PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

(HANSARD)

SIXTH SERIES—VOLUME 267

HOUSE OF COMMONS

OFFICIAL REPORT

**FOURTH SESSION OF THE FIFTY-FIRST PARLIAMENT
OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN
AND NORTHERN IRELAND
FORTY-FOURTH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II**

SESSION 1995–96

COMPRISING PERIOD
15 November—30 November 1995

Chronology of "The Parliamentary Debates"

The Parliamentary History contains all that can be collected of the Legislative History of this country from the Conquest to the close of the XVIIIth Century (1803), 36 vols. The chief sources whence these Debates are derived are the Constitutional History, 24 vols.; Sir Simonds D'Ewes' Journal; Debates of the Commons in 1620 and 1621; Chandler and Timberland's Debates, 22 vols.; Grey's Debates of the Commons, from 1667 to 1694, 10 vols.; Almons Debates, 24 vols.; Debrett's Debates, 63 vols.; The Hardwicke Papers; Debates in Parliament by Dr. Johnson, &c. &c.

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House of Commons

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Abbott, Ms Diane Julie (Hackney, North and Stoke Newington)
Adams, Mrs. Katherine (Paisley, North)
Adley, Robert James (Christchurch) *[died, May 1993]*
Ainger, Nicholas Richard (Pembroke)
Ainsworth, Peter Michael (East Surrey)
Ainsworth, Robert William (Coventry, North-East)
Aitken, Rt. Hon. Jonathan William Patrick (South Thanet)
Alexander, Richard Thain (Newark)
Alison, Rt. Hon. Michael James Hugh (Selby)
Allason, Rupert William Simon (Torbay)
Allen, Graham William (Nottingham, North)
Alton, David Patrick Paul (Liverpool, Mossley Hill)
Amess, David Anthony Andrew (Basildon)
Ancram, Michael (Devizes)
Anderson, Donald (Swansea, East)
Anderson, Janet (Rossendale and Darwen)
Arbuthnot, James Norwich (Wanstead and Woodford)
Armstrong, Ms Hilary Jane (North-West Durham)
Arnold, Jacques Arnold (Gravesham)
Arnold, Sir Thomas Richard (Hazel Grove)
Ashby, David Glynn (North-West Leicestershire)
Ashdown, Rt. Hon. Jeremy John Durham (Yeovil)
Ashton, Joseph William (Bassetlaw)
Aspinwall, Jack Heywood (Wansdyke)
Atkins, Rt. Hon. Robert James (South Ribble)
Atkinson, David Anthony (Bournemouth, East)
Atkinson, Peter Landreth (Hexham)
Austin-Walker, John Eric (Woolwich)

B

Baker, Rt. Hon. Kenneth Wilfred CH (Mole Valley)
Baker, Nicholas Brian (Dorset, North)
Baldry, Antony Brian (Banbury)
Banks, Matthew Richard William (Southport)
Banks, Robert George (Harrogate)
Banks, Tony (Newham, North-West)
Barnes, Harold (North-East Derbyshire)
Barron, Kevin John (Rother Valley)
Bates, Michael Walton (Langbaurgh)
Batiste, Spencer Lee (Elmet)
Battle, John Dominic (Leeds, West)
Bayley, Hugh (York)
Beckett, Rt. Hon. Mrs. Margaret Mary (Derby, South)
Beggs, Roy (East Antrim)
Beith, Rt. Hon. Alan James (Berwick-upon-Tweed)
Bell, Stuart (Middlesbrough)
Bellingham, Henry Campbell (North-West Norfolk)
Bendall, Vivian Walter Hough (Ilford, North)
Benn, Rt. Hon. Anthony Neil Wedgwood (Chesterfield)
Bennett, Andrew Francis (Denton and Reddish)
Benton, Joseph Edward (Bootle)
Beresford, Sir Alexander Paul (Croydon, Central)
Bermingham, Gerald Edward (St. Helens, South)
Berry, Roger Leslie (Kingswood)
Betts, Clive James Charles (Sheffield, Attercliffe)
Biffen, Rt. Hon. William John (North Shropshire)
Blackburn, John Graham (Dudley, West) *[died, October 1994]*
Blair, Rt. Hon. Anthony Charles Lynton (Sedgefield)
Blunkett, David (Sheffield, Brightside)
Boateng, Paul Yaw (Brent, South)
Body, Sir Richard Bernard Frank Stewart (Holland with Boston)
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas Cosmo (Upminster)
Booth, Vernon Edward Hartley (Finchley)
Boothroyd, Rt. Hon. Miss Betty (West Bromwich, West)
Boswell, Timothy Eric (Daventry)
Bottomley, Peter James (Eltham)
Bottomley, Rt. Hon. Mrs. Virginia Hilda Brunette Maxwell (South-West Surrey)
Bowden, Sir Andrew MBE (Brighton, Kemptown)
Bowis, John Crocket OBE (Battersea)
Boyce, James (Rotherham) *[died, January 1994]*
Boyes, Roland (Houghton and Washington)
Boyson, Rt. Hon. Sir Rhodes (Brent, North)
Bradley, Keith John Charles (Manchester, Withington)
Brandreth, Gyles Daubeney (City of Chester)
Bray, Dr. Jeremy William (Motherwell, South)
Brazier, Julian William Hendy (Canterbury)
Bright, Sir Graham Frank James (Luton, South)
Brooke, Rt. Hon. Peter Leonard (City of London and Westminster, South)
Brown, James Gordon (Dunfermline, East)
Brown, Michael Russell (Brigg and Cleethorpes)
Brown, Nicholas Hugh (Newcastle upon Tyne, East)
Browning, Mrs. Angela Frances (Tiverton)
Bruce, Ian Cameron (South Dorset)
Bruce, Malcolm Gray (Gordon)
Budgen, Nicholas William (Wolverhampton, South-West)
Burden, Richard Haines (Birmingham, Northfield)
Burns, Simon Hugh McGuigan (Chelmsford)
Burt, Alistair James Hendrie (Bury, North)
Butcher, John Patrick (Coventry, South-West)
Butler, Peter (Milton Keynes, North-East)
Butterfill, John Valentine (Bournemouth, West)
Byers, Stephen John (Wallsend)

C

Caborn, Richard George (Sheffield, Central)
Callaghan, James (Heywood and Middleton)
Campbell, Anne (Cambridge)
Campbell, Ronald (Blyth Valley)
Campbell, Walter Menzies CBE QC (Fife, North-East)
Campbell-Savours, Dale Norman (Workington)
Canavan, Dennis Andrew (Falkirk, West)
Cann, James Charles (Ipswich)

Carlile, Alexander Charles QC (Montgomery)
Carlisle, John Russell (Luton, North)
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth Melville (Lincoln)
Carrington, Matthew Hadrian Marshall (Fulham)
Carttiss, Michael Reginald Harry (Great Yarmouth)
Cash, William Nigel Paul (Stafford)
Channon, Rt. Hon. Henry Paul Guinness (Southend, West)
Chaplin, Mrs. Sybil Judith OBE (Newbury) *[died, February 1993]*
Chapman, Sir Sydney Brookes (Chipping Barnet)
Chidgey, David William George (Eastleigh) *[By-election, June 1994]*
Chisholm, Malcolm George Richardson (Edinburgh, Leith)
Church, Judith Ann (Dagenham) *[By-election, June 1994]*
Churchill, Winston Spencer (Davyhulme)
Clapham, Michael (Barnsley, West and Penistone)
Clappison, William James (Hertsmere)
Clark, David George (South Shields)
Clark, Michael (Rochford)
Clarke, Eric Lionel (Midlothian)
Clarke, Rt. Hon. Kenneth Harry QC (Rushcliffe)
Clarke, Thomas CBE (Monklands, West)
Clelland, David Gordon (Tyne Bridge)
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey Robert (Cirencester and Tewkesbury)
Clwyd, Mrs. Ann (Cynon Valley)
Coe, Sebastian Newbold (Falmouth and Camborne)
Coffey, Ann (Stockport)
Cohen, Harry Michael (Leyton)
Colvin, Michael Keith Beale (Romsey and Waterside)
Congdon, David Leonard (Croydon, North-East)
Connarty, Michael (Falkirk, East)
Conway, Derek Leslie (Shrewsbury and Atcham)
Cook, Francis (Stockton, North)
Cook, Robert Finlayson (Livingston)
Coombs, Anthony Michael Vincent (Wyre Forest)
Coombs, Simon Christopher (Swindon)
Cope, Rt. Hon. Sir John Ambrose (Northavon)
Corbett, Robin (Birmingham, Erdington)
Corbyn, Jeremy Bernard (Islington, North)
Cormack, Sir Patrick Thomas (South Staffordshire)
Corston, Jean Ann (Bristol, East)
Couchman, James Randall (Gillingham)
Cousins, James Mackay (Newcastle upon Tyne, Central)
Cox, Thomas Michael (Tooting)
Cran, James Douglas (Beverley)
Critchley, Sir Julian Michael Gordon (Aldershot)
Cryer, George Robert (Bradford, South) *[died, April 1994]*
Cummings, John Scott (Easington)
Cunliffe, Lawrence Francis (Leigh)
Cunningham, James Dolan (Coventry, South-East)
Cunningham, Rt. Hon. John Anderson (Copeland)
Cunningham, Ms Roseanna (Perth and Kinross) *[By-election, May 1995]*
Currie, Mrs. Edwina (South Derbyshire)
Curry, David Maurice (Skipton and Ripon)

D

Dafis, Cynog Glyndwr (Ceredigion and Pembroke, North)
Dalyell, Tam (Linlithgow)
Darling, Alistair Maclean (Edinburgh, Central)
Davidson, Ian Graham (Glasgow, Govan)
Davies, Bryan (Oldham, Central and Royton)
Davies, Chris (Littleborough and Saddleworth) *[By-election, July 1995]*
Davies, Rt. Hon. David John Denzil (Llanelli)
Davies, John Quentin (Stamford and Spalding)
Davies, Ronald (Caerphilly)
Davis, David Michael (Boothferry)
Davis, Terence Anthony Gordon (Birmingham, Hodge Hill)
Day, Stephen Richard (Cheadle)
Denham, John Yorke (Southampton, Itchen)
Deva, Niranjan Joseph Aditya (Brentford and Isleworth)
Devlin, Timothy Robert (Stockton, South)
Dewar, Donald Campbell (Glasgow, Garscadden)
Dickens, Geoffrey Kenneth (Littleborough and Saddleworth) *[died, May 1995]*
Dicks, Terence Patrick (Hayes and Harlington)
Dixon, Donald (Jarrow)
Dobson, Frank Gordon (Holborn and St. Pancras)
Donohoe, Brian (Cunninghame, South)
Dorrell, Rt. Hon. Stephen James (Loughborough)
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Edinburgh, West)
Dover, Densmore Ronald (Chorley)
Dowd, James Patrick (Lewisham, West)
Duncan, Alan James Carter (Rutland and Melton)
Duncan Smith, George Iain (Chingford)
Dunn, Robert John (Dartford)
Dunnachie, James Francis (Glasgow, Pollok)
Dunwoody, Hon. Mrs. Gwyneth Patricia (Crewe and Nantwich)
Durant, Sir Robert Anthony Bevis (Reading, West)
Dykes, Hugh John Maxwell (Harrow, East)

E

Eagle, Angela (Wallasey)
Eastham, Kenneth (Manchester, Blackley)
Eggar, Rt. Hon. Timothy John Crommelin (Enfield, North)
Elletson, Harold Daniel Hope (Blackpool, North)
Emery, Rt. Hon. Sir Peter Frank Hannibal (Honiton)
Enright, Derek Anthony (Hemsworth) *[died, October 1995]*
Etherington, William (Sunderland, North)
Evans, David John (Welwyn Hatfield)
Evans, John (St. Helens, North)
Evans, Jonathan Peter (Brecon and Radnor)
Evans, Nigel Martin (Ribble Valley)
Evans, Roger Kenneth (Monmouth)
Evennett, David Anthony (Erith and Crayford)
Ewing, Mrs. Margaret Anne (Moray)

F

Faber, David James Christian (Westbury)
Fabricant, Michael Louis David (Mid-Staffordshire)
Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas Hardwick QC (Perth and Kinross) *[died, February 1995]*
Fatchett, Derek John (Leeds, Central)
Faulds, Andrew Matthew William (Warley, East)
Fenner, Dame Peggy Edith (Medway)
Field, Barry John Anthony (Isle of Wight)
Field, Frank (Birkenhead)
Fishburn, John Dudley (Kensington)

Fisher, Mark (Stoke-on-Trent, Central)
Flynn, Paul Phillip (Newport, West)
Fookes, Dame Janet Evelyn (Plymouth, Drake)
Forman, Francis Nigel (Carshalton and Wallington)
Forsyth, Rt. Hon. Michael Bruce (Stirling)
Forsythe, Clifford (South Antrim)
Forth, Eric (Mid-Worcestershire)
Foster, Rt. Hon. Derek (Bishop Auckland)
Foster, Donald Michael Ellison (Bath)
Foulkes, George (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley)
Fowler, Rt. Hon. Sir Peter Norman (Sutton Coldfield)
Fox, Sir John Marcus MBE (Shipley)
Fox, Liam (Woodspring)
Fraser, John Denis (Norwood)
Freeman, Rt. Hon. Roger Norman (Kettering)
French, Douglas Charles (Gloucester)
Fry, Sir Peter Derek (Wellingborough)
Fyfe, Mrs. Maria (Glasgow, Maryhill)

G

Galbraith, Samuel Laird (Strathkelvin and Bearsden)
Gale, Roger James (North Thanet)
Gallie, Philip Roy (Ayr)
Galloway, George (Glasgow, Hillhead)
Gapes, Michael John (Ilford, South)
Gardiner, Sir George Arthur (Reigate)
Garel-Jones, William Armand Thomas Tristan (Watford)
Garnier, Hon. Edward Henry QC (Harborough)
Garrett, John Laurence (Norwich, South)
George, Bruce Thomas (Walsall, South)
Gerrard, Neil Francis (Walthamstow)
Gilbert, Rt. Hon. John William (Dudley, East)
Gill, Christopher John Fred RD (Ludlow)
Gillan, Mrs. Cheryl Elise Kendall (Chesham and Amersham)
Godman, Norman Anthony (Greenock and Port Glasgow)
Godsiff, Roger Duncan (Birmingham, Small Heath)
Golding, Mrs. Llinos (Newcastle-under-Lyme)
Goodlad, Alastair Robertson (Eddisbury)
Goodson-Wickes, Dr. Charles (Wimbledon)
Gordon, Mrs. Mildred (Bow and Poplar)
Gorman, Mrs. Theresa Ellen (Billericay)
Gorst, Sir John Michael (Hendon, North)
Gould, Bryan Charles (Dagenham) *[resigned, May 1994]*
Graham, Thomas (Renfrew, West and Inverclyde)
Grant, Bernard Alexander Montgomery (Tottenham)
Grant, Sir John Anthony (South-West Cambridgeshire)
Greenway, Harry (Ealing, North)
Greenway, John Robert (Ryedale)
Griffiths, Nigel (Edinburgh, South)
Griffiths, Peter Harry Steve (Portsmouth, North)
Griffiths, Winston James (Bridgend)
Grocott, Bruce Joseph (The Wrekin)
Grylls, Sir William Michael John (North-West Surrey)
Gummer, Rt. Hon. John Selwyn (Suffolk, Coastal)
Gunnell, John (Leeds, South and Morley)

H

Hague, Rt. Hon. William Jefferson (Richmond, Yorks)
Hain, Peter Gerald (Neath)
Hall, Mike Thomas (Warrington, South)
Hamilton, Rt. Hon. Sir Archibald Gavin (Epsom and Ewell)
Hamilton, Mostyn Neil (Tatton)
Hampson, Keith (Leeds, North-West)
Hanley, Rt. Hon. Jeremy James (Richmond and Barnes)
Hannam, John Gordon (Exeter)
Hanson, David George (Delyn)
Hardy, Peter (Wentworth)
Hargreaves, Andrew Raikes (Birmingham, Hall Green)
Harman, Ms Harriet Ruth (Peckham)
Harris, David Anthony (St. Ives)
Harvey, Nick (North Devon)
Haselhurst, Sir Alan Gordon Barraclough (Saffron Walden)
Hattersley, Rt. Hon. Roy Sydney George (Birmingham, Sparkbrook)
Hawkins, John Nicholas (Blackpool, South)
Hawksley, Philip Warren (Halesowen and Stourbridge)
Hayes, Jeremy Joseph James (Harlow)
Heald, Oliver (North Hertfordshire)
Heath, Rt. Hon. Sir Edward Richard George KG MBE (Old Bexley and Sidcup)
Heathcoat-Amory, David Philip (Wells)
Henderson, Douglas John (Newcastle upon Tyne, North)
Hendron, Dr. Joseph Gerard (Belfast, West)
Hendry, Charles (High Peak)
Heppell, John (Nottingham, East)
Heseltine, Rt. Hon. Michael Ray Dibdin (Henley)
Hicks, Robert Adrian (South-East Cornwall)
Higgins, Rt. Hon. Sir Terence Langley (Worthing)
Hill, Trevor Keith (Streatham)
Hill, Stanley James Allen (Southampton, Test)
Hinchliffe, David Martin (Wakefield)
Hodge, Margaret Eve (Barking) *[By-election, June 1994]*
Hoey, Miss Catharine Letitia (Vauxhall)
Hogg, Rt. Hon. Douglas Martin QC (Grantham)
Hogg, Norman (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth)
Home Robertson, John David (East Lothian)
Hood, James (Clydesdale)
Hoon, Geoffrey William (Ashfield)
Horam, John Rhodes (Orpington)
Hordern, Rt. Hon. Sir Peter Maudslay (Horsham)
Howard, Rt. Hon. Michael QC (Folkestone and Hythe)
Howarth, Alan Thomas CBE (Stratford-on-Avon)
Howarth, George Edward (Knowsley, North)
Howell, Rt. Hon. David Arthur Russell (Guildford)
Howell, Sir Ralph Frederic (North Norfolk)
Howells, Dr. Kim Scott (Pontypridd)
Hoyle, Eric Douglas Harvey (Warrington, North)
Hughes, Kevin Michael (Doncaster, North)
Hughes, Robert Gurth (Harrow, West)
Hughes, Robert (Aberdeen, North)
Hughes, Royston John (Newport, East)
Hughes, Simon Henry Ward (Southwark and Bermondsey)
Hume, John (Foyle)
Hunt, Rt. Hon. David James Fletcher MBE (Wirral, West)
Hunt, Sir John Leonard (Ravensbourne)
Hunter, Andrew Robert Frederick (Basingstoke)
Hurd, Rt. Hon. Douglas Richard CBE (Witney)
Hutton, John Matthew Patrick (Barrow and Furness)

I

Illsley, Eric Evelyn (Barnsley, Central)
Ingram, Adam Paterson (East Kilbride)

J

Jack, John Michael (Fylde)
Jackson, Glenda May (Hampstead and Highgate)
Jackson, Helen Margaret (Sheffield, Hillsborough)
Jackson, Robert Victor (Wantage)
Jamieson, David Charles (Plymouth, Devonport)
Janner, Hon. Greville Ewan QC (Leicester, West)
Jenkin, Bernard Christison (Colchester, North)
Jessel, Toby Francis Henry (Twickenham)
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey (Wealden)
Johnston, Sir David Russell (Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber)
Jones, Gwilym Hadyn (Cardiff, North)
Jones, Ieuan Wyn (Ynys Môn)
Jones, Jonathan Owen (Cardiff, Central)
Jones, Lynne Mary (Birmingham, Selly Oak)
Jones, Martyn David (Clwyd, South-West)
Jones, Nigel David (Cheltenham)
Jones, Robert Brannock (West Hertfordshire)
Jones, Stephen Barry (Alyn and Deeside)
Jopling, Rt. Hon. Thomas Michael (Westmorland and Lonsdale)
Jowell, Tessa Jane Helen Douglas (Dulwich)

K

Kaufman, Rt. Hon. Gerald Bernard (Manchester, Gorton)
Keen, David Alan (Feltham and Heston)
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Mary Elaine (Lancaster)
Kennedy, Charles Peter (Ross, Cromarty and Skye)
Kennedy, Jane Elizabeth (Liverpool, Broadgreen)
Key, Simon Robert (Salisbury)
Khabra, Piara Singh (Ealing, Southall)
Kilfedder, Sir James Alexander (North Down) *[died, March 1995]*
Kilfoyle, Peter (Liverpool, Walton)
King, Rt. Hon. Thomas Jeremy CH (Bridgwater)
Kinnock, Rt. Hon. Neil Gordon (Islwyn) *[resigned, February 1995]*
Kirkhope, Timothy John Robert (Leeds, North-East)
Kirkwood, Archibald Johnstone (Roxburgh and Berwickshire)
Knapman, Roger Maurice (Stroud)
Knight, Mrs. Angela Ann (Erewash)
Knight, Rt. Hon. Gregory (Derby, North)
Knight, Dame Joan Christabel Jill DBE (Birmingham, Edgbaston)
Knox, Sir David Laidlaw (Staffordshire, Moorlands)
Kynoch, George Alexander Bryson (Kincardine and Deeside)

L

Lait, Mrs. Jacqueline Anne Harkness (Hastings and Rye)
Lamont, Rt. Hon. Norman Stewart Hughson (Kingston upon Thames)
Lang, Rt. Hon. Ian Bruce (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale)
Lawrence, Sir Ivan John QC (Burton)
Legg, Barry Charles (Milton Keynes, South-West)
Leigh, Edward Julian Egerton (Gainsborough and Horncastle)
Leighton, Ronald (Newham, North-East) *[died, March 1994]*
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark Alexander (Morecambe and Lunesdale)
Lester, James Theodore (Broxtowe)
Lestor, Miss Joan (Eccles)
Lewis, Terence (Worsley)
Liddell, Mrs. Helen (Monklands, East) *[By-election, June 1994]*
Lidington, David Roy (Aylesbury)
Lightbown, Sir David Lincoln (South-East Staffordshire)
Lilley, Rt. Hon. Peter Bruce (St. Albans)
Litherland, Robert Kenneth (Manchester, Central)
Livingstone, Kenneth Robert (Brent, East)
Lloyd, Anthony Joseph (Stretford)
Lloyd, Rt. Hon. Sir Peter Robert Cable (Fareham)
Llwyd, Elfyn (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy)
Lofthouse, Sir Geoffrey (Pontefract and Castleford)
Lord, Michael Nicholson (Central Suffolk)
Loyden, Edward (Liverpool, Garston)
Luff, Peter James (Worcester)
Lyell, Rt. Hon. Sir Nicholas Walter QC (Mid-Bedfordshire)
Lynne, Elizabeth (Rochdale)

M

McAllion, John (Dundee, East)
McAvoy, Thomas (Glasgow, Rutherglen)
McCartney, Ian (Makerfield)
McCartney, Robert QC (North Down) *[By-election, June 1995]*
McCrea, Rev. Robert Thomas William (Mid-Ulster)
MacDonald, Calum Alasdair (Western Isles)
McFall, John (Dumbarton)
McGrady, Edward Kevin (South Down)
MacGregor, Rt. Hon. John Roddick Russell OBE (South Norfolk)
MacKay, Andrew James (East Berkshire)
McKelvey, William (Kilmarnock and Loudoun)
Mackinlay, Andrew Stuart (Thurrock)
Maclean, Rt. Hon. David John (Penrith and The Border)
McLeish, Henry Baird (Fife, Central)
Maclennan, Robert Adam Ross (Caithness and Sutherland)
McLoughlin, Patrick Allen (West Derbyshire)
McMaster, Gordon (Paisley, South)
MacNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick Michael Ernest David (New Forest)
McNamara, Joseph Kevin (Kingston upon Hull, North)
MacShane, Denis (Rotherham) *[By-election, May 1994]*
McWilliam, John David (Blaydon)
Madden, Maxwell Francis (Bradford, West)
Maddock, Mrs. Diana (Christchurch) *[By-election, July 1993]*
Madel, Sir William David (South-West Bedfordshire)
Maginnis, Kenneth (Fermanagh and South Tyrone)
Mahon, Mrs. Alice (Halifax)
Maitland, Olga Helen (Sutton and Cheam)
Major, Rt. Hon. John (Huntingdon)
Mallon, Seamus (Newry and Armagh)
Malone, Peter Gerald (Winchester)

Mandelson, Peter Benjamin (Hartlepool)
Mans, Keith Douglas Rowland (Wyre)
Marek, Dr. John (Wrexham)
Marland, Paul (West Gloucestershire)
Marlow, Antony Rivers (Northampton, North)
Marshall, David (Glasgow, Shettleston)
Marshall, James (Leicester, South)
Marshall, John Leslie (Hendon, South)
Marshall, Sir Robert Michael (Arundel)
Martin, David John Pattison (Portsmouth, South)
Martin, Michael John (Glasgow, Springburn)
Martlew, Eric Anthony (Carlisle)
Mates, Michael John (East Hampshire)
Mawhinney, Rt. Hon. Brian Stanley (Peterborough)
Maxton, John Alston (Glasgow, Cathcart)
Mayhew, Rt. Hon. Sir Patrick Barnabas Burke QC (Tunbridge Wells)
Meacher, Michael Hugh (Oldham, West)
Meale, Joseph Alan (Mansfield)
Mellor, Rt. Hon. David John QC (Putney)
Merchant, Piers Rolf Garfield (Beckenham)
Michael, Alun Edward (Cardiff, South and Penarth)
Michie, Mrs. Janet Ray (Argyll and Bute)
Michie, William (Sheffield, Heeley)
Milburn, Alan (Darlington)
Miller, Andrew Peter (Ellesmere Port and Neston)
Milligan, Stephen David Wyatt (Eastleigh) *[died, February 1994]*
Mills, Iain Campbell (Meriden)
Mitchell, Andrew John Bower (Gedling)
Mitchell, Austin Vernon (Great Grimsby)
Mitchell, Sir David Bower (North-West Hampshire)
Moate, Sir Roger Denis (Faversham)
Molyneaux, Rt. Hon. James Henry (Lagan Valley)
Monro, Rt. Hon. Sir Hector Seymour Peter AE (Dumfries)
Montgomery, Sir William Fergus (Altrincham and Sale)
Moonie, Dr. Lewis George (Kirkcaldy)
Morgan, Hywel Rhodri (Cardiff, West)
Morley, Elliot Anthony (Glanford and Scunthorpe)
Morris, Rt. Hon. Alfred (Manchester, Wythenshawe)
Morris, Estelle (Birmingham, Yardley)
Morris, Rt. Hon. John QC (Aberavon)
Morris, Rt. Hon. Michael Wolfgang Laurence (Northampton, South)
Moss, Malcolm Douglas (North-East Cambridgeshire)
Mowlam, Ms Marjorie (Redcar)
Mudie, George Edward (Leeds, East)
Mullin, Christopher John (Sunderland, South)
Murphy, Paul Peter (Torfaen)

N

Needham, Rt. Hon. Richard Francis (North Wiltshire)
Nelson, Richard Anthony (Chichester)
Neubert, Sir Michael Jon (Romford)
Newton, Rt. Hon. Antony Harold OBE (Braintree)
Nicholls, Patrick Charles Martyn (Teignbridge)
Nicholson, David John (Taunton)
Nicholson, Miss Emma Harriet (Torridge and West Devon)
Norris, Steven John (Epping Forest)

O

Oakes, Rt. Hon. Gordon James (Halton)
O'Brien, Michael (North Warwickshire)
O'Brien, William (Normanton)
O'Hara, Edward (Knowsley, South)
Olner, William John (Nuneaton)
O'Neill, Martin John (Clackmannan)
Onslow, Rt. Hon. Sir Cranley Gordon Douglas (Woking)
Oppenheim, Phillip Anthony Charles Lawrence (Amber Valley)
Orme, Rt. Hon. Stanley (Salford, East)
Ottaway, Richard Geoffrey James (Croydon, South)

P

Page, Richard Lewis (South-West Hertfordshire)
Paice, James Edward Thornton (Cambridge, South East)
Paisley, Rev. Ian Richard Kyle (North Antrim)
Parry, Robert (Liverpool, Riverside)
Patchett, Terry (Barnsley, East)
Patnick, Sir Cyril Irvine (Sheffield, Hallam)
Patten, Rt. Hon. John Haggitt Charles (Oxford, West and Abingdon)
Pattie, Rt. Hon. Sir Geoffrey Edwin (Chertsey and Walton)
Pawsey, James Francis (Rugby and Kenilworth)
Peacock, Mrs. Elizabeth Joan (Batley and Spen)
Pearson, Ian (Dudley, West) *[By-election, December 1994]*
Pendry, Thomas (Stalybridge and Hyde)
Pickles, Eric Jack (Brentwood and Ongar)
Pickthall, Colin (West Lancashire)
Pike, Peter Leslie (Burnley)
Pope, Greg James (Hyndburn)
Porter, David John (Waveney)
Porter, George Barrington (Wirral, South)
Portillo, Michael Denzil Xavier (Enfield, Southgate)
Powell, Raymond (Ogmore)
Powell, William Rhys (Corby)
Prentice, Mrs. Bridget Theresa (Lewisham, East)
Prentice, Gordon (Pendle)
Prescott, Rt. Hon. John Leslie (Kingston upon Hull, East)
Primarolo, Ms Dawn (Bristol, South)
Purchase, Kenneth (Wolverhampton, North East)

Q

Quin, Ms Joyce Gwendolen (Gateshead, East)

R

Radice, Giles Heneage (North Durham)
Randall, Stuart Jeffrey (Kingston upon Hull, West)
Rathbone, John Rankin (Lewes)
Raynsford, Wyvill Richard Nicolls (Greenwich)
Redmond, Martin (Don Valley)
Redwood, Rt. Hon. John Alan (Wokingham)
Reid, John (Motherwell, North)
Rendel, David Digby (Newbury) *[By-election, May 1993]*
Renton, Rt. Hon. Ronald Timothy (Mid-Sussex)
Richards, Roderick (Clwyd, North-West)
Richardson, Miss Josephine (Barking) *[died, February 1994]*
Riddick, Graham Edward Galloway (Colne Valley)
Rifkind, Rt. Hon. Malcolm Leslie QC (Edinburgh, Pentlands)

Robathan, Andrew Robert George (Blaby)
Roberts, Rt. Hon. Sir Ieuan Wyn Pritchard (Conwy)
Robertson, George Islay Macneill (Hamilton)
Robertson, Raymond Scott (Aberdeen, South)
Robinson, Geoffrey (Coventry, North-West)
Robinson, Mark Noel Foster (Somerton and Frome)
Robinson, Peter David (Belfast, East)
Roche, Barbara Maureen (Hornsey and Wood Green)
Roe, Mrs. Marion Audrey (Broxbourne)
Rogers, Allan Ralph (Rhondda)
Rooker, Jeffrey William (Birmingham, Perry Barr)
Rooney, Terence Henry (Bradford, North)
Ross, Ernest (Dundee, West)
Ross, William (East Londonderry)
Rowe, Andrew John Bernard (Mid-Kent)
Rowlands, Edward (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney)
Ruddock, Ms Joan Mary (Lewisham, Deptford)
Rumbold, Rt. Hon. Dame Angela Claire Rosemary CBE (Mitcham and Morden)
Ryder, Rt. Hon. Richard Andrew OBE (Mid-Norfolk)

S

Sackville, Hon. Thomas Geoffrey (Bolton, West)
Sainsbury, Rt. Hon. Sir Timothy Alan Davan (Hove)
Salmond, Alexander Elliott Anderson (Banff and Buchan)
Scott, Rt. Hon. Sir Nicholas Paul MBE (Chelsea)
Sedgemore, Brian Charles (Hackney, South and Shoreditch)
Shaw, David Lawrence (Dover)
Shaw, Sir John Giles Dunkerley (Pudsey)
Sheerman, Barry John (Huddersfield)
Sheldon, Rt. Hon. Robert Edward (Ashton under Lyne)
Shephard, Rt. Hon. Mrs. Gillian Patricia (South-West Norfolk)
Shepherd, Colin Ryley (Hereford)
Shepherd, Richard Charles Scrimgeour (Aldridge-Brownhills)
Shersby, Sir Julian Michael (Uxbridge)
Shore, Rt. Hon. Peter David (Bethnal Green and Stepney)
Short, Clare (Birmingham, Ladywood)
Simpson, Alan (Nottingham, South)
Sims, Roger Edward (Chislehurst)
Skeet, Sir Trevor Herbert Harry (North Bedfordshire)
Skinner, Dennis Edward (Bolsover)
Smith, Andrew David (Oxford, East)
Smith, Christopher Robert (Islington, South and Finsbury)
Smith, Sir Dudley Gordon (Warwick and Leamington)
Smith, Rt. Hon. John QC (Monklands, East) *[died, May 1994]*
Smith, Llewellyn (Blaenau Gwent)
Smith, Timothy John (Beaconsfield)
Smyth, Rev. William Martin (Belfast, South)
Snape, Peter Charles (West Bromwich, East)
Soames, Hon. Arthur Nicholas Winston (Crawley)
Soley, Clive Stafford (Hammersmith)
Spearing, Nigel John (Newham, South)
Speed, Sir Herbert Keith (Ashford)
Spellar, John Francis (Warley, West)
Spencer, Sir Derek Harold (Brighton Pavilion)
Spicer, Sir James Wilton (West Dorset)
Spicer, William Michael Hardy (South Worcestershire)
Spink, Dr. Robert Michael (Castle Point)
Spring, Richard John Grenville (Bury St. Edmunds)
Sproat, Iain MacDonald (Harwich)
Squire, Mrs. Rachel Anne (Dumfermline, West)
Squire, Robin Clifford (Hornchurch)
Stanley, Rt. Hon. Sir John Paul (Tonbridge and Malling)
Steel, Rt. Hon. Sir David Martin Scott (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale)
Steen, Anthony David (South Hams)
Steinberg, Gerald Neil (City of Durham)
Stephen, Michael (Shoreham)
Stern, Michael Charles (Bristol, North-West)
Stevenson, George William (Stoke-on-Trent, South)
Stewart, John Allan (Eastwood)
Stott, Roger CBE (Wigan)
Strang, Gavin Steel (Edinburgh, East)
Straw, John Whitaker (Blackburn)
Streeter, Gary Nicholas (Plymouth, Sutton)
Sumberg, David Anthony Gerald (Bury, South)
Sutcliffe, Gerald (Bradford, South) *[By-election, June 1994]*
Sweeney, Walter Edward (Vale of Glamorgan)
Sykes, John David (Scarborough)

T

Tapsell, Sir Peter Hannay Bailey (East Lindsey)
Taylor, Sir Edward Macmillan (Southend, East)
Taylor, Ian Colin MBE (Esher)
Taylor, Rt. Hon. John David (Strangford)
Taylor, John Mark (Solihull)
Taylor, Matthew Owen John (Truro)
Taylor, Mrs. Winifred Ann (Dewsbury)
Temple-Morris, Peter (Leominster)
Thomason, Kenneth Roy (Bromsgrove)
Thompson, Sir Donald (Calder Valley)
Thompson, Hugh Patrick (Norwich, North)
Thompson, John (Wansbeck)
Thornton, Sir George Malcolm (Crosby)
Thurnham, Peter Giles (Bolton, North-East)
Timms, Stephen Cresswell (Newham, North-East) *[By-election, June 1994]*
Tipping, Simon Patrick (Sherwood)
Touhig, James Donnelly (Islwyn) *[By-election, February 1995]*
Townend, John Ernest (Bridlington)
Townsend, Cyril David (Bexleyheath)
Tracey, Richard Patrick (Surbiton)
Tredinnick, David Arthur Stephen (Bosworth)
Trend, Michael St. John (Windsor and Maidenhead)
Trimble, David (Upper Bann)
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15 November 1995

THE PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

OFFICIAL REPORT

IN THE FOURTH SESSION OF THE FIFTY-FIRST PARLIAMENT OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND
[WHICH OPENED 27 APRIL 1992]

FORTY-FOURTH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SIXTH SERIES **VOLUME 267**

FIRST VOLUME OF SESSION 1995-96

House of Commons

Wednesday 15 November 1995

The House met at twenty-nine minutes past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Message to attend Her Majesty:

The House went; and having returned:

The sitting was suspended until half-past Two o'clock, and then resumed.

2.30 pm

On resuming—

SESSIONAL ORDERS

ELECTIONS

Ordered,

That all Members who are returned for two or more places in any part of the United Kingdom to make their Election for which of the places they will serve, within one week after it shall appear that there is no question upon the Return for that place; and if anything shall come in question touching the Return or Election of any Member, he is to withdraw during the time the matter is in debate; and that all Members returned upon double Returns do withdraw until their Returns are determined.

Resolved,

That no Peer of the Realm, except a Peer of Ireland, hath any right to give his vote in the Election of any Member to serve in Parliament.

Resolved,

That if it shall appear that any person hath been elected or returned a Member of this House, or endeavoured so to be, by Bribery or any other corrupt practices, this House will proceed with the utmost severity against all such persons as shall have been wilfully concerned in such Bribery or other corrupt practices.

WITNESSES

Resolved,

That if it shall appear that any person hath been tampering with any Witness, in respect of his evidence to be given to this House, or any Committee thereof, or directly or indirectly hath endeavoured to deter or hinder any person from appearing or giving evidence the same is declared to be a high crime and misdemeanour; and this House will proceed with the utmost severity against such offender.

Resolved,

That if it shall appear that any person hath given false evidence in any case before this House, or any Committee thereof, this House will proceed with the utmost severity against such offender.

METROPOLITAN POLICE

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis do take care that during the Session of Parliament the passages through the streets leading to the House be kept free and open and that no obstruction be permitted to hinder the passage of Members to and from this House, and that no disorder be allowed in Westminster Hall, or in the passages leading to this House, during the Sitting of Parliament and that there be no annoyance therein or thereabouts; and that the Serjeant at Arms attending this House do communicate this Order to the Commissioner aforesaid.

Mr. David Harris (St. Ives): I rise to seek guidance on this Sessional Order, Madam Speaker. I do not know whether this has been the experience of other hon. Members, but I have noticed, particularly during the past year, that various demonstrations of one sort or another have been allowed in the immediate precincts of the House of Commons. Just a few weeks ago, there was a demonstration—I do not quarrel with demonstrations as such—against nuclear tests in the Pacific. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] I do not quarrel with the substance, but merely ask for clarification of the Sessional Order. A lorry was parked right on the pedestrian crossing between the House and No. 1 Parliament street, where I happen to have an office. Photographers were photographing that lorry, which was carrying people wearing masks. In fact, one mask resembled a likeness of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister.

[Mr. David Harris]

What I am asking is whether we intend to enforce what I have always understood to be the Sessional Order of this House—that there should be no demonstrations of any kind in the immediate precincts of the House. I have observed that demonstrations do take place, and photographs are taken of lobbyists and others. Are we serious about the Order? If not, perhaps we should drop it.

Madam Speaker: I have of course taken note of the hon. Gentleman's points. They will certainly be put to, and be seriously considered by, the appropriate quarters. These are not easy matters in this day and age. The House owes a debt of thanks to the Commissioner and his officers for the way in which they attempt to carry out their duties, which are not, as I say, always easy.

I am pleased that the hon. Gentleman has raised the matter. It will certainly be looked at with all seriousness.

Question put and agreed to.

VOTES AND PROCEEDINGS

Ordered,

That the Votes and Proceedings of this House be printed, being first perused by the Speaker; and that she do appoint the printing thereof; and that no person but such as she shall appoint do presume to print the same.

OUTLAWRIES

A Bill for the more effectual preventing Clandestine Outlawries; read the First time; to be read a Second time.

JOURNAL

Ordered,

That the Journal of this House, from the end of the last Session to the end of the present Session, with an index thereto, be printed.

Ordered,

That the said Journal and Index be printed by the appointment and under the direction of Donald William Limon Esq, CB, the Clerk of this House.

Ordered,

That the said Journal and Index be printed by such person as shall be licensed by the Speaker, and that no other person do presume to print the same.

Queen's Speech

Madam Speaker: I have to acquaint the House that this House has this day attended Her Majesty in the House of Peers, and that Her Majesty was pleased to make a Most Gracious Speech from the Throne to both Houses of Parliament, of which I have, for greater accuracy, obtained a copy.

I shall direct that the terms of the Gracious Speech be printed in the Votes and Proceedings. Copies are available in the Vote Office.

The Gracious Speech was as follows:

My Lords and Members of the House of Commons

The Duke of Edinburgh and I look forward to receiving the State Visit of His Excellency the President of France and of His Excellency the President of South Africa next year. We also look forward to our State Visits to Poland and the Czech Republic in March and to Thailand in October next year.

National security remains of the highest importance to my Government. They will continue to support the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation and to promote Britain's wider security interests by contributing to the maintenance of international peace and stability. The United Kingdom's minimum nuclear deterrent will be maintained.

My Government will encourage a co-operative relationship between NATO and Russia, and will offer further help to countries in Central and Eastern Europe to consolidate democratic reforms and build stability and prosperity in the region.

A Bill will be introduced to bring up to date the legislation governing the Reserve Forces. My Government will also continue to work to preserve and modernise the Conventional Forces in Europe Treaty. During their Presidency of the Western European Union next year, they will work to enhance that organisation's effectiveness.

Preventing the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction remains a priority. My Government will introduce legislation to ratify the Chemical Weapons Convention. They will pursue negotiations on a verifiable Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty and a Convention to ban the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons and other explosive purposes.

The fight against terrorism, organised crime, and drug misuse and trafficking, in the United Kingdom and elsewhere, will remain a priority.

My Government will continue to pursue the objective of transatlantic free trade in the context of world trade liberalisation.

In the European Union, my Government will participate in the 1996 Inter-Governmental Conference and contribute to preparing the Union for further enlargement. They will work for the continued implementation of the principle of subsidiarity and maintain their efforts to combat fraud. They will promote flexible labour markets and reduced social costs as the best means to improve the competitiveness of the European economy and create a climate for job creation.

A substantial aid programme will be maintained, focused on the poorest countries, to promote sustainable development and good government, including respect for human rights.

Reform of the United Nations, and efforts to enhance the organisation's effectiveness in peace-keeping, will remain an important objective. My Government will work to develop the capacity of the United Nations and regional organisations in the prevention of conflict. They will continue to promote a negotiated settlement in the former Yugoslavia.

My Government will continue working to strengthen ties between members of the Commonwealth.

My Government will work for the prosperity and stability of Hong Kong. In the interests of the Hong Kong people, they will seek to co-operate with China on the basis of the Sino-British Joint Declaration, in order to promote a smooth transition in 1997.

My Government will maintain support for the Middle East Peace Process.

In Northern Ireland my Government will continue to build on the present peace and to create the conditions for political progress through inclusive talks. They will facilitate economic development and promote fair and equitable treatment for all people in Northern Ireland. They will maintain close and friendly relations with the Government of the Republic of Ireland. Legislation will be introduced to continue special provisions required for preserving the peace and maintaining order.

Members of the House of Commons

Estimates for the public service will be laid before you.

My Lords and Members of the House of Commons

My Government will continue with firm financial policies designed to support economic growth and rising employment, based on permanently low inflation. Fiscal policy will continue to be set to bring the public sector borrowing requirement back towards balance over the medium term. The share of national income taken by the public sector will be reduced.

My Government will improve the performance of the economy, by encouraging enterprise and competitiveness and offering support for small businesses. They will promote further deregulation. They will introduce a Bill to extend choice and competition in broadcasting by providing for new digital services and easing restrictions on media ownership. Legislation will again be brought before you to authorise the construction and operation of a high speed rail link between London and the Channel Tunnel.

Increased competitiveness will be encouraged by raising educational and skill levels, advancing knowledge, and promoting an efficient and flexible labour market. Legislation will be laid before you to expand nursery education for four-year-olds and to allow grant-maintained schools to borrow on the commercial market. Legislation will be introduced to enable students to choose between private and public suppliers of subsidised loans. In Scotland, legislation will be introduced to reform education and training.

My Government will continue to improve the quality of public services, through the Citizen's Charter programme and by other means.

A Bill will be introduced to streamline further the handling of asylum applications and to strengthen enforcement of immigration controls.

Legislation will be laid before you to enable the Security Service to assist the law enforcement agencies in their work against organised crime; and to reform the procedures in criminal cases, including those for prosecution and defence disclosure.

My Government will bring forward legislation to make better provision for housing and to promote the smooth running of construction contracts.

Legislation will be introduced to extend the Parliamentary Health Service Commissioner's jurisdiction, and to enable local authorities to make payments to particular groups of people who want to purchase their own community care.

My Government will introduce legislation to reform the law governing divorce and other aspects of family law.

Other measures, including other measures of law reform, will be laid before you.

My Lords and Members of the House of Commons

I pray that the blessing of Almighty God may rest upon your counsels.

Debate on the Address

Madam Speaker: It will be for the convenience of the House to know that the subjects for debate on the Queen's Speech will be as follows.

Thursday 16 November—foreign affairs and defence; Friday 17 November—health; Monday 20 November—investment (trade, industry and transport); Tuesday 21 November—social affairs (education and home affairs); Wednesday 22 November—the economy.

I shall now call on Mr. Douglas Hurd to move the Address, and Mr. Gyles Brandreth will second it.

2.37 pm

Mr. Douglas Hurd (Witney): I beg to move,

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, as follows:

Most Gracious Sovereign,

We, your Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Commons of the United Kingdom and Great Britain and Northern Ireland, in Parliament assembled, beg leave to offer our humble thanks to Your Majesty for the Gracious Speech which Your Majesty has addressed to both Houses of Parliament.

I am delighted to have this honour, with my hon. Friend the Member for City of Chester (Mr. Brandreth), for several reasons—not least because tradition allows me to start with a short hymn of praise to my constituency. It will be short, and it will also be disinterested, because I am not seeking to represent the seat again.

I hope that the House will not think it impolite when I say that when I leave Parliament, it will be my constituency that I shall miss the most. It is true that in my giddy youth I dabbled with various ideas about proportional representation, but I am clearly of the opinion that the system in which single Members of this House represent single constituencies containing thousands of people—whether they voted for them or against them—is a precious part of our constitution.

The west Oxfordshire constituency starts on the outskirts of Oxford and stretches westwards into the Cotswolds. To the south, it begins on the old county boundary of the River Thames, and continues north across the royal forest of Wychwood up to Warwickshire. It is a mixture of substantial towns—some old, some new—and a great number of traditional villages. It is at its best, perhaps, on a spring evening when the daffodils are bright against the grey stone. Then, it seems entirely placid and rustic. But that is an illusion, because all human nature is there—together with a great deal of human activity—and always has been. The stone from the Taynton quarries came down by river to be used in the building of Windsor castle and St. Paul's. Gloves were made at Woodstock through the centuries; blankets are still made in Witney.

In the 21 years that I have been in the House, there has been a substantial change in west Oxfordshire. When I started, the big employer was British Leyland and the component manufacturers around it. Buses called at the villages in the morning and came back at night, taking hundreds and hundreds of my constituents to work at Cowley. However, working at Cowley was not in any way to be taken for granted in those days. There was a reign of confusion and uncertainty by shop stewards at British Leyland. Now, there are many fewer jobs at Cowley, but they are good ones.

The change has come round all the market towns and big villages that I represent, where there is now a ring of thriving industrial estates. Along the River Windrush, in one of the old blanket mills—until recently there was actually a donkey on the payroll—people now make electronic components for aircraft manufacturers round the world. That is the new and competitive British economy in which Conservative Members firmly believe.

Oxfordshire has a strong faith in education, and we welcome the provision for nursery places outlined in the Gracious Speech. Witney certainly got there first—as it was put at the time, thanks to the praiseworthy zeal of Rev. Charles Jerram, the infant school was founded in 1836. I have with me the song of those infant school children:

"This is Witney Infant School,
Where we are taught the happy rule,
To love our God and parents kind,
And leave all useless things behind.
But we must come with faces clean,
Neat clothes—all whole—fit to be seen . . .
Then let us all attend to time,
Be there before, or just at nine:
And in the afternoon so true
Be always in the school at two"—

and it stresses:

"And only a penny we do pay
Per week for learning every day."

The difficulty now is that it costs a little more than a penny a week.

During the past year, I have visited many schools and met many governors, parents and teachers. Like my right hon. and hon. Friends, I have also received huge numbers of letters. There is a mood of anxiety about the subject. Those concerned have met the reductions in individual school budgets with some hardship, but on the whole they have met them with once-and-for-all devices such as using school reserves. They are now stripped of that protection and are waiting for this year's figures.

I have found very strong support for the achievement of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment—and, indeed, strong personal affection for her. I support the measures in the Gracious Speech to improve the position of grant-maintained schools. I am a strong supporter of the assisted places scheme. The abolition of direct grant schools was an act of particular vandalism in Oxfordshire, because of the excellent schools that were in the city and in Abingdon. The assisted places scheme does something to redress that.

I know that the quality of teaching is more important than the size of the class—*[Interruption.]* I should have thought that that was an obvious statement. I know, too, that the figures for my county are worse than they might be, because of the financial policies of the county council. But I also know that when my constituents listen to the Budget speech in a few weeks' time, they will hope and expect my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer to strike a difficult balance. They will certainly listen with one ear—one eager ear—for news about taxes, but they will also want to be sure that he gives full and practical effect to what the Prime Minister has said about priority for spending on education.

I congratulate the Prime Minister not only on his return from New Zealand—*[Laughter.]* Safe coming and going is always an achievement in this world. In particular, I

congratulate my right hon. Friend on the way in which he represented the interests of this country in New Zealand. I thought that he came across extremely well, especially on the two main difficult subjects that he had to handle—nuclear tests and Nigeria. Neither is easy, and I thought that the Prime Minister represented the interests and views of this country firmly, clearly and without pretence on both those issues.

No one can suppose that the task that the Commonwealth, Europe or the United Nations are setting themselves on Nigeria will be easy; the right balance will not be at all easy to strike. But if we continue on the way that my right hon. Friend charted at Auckland, we shall both build up the reputation of the Commonwealth and do our best for the people of Nigeria.

I return to, and conclude on, the last sentence of the Gracious Speech, which is always there, in which the Queen prays that the blessing of almighty God may rest upon our counsels. The counsels that we give from this House, and the way in which we arrive at them, are under attack. I believe that we should be more self-confident, perhaps, than we have shown ourselves to be in recent weeks and months in responding to those attacks; otherwise there is a danger that we may look for the wrong defence and the wrong remedy.

I do not believe that sleaze and scandal are really what worries people about this Parliament. What worries them most—it worries many thoughtful people—is the sense of empty noise and phoney warfare. Here, to my faint surprise, I find myself agreeing with remarks made by my right hon. and noble Friend Lord Tebbit the other day. For most people outside Parliament, education, the economy, Europe and the other themes of political argument in this country—big themes, on which there is plenty of natural disagreement—are more than playing fields on which two or three teams of politicians pit themselves against each other.

There used to be in this country a strong and vivid appetite for adversarial politics—in the days of Gladstone and Disraeli, or of Gladstone and Lord Randolph. But for one reason or another, that has gone, and there is a real danger that, egged on by the media, all parties in the House—all of us—may play out the old play not realising that beyond the footlights half the audience has crept away, and the other half is sitting there in mounting irritation.

In that context, I am glad that the divorce reform and mediation Bill is in the Gracious Speech; it is right that it should be debated. It may well be right that the conscience clauses should be decided by the House on a free vote. On past form, that procedure has led to a better debate in the House and probably to a more acceptable conclusion in the country. What I have said is intended not as high-minded exhortation, but as low political advice.

I believe that, in the time that I have described, political success may well go to those who sound least like politicians. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has found that often to his benefit. He has found—and, I believe, will find again—that an ounce of robust and reasoned common sense is worth a wilderness of soundbites and spin doctors. I wish my right hon. Friend and the Government all success in the coming Session.

2.50 pm

Mr. Gyles Brandreth (City of Chester): Speaking of those who sound least like politicians, here I am. Having been a Member of Parliament for only three and a half years, I like to think that I am still loosely in touch with reality. But today I am not entirely sure. I am overwhelmed by the honour of being asked to second the motion, particularly because it was moved with such effortless brilliance and sage wisdom by my right hon. Friend the Member for Witney (Mr. Hurd), who is one of the most civilised and civilising people I know.

Incredible as it may seem to the more casual observer, I have something quite distinctive in common with my right hon. Friend. We share a birthday—in different years, of course—of 8 March. That is a very good birthday for those who aspire to political life in a secretarial capacity. Your own secretary, Madam Speaker, was born on 8 March. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's parliamentary private secretary was born on 8 March. My right hon. Friend the Member for Witney—a previous Northern Ireland Secretary, Home Secretary and Foreign Secretary—was born on 8 March. And yours truly, the secretary of the House of Commons Scrabble club, was born on that date—each to his own.

More intriguing is the fact that my right hon. Friend's wife and my wife also share a birthday of 14 March. They share that birthday with Albert Einstein and Michael Caine, and not a lot of people know that. More curiously, Mrs. Hurd and Mrs. Brandreth share the same birth year because both, of course, are 21. My right hon. Friend's contribution to this House and to this country has been quite extraordinary. We are all in his debt and I am happy to say that, in future, I shall be able to say that literally as well as figuratively. I cannot think of anybody with whom I would rather entrust my overdraft.

My right hon. Friend is not the first international statesman whom I have had the privilege of knowing. Shortly before I came down from university, I had a memorable encounter with the late John Diefenbaker—at least, that is who I think it was. He certainly said that he was the Prime Minister of Canada. Just as my right hon. Friend was president of the Cambridge union, I was president of the Oxford union, and when I encountered Mr. Diefenbaker and told him of my parliamentary ambitions, he gave me his well-worn line. He said that when I succeeded and arrived in Parliament, I would spend the first six months wondering how on earth I got there and the rest of the time wondering how the rest of them got there.

I am genuinely thrilled that I did get here, despite the fact that the description of some of our procedures given to me by my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Staffordshire (Mr. Fabricant) does not quite accord with how the House seems to work. I do not know whether you have seen "The Final Cut", Madam Speaker, but if I were you, I would sue.

Having worked in different worlds before I arrived here, I must say that I have been heartened and impressed by the calibre, commitment and comradeship that I have found in this place. Whatever picture the media may care to paint, this seems to me to be a good place where—for the most part and in all parts of the House—good people of good faith are doing their best to do a good job for their constituents. We should not always let the cynics have the last word.

[Mr. Gyles Brandreth]

Of course, I am here only because I have the unique good fortune to represent the city of Chester, which is quite simply the finest place there is. It has 2,000 years of matchless history.

Mr. Joseph Ashton (Bassetlaw): And a 1,000 majority.

Mr. Brandreth: The hon. Member for Bassetlaw (Mr. Ashton) is not quite right—it is 1,101. I was sponsored by a carpet shampoo firm, and I have declared it.

The joy of being a Member for a marginal seat is that it keeps one on one's toes, as the hon. Gentleman will discover in due course. I have to tell him that I would not stand anywhere else if they asked me, and they have.

I am thrilled to play my tiny part, however brief, in the 2,000 years of the matchless history of Chester—a Roman fortress, a cradle of our monarchy, the last city in the land to fall to the Norman conquest and a bastion for the Crown in the civil war. Indeed, with our historic walls, our fabulous rows, our beautiful river, our ancient cathedral, our theatre, our galleries, our gem of a race course and our model zoo, we are the jewel in any crown. It is no wonder that James Boswell—the Alan Clark of his day, though possibly more reliable—called Chester the

"fairest English city I have seen".

Candidly, I cannot claim a lot of personal credit for the glories of my constituency, although I do try. Colleagues may be shocked to hear this, but whenever there is a bit of good news going in my part of the world, I do my best to get in on the act. At least I have learnt something from the Liberals. Naturally, when the news is less good, I tend to duck, but in Chester I do not have to do much ducking. We are the epicentre of all that is best in Britain, and we have falling unemployment and record levels of inward investment to prove it.

Farming, tourism and retail have long been central to our economy, and now we are becoming a significant centre for financial services and a growing industrial base. Strix is the name of just one of the companies that have recently moved to Chester. It makes switches for electric kettles—for 70 per cent. of the electric kettles in the world. If people want the best communications, the best quality of life, the finest work force and the keenest entrepreneurial spirit in the land, they should come to Chester. We have the lot.

Believe it or not, as well as having our own soap company, Bradford Soap, we even have our own soap opera, "Hollyoaks", just launched on Channel 4. It goes out on Monday nights, so it will have a bit of competition next week. If one is looking for a non-royal soap, do tune in. It is more "Baywatch goes north-west" than anything else. Since it is set in Chester, it must be good.

I was pleased to meet up with a sixth-former at the weekend, who said that she preferred the recent television version of "Pride and Prejudice" to "Hollyoaks". My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister may be gratified to learn that she likened him to Mr. Darcy. This is the bit that I did not check with him. "Tough but tender," was how she put it. He may be less happy to learn that she also took a fancy to Mr. Bingley, whom she said was a dead ringer for the Leader of the Opposition—a poppet with a grin. *[Interruption.]* My hon. Friend the Member for Stamford and Spalding (Mr. Davies) is muttering to me about whom she saw as Mr. Collins. Wild horses would not drag from me whom she saw as Mr. Collins. Suffice it to say that she seems to have had some sort of unfortunate experience youth hostelling near Yeovil. The right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) should not take that amiss. He would have been delighted to hear what she had to say about Lady Catherine de Burgh.

The House will not be surprised to learn that I plan to welcome the Gracious Speech. I believe that the Leader of the Opposition plans to be more critical. Indeed, I know what his plans are, because one of his more innocent spin doctors gave me a detailed preview of his speech under the misapprehension that I was Robin Oakley.

Chester will welcome the Gracious Speech because our city has a range of outstanding schools and a real passion for quality education. My constituents recognise the importance of putting nursery education within the reach of every four-year-old and of extending the opportunities open to grant-maintained schools.

Law and order is an issue of paramount concern to my constituents, which is why they will wholeheartedly endorse the proposed criminal procedure and investigations Bill as a further element in the Government's determined programme to be tough on crime and tough on the perpetrators of crime.

In Chester, the number of police has risen by 38 per cent. in the past 15 years. We are getting more officers again this year—more on the beat and more with dedicated beats—and we are getting more closed circuit television. Never mind the rhetoric, the result is higher rates of detection and falling rates of crime.

Controversial as I know it will be on both sides of the House, I believe that most of my constituents will agree with me that the divorce and mediation proposals are positive ones, which should strengthen rather than diminish the institution of marriage. I say that cautiously and as the Back-Bench Member responsible for taking the Marriage Act 1994 through the House. Incidentally, when early one morning my wife heard me described on local radio as an expert on the Marriage Act, she nearly fell off her bunk.

On behalf of my constituents, I welcome the Gracious Speech. This has been a proud moment for me—on a par with the first time that I was invited to open a building and unveil a plaque in my constituency. I pulled the little string, the blue velvet curtains parted and there I saw the words,

"This plague has been unveiled by Gyles Brandreth MP."

I found no such misprints in the Gracious Speech. Indeed, moments before coming into the Chamber, I took a telephone call from Trevor McDonald, who asked me to tell you, Madam Speaker, that the Queen's Speech in the Queen's English was exactly "comme il faut". Trevor, of course, is above party politics, but for style and syntax he gave the speech 10 out of 10. For content and for Chester, with pride and without prejudice, I do the same.

3.3 pm

Mr. Tony Blair (Sedgefield): It is traditional at the beginning of our debate, before commending the right hon. and hon. Members who have just spoken, to note the deaths of hon. Members in the past year. I am sure that the House will want to record its appreciation of the work of Sir James Kilfedder, Sir Nicholas Fairbairn, Geoffrey

Dickens and Derek Enright—different characters, but people who all, in their different ways, brightened the dullness of political life. They will be missed. In particular, perhaps I may be permitted, on behalf of the Opposition, to express our grief at the tragic and very recent loss of Derek Enright, who will be long remembered and deeply mourned.

I am delighted to commend the right hon. Member for Witney (Mr. Hurd) and the hon. Member for City of Chester (Mr. Brandreth). The speech of the right hon. Member for Witney was, of course, as elegant as ever. As Northern Ireland Secretary, Home Secretary and, indeed, Foreign Secretary, he was never less than decent, assiduous and honest—and, on occasions, he was far-sighted, courageous and successful. He served no fewer than three Prime Ministers and was totally loyal to all three, which I would take as a compliment.

After the election, of course, the right hon. Gentleman will have more time for his own writing and Conservative Members will find food for thought in at least two of his earlier offerings. Written in the 1970s, they tell of a rather different age and, indeed, a different Conservative party. One is called "Truth Game" and the other "An End to Promises"—probably not many sales among the Cabinet nowadays. The best testimonial to the right hon. Member for Witney, whose speech I enjoyed and I commend him for it, was that offered by his friend and colleague the hon. Member for Aldershot (Sir J. Critchley), who said that he is

"a touch too clever for the Tory party."

That charge has never to my knowledge been levelled against the hon. Member for City of Chester, but I greatly commend him for his speech. I mean no offence when I say that I greeted the end of it with some relief since I gather that he holds the world record for after-dinner speaking. It is recorded that he spoke for 12 hours and 32 minutes, though sadly it is not recorded how many of the audience stayed to the end of it.

The hon. Member for City of Chester came to the House with a great reputation for loudness; indeed, that was only for his sweaters. He also runs a teddy-bear shop, I understand, in Stratford, so who says there is not sufficient diversity of experience in the House today? He is also a past winner, I am told, of the world Monopoly championships. No doubt there is a place on a board of the utilities waiting for him. More important, he is the author of a book called "Great Sexual Disasters". The remarkable thing is that it was written before he came to the House. I have no doubt that a sequel is well on the way. He made a highly witty and amusing speech and I commend him for it, as I do the right hon. Member for Witney. They have lived up to our usual standard of speeches before the main debate begins.

Before I come to the main part of the Queen's Speech, I should mention the issue of Northern Ireland, which was mentioned in the Queen's Speech. The Labour party will continue to back the Government in their efforts to secure peace in Northern Ireland, and we will do so even when progress is difficult.

All of us know that for the current ceasefires to be turned into a lasting peace, there must be all-party talks with a view to a negotiated, constitutional settlement that has the support of both communities in Northern Ireland. Those talks can take place only in an atmosphere of trust where all parties are committed exclusively to the democratic path. That is why we have supported the establishment of an international commission to look at arms decommissioning in parallel with preparatory talks that could lead to substantive all-party negotiations. We very much hope that the two Governments can proceed in this direction as soon as possible. It will be a hard road ahead.

We appreciate the enormous pressures on all involved in the search for peace—pressures that are often conflicting. From the first, we have supported the Government and we will continue to support them while we believe that they are acting genuinely and in good faith in the search for peace.

On the rest of the Queen's Speech, I cannot, of course, comment—it would be quite improper—on how Her Majesty responded when it was first put before her, but I think that the reaction of most people would be, "Is this it?" Indeed, she could be forgiven for fearing that she was the victim of another hoax, but this time it was not a joke by a DJ pretending to be the Canadian Prime Minister but the British Prime Minister presenting her with a joke of a Queen's Speech. It is utterly irrelevant to the interests of Britain. It is the programme of a party that has ceased to have any real vision or purpose in government at all. It is about the interests of the Tory party, cobbling together any old bric-à-brac of legislation that can keep the Conservative party in one piece. Because that can be done only by appeasing the extreme right-wing members of the party, it is they who have determined the small substance of the programme, which is as far from one-nation politics as it is possible to imagine. There is nothing about jobs, nothing about reducing inequality and insecurity and nothing about helping those in poverty. Indeed, there is the opposite.

The programme has another purpose. In an extraordinary move—and an extraordinarily inept one—an advance press briefing on the Queen's Speech was given yesterday, not by the Leader of the House, as is traditional, and not by any of the Ministers who will implement the Queen's Speech, but by the chairman of the Conservative party. What did he say in what journalists call an "unprecedented" eve of Queen's Speech briefing? He gave the game away. What did he say the purpose of the Queen's Speech was? He said that it was "to smoke out" the Labour party. He did not say that it was to provide new energy, ideas or vitality for Britain, but that it was to smoke out the Opposition. He did not say that it was to help the people of Britain, but that it was to play a game in the run-up to the election. I say that a Government's job should be to govern. If they cannot govern in Britain's interests, they should not be governing at all.

Let us look at the problems that our country faces. They demand a radical Queen's Speech, a giant of a Queen's Speech and one that matches its ambitions with the nation's problems. Instead, we get a rag-bag of right-wing ideas, fiddling around at the edges of Britain's problems—a pathetic mouse of a Queen's Speech that is designed not to help Britain, but to secure the survival of the Tory party. There cannot be any more eloquent testimony to the state of today's Conservative party than this.

Let us look at the problems that we face. There are the scandals in the privatised utilities; there is nothing in the Queen's Speech about that. One in seven 21-year-olds is unable to read properly and one in five cannot count.

[Mr. Tony Blair]

There is drug abuse and violent crime. One in three people is on welfare benefits under this Government. The national health service is under strain and has been turned into a two-tier system. Public transport is crumbling and pollution is rising. Does the Queen's Speech address any of those questions? It is utterly irrelevant to the problems of Britain and shows no real recognition of the state of Britain today.

Britain is 35th in the world standard of education—35th Britain. To be 35th may be good enough for the Conservative party, but it is not good enough for this country or for our children. Can the Conservatives not see that it is, in part, because of our slide in the education league that we have slumped in the economic league too, from 13th to 18th? They are not the only team to have slumped to 18th in the league; Wolverhampton Wanderers has as well, but at least Graham Taylor did the decent thing—he resigned. He will be at home now, watching our proceedings on the TV as many unemployed people do, and he will be speaking for the nation when he says, "Do I not like this Queen's Speech."

It is extraordinary. Britain is 18th in the league of prosperity—18th in the national income per head. Over 16 years, Britain has had the lowest growth rate of any G7 or European Union nation and the deepest recessions—two of them. Even at the current point of the economic cycle, investment is below what it was in 1989. According to the Bank of England, it is 20 per cent. below what it was at previous similar stages in the cycle. Between 1979 and 1993, the level of investment in the United Kingdom was the lowest of that of any of the 18 countries of the G7 and the European Union. There has been record borrowing, a decaying infrastructure and a 20 per cent. devaluation. All that has happened after the Government have had £120 billion of North sea oil and £80 billion of privatisation money, which they have taken and spent. People often say of the Conservatives that they may be cruel, but that they are competent. This is an economic record of shame. They are cruel and incompetent in equal measure.

Of course, what happened to the great relaunch of the Prime Minister—relaunch No. 19—when he came back from his holidays? We all remember the press briefings, do we not? The leadership election was won. We were told that he was "brimming with energy" and "fizzing" with new ideas. Perhaps what will worry the Cabinet as much as it worries us is the report that the Prime Minister was making a Cabinet "in his own image". He was looking at all areas of policy, and he was going to "stamp his personal authority" on every area.

That bit at least we can accept: this Queen's Speech has the Prime Minister written all over it, with the imprint of the last person who sat on him. It is a Queen's Speech designed to appease those who kept him in his job. It has been dictated by his party's craving for survival rather than this country's need for change.

We will, of course, examine each Bill on its merits. Some Bills are likely to be uncontroversial. There must, of course, be a broadcasting Bill. We have accepted the principles of the White Paper, and we shall examine the contents of the Bill with care. There must be legislation on defence, the reserve forces, Army discipline and chemical weapons. Some of the housing proposals in the Queen's Speech are those that we urged on the Government. We will scrutinise carefully legislation on the disclosure of evidence in criminal cases to see that it is fair, although we have supported the royal commission's recommendations on making the system more open.

The divorce and domestic violence legislation is now back on the agenda, but where is the scope and the vision that matches up to the problems of Britain today? Surely that is the point that Conservative Members should understand. In so far as there is an agenda of substance, it is one dominated by the right—for example, vouchers for nursery places. We know that the Secretary of State did not want them, nor did her Ministers. We know that she was overruled by the Prime Minister, and why? Because, as *The Sunday Times* put it,

"a powerful coalition of Tory right-wingers, including Michael Portillo and John Redwood"

leant on him: they who must be appeased, and appeased they have been.

There will be no choice when the nursery places are not available. A huge bureaucracy is to be created and £5 million will be needed to administer the pilot projects alone. Many local authorities—including the chairmen of Conservative local education authorities—are already saying, and it has not been denied either, that they fear that they will lose funding. All that will happen when the £165 million could provide a real guarantee to all four-year-olds of a proper nursery education.

What else did the right demand? It demanded more money for assisted places. Why? Not because that will even begin to address the problem of under-achievement in our schools, but because it imagines that that will make things difficult for the Labour party—another piece of smoking out. That £100 million will be spent to play a party political game. That money is there to be spent on our children's education, and the Prime Minister chooses to spend it on subsidising private education for 30,000 children while the educational needs of millions go neglected in our country.

Resources mean choices—assisted places for the few, or smaller class sizes for the many. I know the choice that the Labour party makes; it is the choice that British people make. *[Interruption.]* It is the choice—*[Interruption.]* Before Conservative Members tell us that class sizes do not matter, why do so many of them send their children to private schools with small classes? *[Interruption.]*

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale) *rose—*

Mr. Blair *indicated dissent.*

The rowdier Conservative Members get, the more beaten they show themselves to be. *[Interruption.]* They appear to have a new tactic—to sit there and shout rather than stand and shout. We shall wait and see.

Mr. David Shaw (Dover): He is losing his temper.

Mr. Blair: I gather that I am being accused of bad form by the hon. Member for Dover (Mr. Shaw).

We all know the purpose of the asylum Bill. The former Tory research director, who is now a Conservative candidate, said when he left:

"Immigration, an issue which we raised successfully in 1992 and again in the 1994 Euro-elections campaign, played particularly well in the tabloids and has more potential to hurt."

Of course the hurt is done not only to the Labour party. When politics is played with such issues, it causes hurt to many ordinary, decent people in this country who should not be hurt.

We oppose bogus applications and fraud and we recognise the need for immigration controls, but race and immigration should not be the plaything of party politics. Let me suggest to the Prime Minister how the issue may be tackled to ensure that it is not.

We should be clear in our minds what the real problem is—the real opening for fraud. According to recent parliamentary answers, not a single asylum decision on the fast track has been taken within the seven-day limit; the average is 40 days. The decision on the substantive procedure is meant to take 28 days; it takes, on average, eight months. The appeals procedure is supposed to take nine weeks; it takes 10 months. If we deal with those delays, we shall start to deal with the problem properly.

The Prime Minister denies that that issue is being used to play the race card in any sense. Let the new Bill go to a Standing Committee of the House, so that evidence may be taken and considered, and let it be a genuine consensual exercise in getting at the truth. I am delighted to see that some Conservative Members are nodding at that.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): You do not mean a Standing Committee.

Mr. Blair: It is not an unreasonable proposition. It would be a way to take the issue out of party politics and have it dealt with sensibly and with reason.

I very much hope that we shall hear a pledge in the debate, especially in the light of events of the past couple of weeks, that Nigeria will not be on the list of nations decreed by the Home Office to be free of internal repression.

On housing, the Government have removed the duty to find accommodation for priority homeless households. That duty on local authorities is to be scrapped despite warnings from charities and local authorities of the effects of doing so. It is a cruel and senseless measure, which will harm some of the most vulnerable people in Britain.

Every issue that is now considered by the Government is considered on the following basis. I want to describe the way in which government now works, and I believe that many Conservative Members know, in their heart of hearts, that this is how it now works.

These are the tests that are applied. What can put Labour on the spot? What can squeeze a headline out of tomorrow's papers? What can keep the two wings of the Conservative party together? As a Minister said to a newspaper the other day, it is government by tacking. It is a tawdry, low-life, demeaning exercise in political tactics. It is everything about using government as a propaganda machine and it is nothing about the interests of Britain as a country.

Consider the year since the previous Queen's Speech. *[Interruption.]* It is very interesting. Conservative Members all want to shout sedentary interventions, but I do not think that they want to intervene today. No—they do not want to intervene today; they are so pathetic. It is another little game: usually, they intervene; today, they are all going to sit there and shout instead. Why do not they, just for one minute, behave like a Government instead of a rabble? What is wrong? Do they not dare to stand up today? Is there a problem? It is a little game with the Whips. To think that those people can keep themselves in government for another 18 months—it is a tragedy for this country.

I shall take advantage of the fact that Conservative Members are not going to interrupt me. Let us look at the past year—*[Interruption.]* Does the former chairman of the Tory party want to intervene? The tactic of not intervening is so bad that I can believe that he might have thought of it. No one wants to intervene—what a pathetic bunch they are.

Dame Jill Knight (Birmingham, Edgbaston): Conservatives recognise convention and tradition. We recognise that during the speeches this afternoon, on this special day, we do not intervene.

Mr. Blair: First, in that case, Conservative Members broke the convention at least 10 times last year. Secondly, I think that the hon. Lady means the Budget speech, not this one. *[Interruption.]* Let us break a rule—they can come at me if they want to.

Mr. Jim Lester (Broxtowe): As someone who was a one-nation Tory long before I entered the House, I must say that the right hon. Gentleman is not doing much to convince people like me that he has converted.

Mr. Blair: If the hon. Gentleman considered the current position and policy of the Government on the immigration issue that has just been raised, on Europe, on tackling poverty and on employment, he would probably find that he had a lot more in common with what we say than with what the Government say.

Let us consider the past year since the Queen's Speech. If the BBC were to run a review of the Tories in the past year, it would not know whether to get the news, sport or light entertainment departments to put the compilation together. The country needs to know how the Government are run. Let us consider the Nolan inquiry. There were allegations of sleaze and we were told that there was no need for an inquiry. Then, there was an inquiry and the Government accepted the findings, but their Back Benchers did not like them so the matter was put in the hands of a new committee. There was then a vote—the Government lost the vote, said the vote did not matter and blamed the Whips. That is how the Government conduct their business.

On the issue of the utility bosses—the fat cats—first, there is no need for an inquiry, but the pressure grows so there is a Confederation of British Industry inquiry, and with it the new mantra, "Wait for Greenbury." We wait and the recommendations appear. First, the Government accept them, but when they try to implement them they find that they hit the wrong people—the subject was not even mentioned in the Queen's Speech.

On the subject of arms to Iraq, first, we heard that there was no need for an inquiry but then we were told that there would be an inquiry and that we were to wait for the Scott inquiry. We are still waiting. On the subject of Europe, the Whipless wonders were expelled to darkness for daring to defy the Prime Minister. They were propelled into fame; they were so in demand by the media that they should have paid council tax on

[Mr. Blair]

No. 4 Millbank. They were brought back into the fold having conceded nothing, having given up nothing and having won the policy battle.

Sir Peter Tapsell (East Lindsey): While the right hon. Gentleman is on the subject of Europe, will he say whether a Government led by him would join the single European market and retain our controls on immigration?

Mr. Blair: We are in the European single market and we have made it clear that we shall retain our veto on immigration issues. We have always said that.

As to the family and domestic violence Bill, imagine trying to portray the Lord Chancellor—of all people—as a wild-eyed, anti-family, anti-religious destroyer of all that Britain holds dear. One expected him to turn up eating muesli and wearing sandals. The Government caved into the pressure, but then there was a backlash against the backlash. The Government caved in again and the Bill is back in the Queen's Speech.

Never was there a greater show of appeasement or a better indication of how the Government work than at the Conservative party conference when the Defence Secretary made one of the most ill-considered speeches ever delivered by a Defence Secretary. The chiefs of staff were appalled, the Special Air Services were sickened and former Tory Prime Ministers found the speech revolting. But what did the Prime Minister do? He stood up and he led the applause. The Prime Minister, who once would have had us at the heart of Europe, rose to salute the person who would have us out of Europe altogether.

The Prime Minister does not believe in that policy—I would have more respect for him and for his current position if he did. The Prime Minister has lurched to the right on Europe not through deliberation but through default. It is time that the one-nation Tories who disdain such views stood up and said so loudly and clearly. They must sit in the Chamber, listening to the stridency and extremism, asking themselves why the Prime Minister caves in to the first four or five members of the hard right who want to see Government policy change. One-nation Toryism is dead; it is finished. There is only one party of social justice in the House today. Do not ask me who it is, Madam Speaker: simply read the comments of the hon. Member for Aldershot which appear in today's *Evening Standard.*

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford): As we are talking about supposed cave-ins, will the Leader of the Opposition explain Labour's education policy to the House? Last year Labour favoured taking grant-maintained schools back under political control, but when the right hon. Gentleman sent his child to a grant-maintained school, the policy changed and suddenly grant-maintained schools were in favour. Extremists such as the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) complained and the Labour party shifted policy again. Now it is in favour of retaining half of all grant-maintained schools under political control.

Mr. Blair: The hon. Gentleman is wrong on every point, and if he were to read the relevant Labour party documents, he would realise that. I will tell him what the difference is between Labour and the Conservatives. If we make a change, we do so in the interests of this country and we stand up for that change. What is more, if there needs to be a change, I lead it; I do not follow it.

Mr. John Redwood (Wokingham): Why should we believe the right hon. Gentleman's views on Europe today when they are the complete opposite of his views 12 years ago? What will his views be in 10 years?

Mr. Blair: I have heard it all now. Twelve months ago, the right hon. Gentleman sat in the Cabinet and agreed with the Government's policy. He is the man—I shall be corrected if I am wrong—who served in the Government at the time of the Maastricht decision and supported the Government all the way. *[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. Hon. Members will stop shouting so much.

Mr. Blair: As I said last year—and I meant it—I would rather serve in a party that stands up for a constructive, proper relationship in Europe, than in a party that, probably later under the right hon. Gentleman, would move to take Britain out of Europe altogether.

Mr. Nirj Joseph Deva (Brentford and Isleworth): Does the right hon. Gentleman know that last year there were 38,000 bogus and 1,700 genuine applications for asylum in Britain? Bogus applications damage race relations in this country.

Mr. Blair: I hope that no one will suggest that we or anyone else are in favour of bogus asylum applications. I hope that the Government are not either. Earlier, I made a suggestion that is worth considering. I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman would agree that the Bill should go to a Special Standing Committee that would take evidence. That would take the matter out of party politics altogether.

Not a promise has been kept on tax, VAT, mortgage relief, the value of the pound, Europe, education and health. The Conservative Government have created a less equal, more unfair and more divided country than any Government this century. For decades, our nation, under Governments of both political persuasions, tried to pursue policies that brought the nation together because it was fair and efficient. Today, there is not even a pretence at it by the Government.

Britain as a nation is less fair, less united and less cohesive. It thinks and acts less like one nation than at any time this century. The Tories may wrap themselves in the language of the nation state, but they have done more to destroy the fabric of Britain than any party in living memory.

Mr. Phil Gallie (Ayr): A few minutes ago, the right hon. Gentleman suggested that he would rather belong to a party that had constructive and objective views on Europe, so why does he not come and join us? Why does he not accept that he has already moved down a whole pile of avenues that the Conservative party has advocated over the years? Perhaps he should recognise his true position in future.

Mr. Blair: At first I thought that it was an error of judgment by the Whips to stop interventions. Now I know that it was a canny and intelligent move. For heaven's sake, we know perfectly well that there are different views

on Europe in the Cabinet, but now the Government cannot even discuss certain issues connected with Europe as they are so worried about disagreeing.

We needed a Queen's Speech for Britain. We needed measures to lift Britain up the prosperity league by raising investment in skills, infrastructure and the regions and to bring knowledge and information to the people by harnessing new technology for our schools, in the workplace and in the home. We needed a Queen's Speech to provide new opportunities for the young unemployed, to build homes for the homeless and to allow people a decent standard of living. We needed a Queen's Speech to reform welfare and allow people back into work who need and want to work, to cut class sizes, to raise standards and to take tough action against failing schools. We needed a Queen's Speech to restore the health service as one unified system of proper public service in Britain. We needed a Queen's Speech to make the streets safe again by legislating for a proper crime prevention strategy in every part of Britain.

We should and could have had a Queen's Speech to revive local government, to bring real democracy to the nations and regions of Britain and to clean up politics after years of Conservative sleaze. We should have had a Queen's Speech with a foreign policy based not on the need to appease people within the Conservative party but on Britain's true national interests.

The Queen's Speech was not designed to make Britain proud, hopeful or confident. It will merely strengthen the desire of millions of people to see the Government put out of office. They have been there too long, they have told too many lies and they have made too many mistakes. They have nothing whatever to offer the future of Britain.

A Queen's Speech designed to smoke out the Labour party has instead smoked out the Government. It exposes them for what they are—tired, inept and incompetent. The Government have given up governing the country. By their tactics today, they show just how pathetic and pitiable they have become. The Government are now behaving like an Opposition and they will soon get the chance to be an Opposition. It is time for them to go.

3.39 pm

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): At the outset of his remarks, the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair), the Leader of the Opposition, paid tribute to those of our former colleagues who sadly died in the past 12 months. I willingly join him in that tribute. They each in their own way made a distinctive contribution to the House, and we shall miss them. I reiterate our sympathy to their friends and families.

No one who knows my right hon. Friend the Member for Witney (Mr. Hurd) will be remotely surprised by the quality of his excellent speech. I sat alongside my right hon. Friend often enough at international meetings to know his worth. Time after time, often in a hostile environment, he won arguments for the United Kingdom, and won them well.

In the House, my right hon. Friend has a particular reputation. Throughout the years I have known him—that goes back to long before I became a Member of this place—my right hon. Friend has always been valiant for moderation. Not for him the cheap and silly soundbite to sully his opponents. My right hon. Friend is rightly contemptuous of that. His politics have been constructed on rational argument. I believe that the country and the House will be the poorer when he leaves this place.

My right hon. Friend has been a generous source of wise counsel to the country as well as to the Government. He has been a great servant of the state. I am most grateful to him. All of us in the House who wish our country well should join in those sentiments.

I congratulate also my hon. Friend the Member for City of Chester (Mr. Brandreth) on his amusing speech. He was very amusing but not wholly frank. My hon. Friend had a dark secret that he declined to mention—his distant ancestor, Jeremiah Brandreth. Jeremiah was an agitator, a left-wing agitator, and, like so many, he was rather unworldly.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): He was a good one.

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman says that he was a good one. Well, he was known as the hopeless radical, and so good was he as a left-wing agitator that he was arrested and convicted, and became the last man to be beheaded for treason in this country.

Mr. Ronnie Campbell (Blyth Valley): So far.

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman may unknowingly be right.

I have not told the House that Jeremiah was arrested by a Mr. Waldegrave, an illustrious predecessor of my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary. I warn my right hon. and hon. Friends: if they consider that the spending round is rigorous, let them know that my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary is in no mood for compromise.

My hon. Friend the Member for City of Chester was president of the Oxford union. He had an endearing habit in debate. If he found—it was a most unusual circumstance—that he was losing the argument, he would physically stand on his head to confound his opponents. I congratulate him on an extremely useful preparation for national politics.

We have heard U-turn after U-turn from the Leader of the Opposition. The right hon. Gentleman does not literally stand on his head, but he has a remarkable chameleon-like ability to change political colour, depending on the audience that he is facing. I have rarely heard such copperplated nonsense as he fed to the House this afternoon. It was humbug at its worst, and juvenile in its style of criticism. It was what we have come to expect from the right hon. Gentleman—cheap soundbites and no sign of his real policy substance, if he has any.

We had the usual nonsense and absurdity that we have heard over the past few days about lurching to the right. That is this week's approved soundbite from the thought merchants who govern the right hon. Gentleman in his back room. I hope that one day he will learn to give up this silly name-calling—

Dr. John Reid (Motherwell, North): Will the Prime Minister give way?

The Prime Minister: I will later.

I hope that, one day, the right hon. Gentleman will learn to give up this silly name-calling, and learn to address serious issues of policy that are of interest to the country.

[The Prime Minister]

The right hon. Gentleman had something to say about "one nation". Only one party—mine—is truly the "one nation" party. The right hon. Gentleman has an interesting way of claiming to be in the "one nation" party. He would start by dividing up the United Kingdom and covering it with a rash of assemblies; he would then give the remnants to Brussels, because he would not want to be isolated on any single issue. He would put the young out of work with a minimum wage; he would destroy grant-maintained schools, and the choice they offer. As for defence, he would put it under the control of a former member of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament—which describes most members of his shadow Cabinet.

Those policies would not create one nation. They would weaken it, split it and divide it—and that is what the right hon. Gentleman stands for.

Dr. Reid: Will the Prime Minister give way?

The Prime Minister: In a minute.

Let us just examine the latest soundbite: "lurching to the right". Giving parents more choice—is that lurching to the right? If it is, I willingly lurch in that direction. Reforming welfare to help those in genuine need: a lurch to the right? I welcome it. Fighting crime and the drugs barons—is that a lurch to the right, or does the right hon. Gentleman agree with it? Helping the disabled, giving tenants the right to buy their homes, creating incentives for enterprise—what sort of lurch is that? What are those, other than commonsense Conservative policies that are in the interests of this country?

The Opposition conduct policy by finding their cheap sneer of the week and using it, whatever happens. When—if ever—they return to real politics, they will find that there is much more substance to politics than the childish, juvenile nonsense that they spout day after day after day.

Dr. Reid: I believe that the Prime Minister personally has not lurched to the right. We are suggesting that he has been caught in a trap by those on the right. There is, however, a way in which he can illustrate his moral fibre—the fact that he is not a prisoner on every issue—and show that he is not prepared to use the race card in a general election. Will he accept the Leader of the Opposition's suggestion that the asylum Bill be dealt with by a Special Standing Committee? The people of Britain can judge from his answer whether he is really committed to "one nation" policies, or whether he is a prisoner of the right.

The Prime Minister: I shall turn to the asylum Bill later. Let me tell the hon. Gentleman, however, that there is one party in the House that is using the race card, and it is not mine: its members sit on the Opposition Benches.

When the right hon. Member for Sedgefield next talks about world prosperity, he might get some of his facts right. The countries that have risen in the prosperity league include low-taxation, free-market countries such as Japan, Hong Kong and Singapore; the countries that are slipping down the league include countries that have pursued socialist policies of high taxation and high spending.

Mr. Peter Hain (Neath): Will the Prime Minister give way?

The Prime Minister: Not for the moment; I may do so a little later.

The right hon. Gentleman sees his job as being to disagree with everything—to attack the Government's motives first, and their policies second. In his view, all is wrong; nothing is right. But if he were in power—ah! Amazing things would happen. We would never be isolated anywhere in the world. He would never be isolated: the world would automatically accept his position. Everything would suddenly become for the best in the best of all possible worlds.

Taxes would not rise, although the deputy Leader of the Opposition says that they will rise for the highest-paid. That is not something that I heard from the Leader of the Opposition at the CBI conference just the other day. But of course, spending would rise, because spending promises are made daily, despite the efforts of the shadow Chancellor.

Unemployment, the Opposition think, would vanish. The sun would shine. That is the substance of the right hon. Gentleman's soundbite, day after day. His position is, of course, total baloney, and he knows that it is total baloney. I intend to concentrate on the real world of sound policies, not on the right hon. Gentleman's world of soundbites. This country is now enjoying a more sustained and secure recovery than it has known for many years.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Order. Hon. Members should not persist. They heard the Prime Minister say that he will give way a little later, and having heard that, they should not persist.

The Prime Minister: I reiterate that I shall give way to some Labour Members in a few moments.

Britain is back in business in a big way. The changes of the past 16 years have transformed this country's prospects for the better. Sixteen years ago, the dead could not be buried in Labour Members' constituencies; 16 years ago, we could not take our own money abroad; 16 years ago, people could not run their own companies, because of the way the trade unions ran amok; 16 years ago, Britain had an incipient inflation problem.

The Leader of the Opposition may choose to forget, but I do not think that the nation will have forgotten, the shambles that emanated from Labour policies. Whenever the Opposition talk about this country, they try to talk it down, and refuse to recognise what has happened. Inflation is no longer a serious issue: it is under lock and key.

The number of people out of work—*[Interruption.]* The deputy Leader of the Opposition sniggers. When was inflation less than 8 per cent., even on a rigged quarterly basis, under the last Labour Government? It has been about 3 per cent. under this Conservative Government for three years, and shows no sign of getting out of control. What help have we had from the Opposition to bring down inflation?

The number of people out of work has fallen by almost three quarters of a million. It is now below Germany, and well below France. A higher proportion of British people are in work than ever before in our history, and more than in any comparable European country. *[Interruption.]* Labour Members do not like it, but that is the real world, from which they try to hide.

Strikes are at their lowest level since records began, interest rates are at half their peak, public spending is under control, and growth is firmly based on rising

exports and rising investment. It is the most secure platform for prosperity that this country has known for generations.

Mr. Robert Ainsworth (Coventry, North-East): The Prime Minister has explained how other countries have moved within the economic prosperity league. After 16 years of Tory government, where has Britain moved in the economic prosperity league? We want to hear it from his own mouth.

The Prime Minister: We have moved, over the last few years—*[Interruption.]* Curiously enough, I invite the hon. Gentleman to look at *The Sunday Times*, which exploded Labour's advertisements. It showed that, in fact, Britain is becoming progressively more prosperous, while socialist countries are becoming progressively less prosperous. That is because they insist on policies such as the social chapter, from which they cannot opt out once they have signed in—unlike what the Leader of the Opposition suggested the other day.

Ms Joan Ruddock (Lewisham, Deptford): I am grateful to the Prime Minister for giving way. I want to ask a question similar to that asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry, North-East (Mr. Ainsworth). Has not Britain now moved down the prosperity league from 13th to 18th place? Will he give the House the benefit of his opinion on why that has happened under his Government?

The Prime Minister: I can tell the hon. Lady directly that Britain is now the fastest-growing economy—*[Interruption.]* She does not like that. We have put right what was wrong under the last Labour Government, and Britain is now the fastest-growing economy in western Europe. She does not have to take just the Government's word for that: she should read what the OECD has to say about the British economy. It is the OECD that comments favourably about us, and it was the IMF that carted Labour away to the knacker's yard when a Labour Government were trying to run the economy.

Mr. Tristan Garel-Jones (Watford): Is my right hon. Friend aware that the Leader of the Opposition, not only throughout his speech but in all that he has said all over the country in the past 12 months, has hardly been able to point to a Conservative reform of the past 16 years, in labour law or in industrial law, in health or in education, that he proposes to repeal? Does my right hon. Friend agree that perhaps no one in the House has moved further to the right than the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair)?

The Prime Minister: The Leader of the Opposition certainly seems to have lurched quite a long way to the right, but I sometimes wonder to what extent his party has lurched with him. I think that Labour's heart and soul are where they always were—opposed to strong defence, nuclear weapons, low-inflation policies and free enterprise. That is where the heart of the Labour party is, even if a squatter is moving off its land on to ours and posing as the leader of the Labour party.

Mr. Robert N. Wareing (Liverpool, West Derby): Will the Prime Minister give way?

The Prime Minister: I should like to make a little progress now, and I trust that the hon. Gentleman will permit me to do so.

I have set out the platform for prosperity that we now have, but it is not a platform that the country can afford to take for granted. Getting there has not been easy. The policies that picked Britain up from its knees were fought tooth and nail by the Labour party, and those who fought them are not the people to build on them in future.

As the Leader of the Opposition said, we still face many challenges—harsher competition from all over the world threatening jobs and security, a growing elderly population in need of care, tidal changes in technology and rapid social change.

Conservatives are clear about how to deal with those problems. First, we have an unswerving commitment to an enterprise economy. That means low taxes, for the economic benefits they bring. It means incentives to encourage investment and create wealth, policies to increase personal prosperity and choice, and Government accepting that they should not always interfere. There are times when Governments do damage by interfering. In short, ours are policies to make Britain the enterprise centre of Europe.

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax) *rose—*

The Prime Minister: I shall not give way to the hon. Lady now, but perhaps I shall a little later.

Opposition Members will hate our policies, because they hate choice. In their hearts, they hate the private sector, and believe that our great public services can be built only by higher taxation. As usual, they are wrong. People do not want, and in the 1990s they do not need, every choice to be taken for them by the Government or by some other central bureaucracy.

Of course, there will always be a role for the state. I do not favour a totally laissez-faire attitude in society, any more than I want a nanny state. Conservatives have always accepted the social obligation to care; so do the Government, and so will Conservative Governments after the next election. But we need those who can do so to care for themselves. For those who cannot, there must be the help that only an enterprise economy can pay for.

We care for our public services—schools, hospitals and welfare. I grew up dependent on those, just as people do today—and unlike some Opposition Members, I do not intend to kick away the ladder that I climbed as a boy. But to build our public services, we need growth, not high taxes. Growth is built on policies for enterprise, not on the policies of envy and spite that ignite Opposition Members.

We must also win the war against crime, protect the stability of the United Kingdom and stand up for our sovereign interests abroad. In the future, as in the past, that will mean tough action to deliver safety and security.

Mrs. Mahon: As the Prime Minister was talking about public services and choice, is he aware of the serious problem facing people in Calderdale and Kirklees, who face having their water cut off in a few days? Why was there no provision in the Queen's Speech to try to prevent that from ever happening again? This is a first-world country, so why is the greedy, incompetent privatised Yorkshire Water allowed to run that company? When will the Prime Minister take responsibility for the delivery of free clean water to the people of my constituency?

The Prime Minister: In addition to everything else, the Opposition have a policy to make it rain when it is

[The Prime Minister]

convenient. We have just heard from the hon. Lady the absolute instinct of the Labour party to oppose the private sector whenever it can. Were there never problems in the old nationalised water industry? Of course there were.

A year ago, I spoke about the changing situation in Northern Ireland. Since then, the ceasefire has held, and there is a new atmosphere in Northern Ireland. There is a new situation: a growing economy, more jobs, policemen patrolling without armed soldiers in tow; in a word, Madam Speaker, peace. For weeks—and for, I believe, negotiating purposes—Sinn Fein has been declaring a state of crisis. It has warned—but it tells us that it is not a threat—that violence could return unless the other parties come rapidly to the negotiating table. But violence does not return of its own accord, like the daffodils in spring.

If Sinn Fein is committed to exclusively peaceful methods—as its leaders claim it to be—there can be no question of violence returning. Let Sinn Fein say that unequivocally. If its commitment is real, threats and thuggery should stop. The killing has stopped, but much else has not. A 16-year-old girl is dragged from her home in west Belfast by masked men, tied to a lamp post and assaulted. Her hair is cropped, and paint is poured over her. A 67-year-old woman from Londonderry is taken to hospital in shock when seven self-proclaimed provisionals with baseball bats break in and smash her house.

That may not be murder, but it is not peace, and it is not behaviour which merits Sinn Fein's entry to talks. I want Sinn Fein to denounce such behaviour and to stop it. I have given Mr. Adams and Mr. McGuinness the freedom to appear face to face on the media and express their views. Let them do so, and express their opposition to the punishment beatings which go on day after day after day in Northern Ireland.

Almost every day brings a fresh atrocity—there have been 250 since the ceasefire. Each assault, each threat, each so-called warning puts a question mark in the minds of reasonable people. I wish to move forward to negotiations involving all parties, including Sinn Fein. I believe that we can, and I shall work for that, but it will need good will and trust. We cannot move forward at any price, and we cannot move forward with a gun held to our head. The road to peace will be open if those erecting road blocks remove them, and I hope they will.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): I agree with the Prime Minister. There was a recent case in Londonderry when individuals took refuge in the cathedral. Martin McGuinness—who had directed people involved in the stoning of houses—also directed those who wanted to put pressure on the bishop to remove those individuals from the cathedral. When a ship is decommissioned, it is not only put out of service but its crew is scattered. Until the IRA battalions are scattered, there can be no lasting peace.

On the 10th anniversary of the signing of the Anglo-Irish Agreement, may I point out that the methodology of the agreement still denies people the right to equal citizenship which is at the heart of the Gracious Speech? I yearn for the day when the people of Northern Ireland will be able to put forward an elected representative to negotiate a way forward.

The Prime Minister: We all look forward to the day when the road is open, not just for the preliminary talks we are looking at currently, but beyond them to the round table talks between all the constitutional parties which can find a proper settlement in Northern Ireland. I look forward to that day, and I pledge to the House that I will continue to work for that day—but not, as I indicated a moment ago, at any price.

Dr. Joe Hendron (Belfast, West): I totally agree with the Prime Minister's comments on the punishment beatings by both sets of paramilitaries. But on a slightly different aspect, bearing in mind the fact that the promotion of jobs in Northern Ireland is mentioned in the Gracious Speech, that the Prime Minister has played a noble role in the peace process in Northern Ireland and that he is aware that the Republic of Ireland has a 10 per cent. corporate tax which helps the Irish Government and the business people in the Republic of Ireland to attract investment from the United States and elsewhere, will the Government consider introducing a 10 per cent. corporate tax in the north of Ireland, in order to treat both parts of Ireland equally and to help to attract inward investment? I bear in mind the Prime Minister's conference in November, when I had the pleasure of hearing him, and I congratulate him once again on that. Surely the introduction of a 10 per cent. corporate tax in Northern Ireland would be a big step forward.

The Prime Minister: I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on his special pleading—a special pleading with which I am familiar from my visits to Northern Ireland. Northern Ireland enjoys a number of other advantages not enjoyed in the south or elsewhere. One must consider the position in the round. Not only would the hon. Gentleman be surprised, but the House would be astonished beyond belief, if I were to deal with such tax measures on this occasion. *[Interruption.]* I fear that, despite the tempting invitation from the shadow Home Secretary, I have no intention of doing so.

Our commonsense, practical programme of traditional Conservative values is set out in the Gracious Speech. The centrepiece of our economic strategy will be unveiled later this month in the Budget. It will show our determination to turn Britain into the enterprise centre of Europe. As I said a moment ago, I do not intend to anticipate its contents, but it will be consistent with sound public finance and our resolve to move further towards a more enterprising economy. We have brought public spending under control. We will reduce it further, and, when prudent, we will cut taxes on companies and individuals.

For Britain to compete in tomorrow's world, more of our young people will need to be taught and trained in the skills and knowledge of the new century. Already, our education reforms offer parents more choice and pupils more opportunity. Up and down the country, parents are choosing grant-maintained schools for their children. That is excellent news. We will ensure that those highly popular schools can grow to reflect parents' choice in the future, as I believe they will.

I have given a commitment to make a nursery place available for every four-year-old in the country.

Mr. Andrew Miller (Ellesmere Port and Neston): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

The Prime Minister: I shall not give way for the moment. I have given way quite a lot, and I want to make a little progress.

We will take a further significant step in that direction by giving parents the power to choose the nursery place they think is the right one for their children. Parents expect that choice, and they will get it.

Those young people will be entering a world of rapid change. One of the key areas of change is broadcasting. Digital technology will revolutionise broadcasting, just as much as the switch from black and white to colour television. Britain will be right at the forefront of those changes, and the broadcasting Bill will ensure that we stay there.

The Conservative party has a long tradition of helping those in need. *[Interruption.]* It is fashionable for hon. Members to dispute that. The Conservative party has provided more social advance than the Labour party has ever dreamt of. But to help those people to best effect, we must ensure that only those in genuine need receive that help, and our programme will do that.

In housing, our measures will ensure that those in greatest need get the help they deserve. We will raise the standard of social housing by increasing competition in its provision. We will introduce measures to ensure fairer access to social housing, and we will give new opportunities for tenants of housing associations to buy their own homes. Those are the measures that the Leader of the Opposition forgot to mention in his catalogue of what was not in the Queen's Speech.

We intend to offer further help to disabled people. Fate has robbed our fellow citizens who are disabled of a great deal. Governments should not rob them of choice. We will give disabled people themselves the funds to pay for the equipment and services they need. We have extended, and will continue to extend, the choice available to them.

Britain has always opened its doors to those who are in genuine need of asylum, but our current system has been abused. This year, some 40,000 claims for asylum will be made—10 times the figure in 1988. The Labour leader spoke of delays in applying for asylum. With that increase in figures, of course there are delays, and that is why we need reform. Only a small number—

Sir Michael Shersby (Uxbridge): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

The Prime Minister: Not at the moment.

Only a small number are likely to succeed, and they deserve to be determined speedily. The asylum and immigration Bill—*[Interruption.]* I suggest that Opposition Members read the Bill before they talk about it. It will ensure that applications for asylum are dealt with quickly and efficiently.

Genuine asylum cases will always receive a ready refuge in our country. That is our tradition, and it will continue. Of course we will continue to honour our United Nations convention obligations, just as we always have. Of course genuine asylum seekers will be treated with sympathy, as they always have been. But further action, including legislation, is necessary to deter bogus asylum seekers and to speed up the consideration of spurious applications, which, I regret to say, form the vast majority of asylum claims.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

The Prime Minister: I will give way in a moment.

We will take that action in the interests of fair, but firm, policies. Those who attack that Bill, as the right hon. Member for Sedgefield did, do our excellent race relations no service whatsoever. He said that he opposed bogus applications. So do we, so he should support us on that issue.

On the criticisms that have come from some Labour Members, I have always believed strongly in racial tolerance in Britain. I grew up in a multiracial community. I am proud of the way in which race relations have improved in the past two or three decades. It did not always seem likely that they would do so.

Today, many members of ethnic minority groups are role models for all of us, not just for those of their own race and colour. They are Britons. They grew up here. They represent their country—our country—with distinction, at home and abroad, and they must have the same rights as every other citizen. I will not see that progress threatened by those who use race for short-term political gain.

In the interests of good race relations, I will ensure that we have a fair system of asylum—fair for those who need help, and fair for those who do not believe that this country should receive bogus asylum seekers either.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

The Prime Minister: First, I will give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge (Sir M. Shersby) who, I think, has a particular interest.

Sir Michael Shersby: Is my right hon. Friend aware that, in the past year or so, the United Kingdom has been a target for a sustained and planned campaign of illegal immigration, employing the use of sophisticated forged documentation? Is he further aware that my local authority, the London borough of Hillingdon, is paying more than £1 million a year to care for unaccompanied child refugees, who have been brought to this country as part of that campaign? Does he agree that, in dealing with the problem of illegal immigration and asylum, we have to deal with those issues?

The Prime Minister: I agree that those difficult issues exist, and we should address them. But I must tell the whole House that we are seeking to address a particular problem. It is not a help to good race relations to leave that problem unresolved; nor is it a help for Opposition Members, for political reasons, to turn that Bill into a Bill about race, when it is about proper asylum procedures.

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): In that spirit, will the Prime Minister take some time to reflect on the suggestion of the Leader of the Opposition that the proposed Bill be considered by a special Committee? Also, following the suspension of Nigeria from the Commonwealth, will he investigate why only one Nigerian national has been given refugee status in the United Kingdom so far this year? Will he also take the necessary action to declare Nigeria a country of significant upheaval, thereby enabling Nigerian nationals whose applications for refugee status are subject to appeal to claim benefit pending the outcome of the appeal?

The Prime Minister: We shall deal with everybody, from whatever country, on asylum on a fair and free and

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open basis. That includes those people from Nigeria. I saw some of the rumours about Nigeria a few days ago, and fair old nonsense they were.

As far as the first part of the hon. Gentleman's question is concerned, of course, as a matter of courtesy, I will consider what the Leader of the Opposition said. I have to say to the House that I do not immediately find myself attracted by it, for this Bill will be the subject of the proper, wide-ranging discussion that all Bills have in the House during a very lengthy procedure. But of course I will consider what the right hon. Gentleman had to say.

Mr. Robin Corbett (Birmingham, Erdington): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

The Prime Minister: I will give way on this issue to one more hon. Member.

Mr. Corbett: I am most grateful to the Prime Minister. The whole House will welcome the way that he has spoken about the issue, and the language that he has used in doing so. In that spirit, rather than simply as a matter of courtesy—which is not unimportant—will he take the wider point of my right hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair), that if we are going to make the maximum contribution to sustaining and developing good race relations, we would do it best on the basis of consensus? Will he bear that in mind in thinking about my right hon. Friend's suggestion?

The Prime Minister: I have borne that in mind in the manner in which I have approached this issue, but I have to say that it is those who raise the question of race when we are dealing with the question of asylum abuse—*[Interruption.]* It is those who do that who raise the problem. I have to say to the hon. Gentleman that it is his hon. Friends who have been behaving in that fashion, not this Government.

What we are seeking to do—*[Interruption.]* No one denies—certainly the right hon. Member for Sedgefield did not deny it, to his credit—that there is a serious problem of asylum abuse. It is the responsibility of this Government and this House to deal with that question of abuse. It is not the responsibility of this House to drag in extraneous matters that could damage race relations while we undertake consideration of the Bill. Those people who do it cannot claim to be doing it in the interests of asylum seekers or in the interests of good race relations. I appeal to the Opposition to get off the kick they seemed to be on some days ago, and to deal with this Bill responsibly, as I believe it should be dealt with.

Sir Peter Emery (Honiton): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

The Prime Minister: For the last time, I will give way.

Sir Peter Emery: My right hon. Friend started this section of his speech talking about education. Will he bear it in mind that there is a vast campaign by Labour and Liberal Democrat-controlled local education authorities, which go out of their way to try to urge headmasters, governors and parents to resist voting for a grant-maintained system? That has to be examined, and the Government must take positive action about it.

The Prime Minister: I am grateful for what my right hon. Friend says. I know that there have been real problems there.

Whenever our country has been faced with change and difficult circumstances, the family has been a rock for the people of this country. No Conservative Government led by me could introduce legislation that would undermine marriage and the role of the family. At present, almost three quarters of all divorces are completed in less than sixth months, on grounds such as adultery or unreasonable behaviour. In future, no divorce would be possible in less than one year.

The family law Bill will put in place a framework to ensure that married couples face up to the responsibilities they have to each other, and, critically, to the children of that marriage. It will remove the incentive for couples to make allegations one against the other, often harming their children, and usually for the purpose of obtaining a more speedy divorce.

This Bill ensures that arrangements for children precede divorce, and it allows divorce to be barred when it would cause grave hardship. I believe that these measures are emphatically pro-marriage measures, and I believe that they deserve support. But I recognise that it undeniably touches upon the religious convictions and personal conscience of many hon. Members.

I have no wish to seek to ride roughshod over those convictions; so, as far as the Government are concerned, we shall propose free votes on matters of conscience in the family law Bill, and I hope that other parties will follow that lead.

The Bill will also deal with domestic violence, a crime from which every person should be protected, whether married or unmarried and in cohabitation.

Over the past two years, we have seen the largest ever fall in recorded crime. However, one of the most frustrating features of our criminal justice system is that cases have to be dropped because of the current rules on disclosure. That may mean that too many guilty people walk free. We will introduce changes to ensure a fairer balance of disclosure between the prosecution and the defence.

One of the most worrying problems we face is the growth of organised crime, which does not respect international borders. Such crime is often a trade in drugs, bringing untold misery for profit. Only in the past few days, we have seen a particularly highly publicised and tragic case of how drugs can devastate a family. In such an evil trade, no drug is soft, and no drug is safe. We must use every resource against this threat.

We will remove the present barrier to the Security Service helping the police and other agencies against organised crime. The usual statutory safeguards on the actions of the Security Service will, of course, continue to apply.

Mr. Ronnie Campbell: Will the Prime Minister give way?

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): Will the Prime Minister give way?

The Prime Minister: Not at the moment.

Many of the drugs from south America are smuggled to northern Europe through the Caribbean. Over the past few weeks, I have consulted Caribbean leaders about ways in which to break the chain. At their request and with their agreement, I will ask the European Union to give them effective help. The intention would be to find

the resources to stop the Caribbean being used as a way station for drugs from Latin America en route for northern Europe. If we can stop the drugs trade there, we shall damage it significantly, and do a great service to many hundreds of thousands of people throughout northern Europe.

Mr. Campbell: Will the Prime Minister give way on the topic of drugs?

The Prime Minister: No, if the hon. Gentleman will forgive me. I have taken the attention of the House for a long time. I know that there are right hon. and hon. Members who are waiting to speak.

Those are new approaches, but they are necessary. I believe that they can succeed.

The tradition of voluntary military service is an important thread in our national fabric. The reserve forces make a vital contribution to this country's security and well-being. By their selflessness, dedication and sheer enthusiasm, they enrich the quality of our national life and they deserve our gratitude. The reserve forces Bill will enable the reserves to respond more flexibly to the new challenges facing the country since the end of the cold war. In future, they will be able to take their part in peacekeeping and in many other matters.

Our legislative programme will allow us to build on the successes of the past, and to meet the challenges ahead. The policies that Labour advocates would squander our opportunities as a result of its readiness to increase spending, its readiness to put up taxes, the certainty that it would let inflation rip, and its discouragement of investment with more red tape. Labour will try to square its tax and spending inconsistencies with windfall taxes of one extraordinary sort or another. Such policies do not add up to a credible programme of opposition, let alone of government. They add to the reasons why Labour, as it has admitted in its own documents, is unfit to govern.

We have served our nation well, and we have built a strong economy. Labour's policies do not add up. We have been tough on crime; Labour has been soft. It is not remotely fit to govern. We have offered choice and high standards in schools; Labour Members exercise choice themselves, but would deny choice to others. They are not fit to govern. We have raised the quality of care in our hospitals. Labour would rip up our reforms and plunge the hospital system into chaos. Again, Labour is not fit to govern. We have stood up in Europe, often alone. Labour Members would not; they are not fit to govern, because they are not prepared to stand alone.

Our legislative programme is the right programme for this country; it will also be a litmus test for the Opposition. Let those who say that they support the market support the measures in the Finance Bill. Let those who rightly, and merrily, take the opportunity of choice in schools support our plans for choice in schools. Let those who would be tough on crime and tough on the causes of crime join us in being tough on the criminal. That is the litmus test, and we shall see what comes burning through.

While we set out important long-term policies, Labour demonstrates time and again why it is unfit to govern. We will pursue our objectives for the economy, for choice, for opportunity and for a safe and secure United Kingdom. That is what lies at the heart of our programme. I commend it to the House. No other party can put the interests of this country first as this Conservative Government do. *[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. Will hon. Members now leaving the Chamber do so quietly and quickly?

4.24 pm

Mr. Paddy Ashdown (Yeovil): I join the Prime Minister and the leader of the Labour party in congratulating the mover and seconder of the Loyal Address.

The right hon. Member for Witney (Mr. Hurd) has an elegance of phrase that we will, frankly, miss in the House, because it is not found in too many other right hon. and hon. Members. I must say to him, bluntly, that I am not sure that we will miss his management of the nation's foreign affairs, though his long commitment to the business and affairs of the nation has been diligent and is highly regarded.

I seem to remember that the right hon. Gentleman was once famously described by Andrew Rawnsley as "Sir Geoffrey Howe on speed". That is an interesting description. We have all noted how quickly he left the Government in order to spend more time with his bank manager. I think he will be missed as well when he leaves the House.

I had intended to remind the House of the ancestors of the hon. Member for City of Chester (Mr. Brandreth), but unfortunately the Prime Minister got there before me. I had intended to say that the fact that his ancestor was beheaded by an ancestor of the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, the right hon. Member for Bristol, West (Mr. Waldegrave), was perhaps an early example of being tough on crime and tough on the causes of crime.

The hon. Member for City of Chester has often said that he has spent the past few years trying to live down being a past television personality. I suspect that he will spend the next few years trying to live down being a past Conservative Member of Parliament, and I wish him luck in that.

Of course there are some things which we welcome in the Queen's Speech, and I will touch on them in a moment. But overall, a glance at this programme tells us, frankly, all we need to know about the Government. It tells us that they are no longer a Government of direction, let alone of any kind of long-term vision. They cannot be saved by new policies, because they have none—they ran out of those ages ago. They cannot be saved by another relaunch. I have lost count of how many relaunches they have had since the last election. I recall that the most recent one lasted a full two days before it was forgotten. They cannot be saved by another lurch to the right—they have done too many of those.

Let us admit, since the Opposition parties know it, that this Queen's Speech is not the event that matters in the month of November. It is an example of going through the motions. The Queen's Speech is a charade—a pantomime. It is a necessary formality before the real event in less than two weeks' time, the Budget.

The Government now have nothing further to say to the nation except, "Please vote for us because we're going to give you a tax cut." That is the beginning and end of the message that they will now present to the country. It is

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their only hope and they know it. Their assumption is that they can hoodwink us once more—that they can fool the nation again.

The Government believe that we will not remember that the tax cuts pledged before the last election were paid for afterwards with higher taxes, higher mortgages, lost jobs, bankrupt businesses and broken lives. They think that we will forget that. They think that people would rather have a little more money in their pockets today than decent schools and better chances for their children in the future.

The Government think that Britain can be fooled again. I think that they are wrong. Just compare Britain's economic situation last year with that achieved this year. Last year, borrowing was £1 billion above target at £35 billion or thereabouts. Today, it is not £1 billion above target, but likely to be £10 billion above target, at £30 billion. Last year, the inflation rate stood at 2.5 per cent., but this year it has nearly doubled to 4 per cent., and it is going up. Last year, the growth in gross domestic product was 4 per cent., but this year it is barely 2 per cent. Last year, growth in sales and manufacturing output in Britain stood at 4 per cent., but this year there was zero growth, and more bad figures were published today. However, last year, the Government said that things were so bad that we had to have record tax increases, but this year, they say that they are so good that they can afford a tax cut. Who the hell do they think they are fooling? They are not fooling anyone. Everyone in the country knows what the Government know, and they know beyond peradventure that the Government are preparing to risk responsible management of the nation's economy for short-term tax cuts to save their own skins.

We now learn that the Labour party will stand idly by and allow the Government to do that—so we hear—because Labour Members dare not vote against a Budget that puts Conservative tax cuts before Britain's interests.

On Monday, at the Confederation of British Industry conference, the Leader of the Opposition said that he was "unashamedly a long-termist". I applaud that commitment and I agree with it, but a person cannot be an unashamed long-termist if the best that he can do is to abstain when the Government so obviously place short-term party interests before the long-term interests of the nation. It will not wash.

I believe that Labour cannot do what it rightly and understandably seeks to do—win a reputation for economic responsibility—if Labour Members will not vote against a Government who are so plainly acting irresponsibly.

If the Labour party will not stand up for the long-term interests of the nation in opposition, how on earth can the country trust it to do so in government? If the Labour party acquiesces to the present Government distorting the country's finances to get themselves re-elected, why on earth should the country not conclude that Labour would do exactly the same if it were in their place?

In two weeks' time, we shall see the cynicism of the Government by the Budget that they present, but we shall also know the mettle of the Labour party by the way in which Labour Members vote on that Budget. The nation will be watching both of them.

Today, however, we debate a Queen's Speech that—the Leader of the Opposition put it rightly—is barely a sufficient programme for three months, let alone a full year. That is precisely the point. For it is a cut-and-run programme, designed to be ditched at any time for an early general election. They are fag-end measures from a fag-end Government.

The one thing that drives the Government—obsesses them—is to find something, anything, to mark out clear water between themselves and new Labour, which now appears determined to become indistinguishable from them. The Leader of the Opposition's tactics—in my opinion, good tactics but bad strategy—are driving the Prime Minister absolutely mad.

Turn as he will, the Prime Minister has not a clue about how to handle that. Blown hither and thither by the gales that rage in the Conservative party, he now tacks frantically from one side to the other, driven on by his own weakness and rebellions all around him. One week, he leads the applause for his Defence Secretary, who has grabbed the wheel and swung it towards clear blue water with a speech of such juvenile right-wing nonsense that it discredits not only his position but the whole nation; the next, we are told that he has at last found firm anchorage, sheltering under the lee of the Deputy Prime Minister, safe in the harbour of one nation Toryism.

Mr. Skinner: What, in his wedding dress?

Mr. Ashdown: However, a week later, there he is, throwing overboard long-planned legislation on divorce and domestic violence and making the Lord Chancellor carry the can, to satisfy a tiny group of Conservative right wingers and the ramblings of a freelance journalist on the *Daily Mail*.

I predict that it will not be long before the Prime Minister is off again, blown on by a news headline or a minor revolt of Conservative Back Benchers or a Minister who has now become too weak to control. Behind him he will trail that sorry, bedraggled Armada that now passes for the Government of our country.

Mr. Skinner: You can't drag an Armada.

Mr. Ashdown: Oh, he can; that man can. He can drag them behind. The albatross of the past 16 years hung around their neck, weighed down by broken promises and political sleaze, paralysed by internal divisions and ministerial incompetence, they will limp on until they make their final rendezvous with the ballot box.

What drives the programme is fear—fear of what that ballot box will bring. But fear is not only the Government's stimulus; fear is the weapon that they intend to use—it is the only weapon that is left to them and it will be their chosen weapon at the next election.

The Government will raise fear over constitutional change—we heard it today. They will say that it will break up Britain. But the opposite is true. The Union is more likely to be broken by the arrogance and contempt with which the Government ride roughshod over opinion in Scotland and Wales and the communities of Britain. They will raise fear over the chaos which they say would follow any change to the way we are governed. But the opposite is true. Britain's democratic structures have become so out of date, so out of kilter with the needs of a modern, citizen-based, information-rich society, that

they are now just as much a block on progress as are the out-of-date machines in too many of our competitive industries.

Mr. David Nicholson (Taunton): The right hon. Gentleman talks about changes in the structure of government. Over the past 18 months the right hon. Gentleman and I, and our colleagues in Somerset, have worked together with success to save the tier of Somerset county council; indeed, we have succeeded in saving the county council tier across most of the country. Given the two-tier structure of local government that we now retain in this country, does the right hon. Gentleman's party still intend to superimpose on top of it—under Westminster and under Europe and Strasbourg—the tier of regional assemblies?

Mr. Ashdown: A tier of regional government already exists. The only difference is that it is not democratically accountable. The Government have gone round constructing it—there are people in Bristol who deal with Government Departments for the west country, but the people of the west country have no control over them. All we seek to do is to ensure that those people are democratically accountable to the areas that they serve.

The Government will raise the fear—we have already seen it today—that the nation is about to be swallowed up by Brussels. But the opposite is true. All that Brussels does, it does because the Government have agreed to it, in secret, in the Council of Ministers—and the only person who agreed to more than the Prime Minister was his predecessor.

Many of the things that we and everyone else want for our people in the years ahead—security, the right framework for a strong economy, a powerful voice in the world, a clean environment in which to live—can be achieved only if we work constructively with our European neighbours. But the Government would sacrifice all that to appease a few rabid anti-Europeans on their own Back Benches.

The Government will raise the fear that if we try to invest in education, we will become bankrupt. But the opposite is true: the one certain way to bankrupt Britain is to fail to invest in our people. For they are the most important resource that we have.

The Government will raise the fear that long-term investment in our infrastructure and a long-term programme to clean up our environment will mean short-term misery for us all. But the opposite is true. Unless this country starts taking the long-term view, it is bound to go on failing—in the short term and in the long term.

The Government will raise the fear that the country cannot be safely governed except by people who have had as much experience as they have had. I presume that they mean people like the Home Secretary, whose chief experience since his appointment two years ago is that of being found guilty eight times by the courts for breaking the laws which he is supposed to be there to protect.

Mr. Skinner: Nine.

Mr. Ashdown: The hon. Gentleman says that it is nine—I am happy to accept that. Frankly, I have lost count.

If it is experience that the Government value so much, if it is experience that gave us the poll tax or the arms to Iraq scandal or sleaze on the Back Benches or economic bungling and mismanagement or the misappropriation of aid for the world's poor into the Pergau dam scandal or the timidity and failure of three years of fatal hesitation in Bosnia, then frankly I think we can do without it. It is not that sort of experience that Britain needs, but new ideas, new energy and some new policies to prepare it for the next century.

Mr. Gallie: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Ashdown: If the hon. Gentleman will allow me to make a little progress I shall happily give way later.

The Government's programme for the next year should have contained such measures. But it does not. There are some measures that we can welcome in the Queen's Speech, as I said earlier, but they are few in number and small in character.

If the Bill on asylum is designed to speed up the procedures for dealing with applicants and to weed out bogus applicants, we would welcome it. But that will not be its purpose. Instead, I believe that it will be a disgraceful attempt to play the race card by blacklisting certain countries' nationals and preventing them from even applying for asylum. I speak of countries such as Nigeria, from where there have been 9,000 applications for asylum since 1993, of which only four have been granted. I am happy to give way to the Prime Minister if he is prepared to answer the question. It would put many minds at rest.

The Leader of the Opposition quoted from an article—which I saw also—by Mr. Andrew Lansley, who was the head of research for the Conservative party at the last election. Interestingly, it is an *Observer* essay that is targeted at the methods used to destroy Labour in 1992. It is entitled "Accentuate the negative to win again"—and we have seen quite a lot of that. In the article, Mr. Lansley, who is now a Conservative party candidate, says:

> "Immigration, an issue which we raised successfully in 1992 and again in the 1994 Euro-elections campaign, played particularly well in the tabloids and has more potential to hurt".

They are the words of a Conservative candidate who was the Prime Minister's research director at the last election. I shall happily give way to the Prime Minister because I believe that he has a very good reputation on race issues. It is the Prime Minister, and not those on the Back Benches, who will run his party's policy on the matter while in government. Will he personally repudiate the sentiment expressed by Mr. Lansley and give an absolute undertaking that it will not recur during the next election campaign?

The Prime Minister: I indicated earlier to the right hon. Gentleman that I grew up in a multiracial area. *[Interruption.]* Will the right hon. Gentleman do me the courtesy of listening? I grew up in a multiracial area and, from time to time, I lived in a rented house with people of more than one race. While I lead it, the instincts of my party will not be to play race at any time, in any way, on any occasion or upon any provocation. That will not be our policy.

I believe passionately in the equal rights of everyone in this country—whether they be black, brown, yellow or white. That is my firm conviction and it has always been

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my firm conviction. That will be the Government's policy for as long as I sit on the Front Bench. I hope that that is clear.

Mr. Ashdown: The Prime Minister's emotions and his sincerity about the matter are not to be doubted; what must be doubted is his control of his party. The Prime Minister has not done what I asked him to do. Is he prepared to stand at the Dispatch Box and repudiate the words of his parliamentary candidate, Mr. Lansley? He is not prepared to do that, and therefore we must infer that at the next election Conservative candidates will be free to put forward that sort of policy.

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman is doing exactly what I said earlier, and it is contemptible. I have set out the Government's policy, which is the policy of the Conservative party. It is the policy of every hon. Member and of every parliamentary candidate. Is that clear enough for the right hon. Gentleman?

Mr. Ashdown: The Prime Minister is not prepared to repudiate Mr. Lansley's words: I think that the nation and the House will recognise and understand that deficiency.

Mr. Deva: Has the right hon. Gentleman such a short memory that he has forgotten what happened with the Liberal councillors in Tower Hamlets? Has he forgotten that he could not control those councillors?

Mr. Ashdown: The hon. Gentleman makes a fair point. The difference is that we took immediate action to solve the problem. The Liberal party is the only party that has conducted an independent inquiry, which included members of the public and people from the Commission for Racial Equality, to root out the problems.

Racism can be found in all of us and in all organisations. It is an endemic bacillus that grows in the Conservative party, as well as in other political parties. It is often found in our own backyards, where we want it least. The issue is not where racism occurs, but how one deals with it. We rooted out the problem and we dealt with it. I have asked the Prime Minister to repudiate a statement that I believe is thoroughly racist in character. No one doubts the Prime Minister's sincerity or his commitment to the issue, but everyone will have noticed his failure to repudiate that statement.

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Ashdown: No, I shall now make some progress. We would support a sensible Bill to strengthen the powers of the health service ombudsman, as proposed in the Queen's Speech. But we believe that other measures are wrong or a distraction, or both.

We will oppose the introduction of nursery vouchers. They will do nothing to expand provision and could wreck the provision that is already in place. We will oppose any attempt to force religious schools to opt out against their will. We support the Government in some of the foreign affairs matters identified in the speech, such as working to strengthen ties with members of the Commonwealth and pursuing a comprehensive test ban treaty. But that makes the Government's refusal to oppose French nuclear testing in the South Pacific completely incomprehensible and shameful.

We will support the Government in working for prosperity and stability in Hong Kong. China must realise that freedom and prosperity in Hong Kong are inextricably interwoven and that, if one is damaged, there is a risk of damaging the other. I visited China recently and I understand why it is suspicious of democracy. But I believe that the Chinese have little to fear. Hong Kongers will use their freedom and democracy carefully and responsibly. I hope that the Chinese Government understand the value that Hong Kong places on the new democratic institutions, and recognise the damage that could be done to the viability and success of the whole community if they are destroyed.

But the British Government must also put their house in order in relation to Hong Kong. The Government's refusal to recognise the position in which their policies have left the non-Chinese ethnic minority community in Hong Kong is, frankly, disgraceful. They are mostly people of Indian subcontinent origin and many have served, and some have fought, in the armed forces for Britain.

Under the agreement signed by the British Government, those people will not be entitled to Chinese passports after 1997 and the Government still refuse to allow them the right of abode in Britain. So that community—4,000 or so in number—will be left effectively stateless after 1997. That is disgraceful, even by the standards of dishonour which have characterised the Government's immigration policy. I hope that the Government will reconsider the issue, as I greatly fear that when Hong Kong is handed over to the Chinese we may see, on one side, Hong Kongers demonstrating about the Chinese crushing democracy and, on the other side, ethnic minority Indians demonstrating about the fact that the British Government have robbed them of their right to statehood.

This Queen's Speech opens the last full year before the next general election. It is clear that the Government have nothing else to offer, so it is time to spell out the alternatives. The time for mere "oppositionism" is past. The country knows how awful the Government are and the people want to know what we would do instead.

Warm words and weak promises are not enough: we need clear proposals and costed policies. That is what the Liberal Democrats, at least, are determined to provide. Last week we published an alternative Queen's Speech and next week we will publish a fully costed alternative Budget. At the core of our proposals are three priorities: to invest in people, to clean up the mess of our politics, and to build for the long term.

We have made clear what we would do specifically to achieve those aims. We would invest £2 billion in education now in order to pay for free, quality early-years education for all three and four-year-olds whose parents want it, for more books and equipment in our schools, for better post-16 education and for an entitlement for everyone to a period of relearning at some point in their adult lives. If necessary, we are prepared to ask people to put a penny on their income tax if that is what it takes to fund that essential investment for Britain. It is that important.

We would put in place a radical programme to clean up the mess in our politics by making quangos accountable, setting higher standards for public representatives and reforming the House of Commons. It

would include a Freedom of Information Act, fair voting and a Bill of Rights so that Britain's constitution is ready for the next century, not stuck in the last one.

We would build for the long term, creating a stable economic framework for business success, supporting innovation and small businesses and helping unemployed people to get back into jobs. We would invest in a modern integrated transport infrastructure for a modern Britain, shifting money from roads to rail to pay for it and re-establishing public control over Railtrack if privatisation goes ahead.

We would create the framework for a national interactive information network with universal access for all. The Liberal party has been calling for that for more than a decade.

We would put green action at the heart of Government policy, building the basis for a clean and environmentally sustainable economy and making an historic shift in taxation by cutting tax on what we want more of, such as jobs and wealth, and putting it on what we want less of, such as pollution and the consumption of finite raw materials.

We would ensure that Britain plays a full part in Europe. Instead of wasting our chances sitting on the sidelines, we want Britain's influence to be used to reform Europe's institutions to make them more democratic, decentralised, open and accountable. We understand that we cannot build the new Europe in the face of the apathy or antagonism of Europe's citizens, so we have no difficulty in saying that further integration—which we believe should take place—can happen only with the specific agreement of our people, given through the ballot box in a referendum.

So much else could have been done in the Queen's Speech. It could have included the abolition of the hated and failed Child Support Act 1995 and its replacement with a fair and effective court system, a housing Bill which really improved access to housing, a crime Bill to make headway in preventing crime in our local communities and a Bill to help small businesses that would penalise the late payment of debt. There could have been legislation to turn welfare payments into payments for work to help people back to jobs, a civil rights Bill for people with disabilities, and so much more. However, for those we shall have to wait for a general election. Until then, Britain will be forced to mark time because we have a Government who are out of time—a Government who, in the deadly words of a former Chancellor of the Exchequer, are in office but not in power.

The vote on the Nolan report showed the Government to be out of touch. The haggling over the divorce and domestic violence Bill showed them to be out of control and the Queen's Speech shows that they are out of ideas. The country cannot wait for them to be out of office.

4.52 pm

Mr. John Redwood (Wokingham): It is always reassuring to see the Liberal party sticking with the manifestos that it put to the country four or five times in the past with so little success. We learnt this morning that the leader of the Liberal party, the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown), has added poor skills at clairvoyance to poor skills in politics, because he condemned the Queen's Speech as a set of fag-end measures before he had the chance to read it. We can understand his problem: he can no longer win power in Westminster and he sees his waning popularity going to other parties, so he desperately tries to find ways to re-establish the Liberal party as a party of government.

The House will recall when the Liberals were preparing for government. It was a long time ago, and they do not seem to have got very far with the preparations. Now the Liberal Democrats are busily preparing for more tiers of government in the hope that eventually they will hit on one where they might have more influence or pick up some scraps from the table of power.

Mr. Ashdown: What about the right hon. Gentleman?

Mr. Redwood: The leader of the Liberal party asks about me. I enjoyed six years in government and I still have influence on government because I belong to a party that wins elections, has good ideas and can address the issues of the day, as the Liberal party is clearly unable to do.

I shall deal now with more serious issues than the Liberal party. The House should consider the great trouble that two people are taking to understand the mood of the nation. I am thinking of those terrible twins, the hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson) and Mr. Alastair Campbell—the Mr. Smooth and the Mr. Nasty of the Labour party. As they burn the midnight oil avidly reading the issue polls on which they are spending a fortune—probably from the trade union movement—we can picture their disconsolate faces when they see what the issue polls are saying. They ask the issue pollsters to tell them what the public want on law and order and the public want a firmer line. People want the Government to stand up for the victim rather than for the criminal. They favour the measures that my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary is about to bring before the House.

The terrible twins then ask the issue pollsters what the public want on taxation. Of course the public would like taxes to be lower, not higher. There is no market out there for the traditional socialism of taking more money from the public and spending it on the silly schemes and bad public policies that Labour always adopts in local government and used to adopt in central Government. They then ask the pollsters what the public want on defence and the public want a strong and sound defence. They want the nuclear deterrent to be retained and Britain to be properly defended, and another Labour shibboleth hits the dust.

The terrible twins then ask what the public would like on education and surprise, surprise, the public want what the leader of the Labour party has taken for himself. People would like real choice for their children to go to a good school—a grant-maintained school that puts standards first, second and third. Why is the leader of the Labour party never able to say why he sent his son to such a school? He would not want to say whether it is because the school is better run, spends more money and believes in academic discipline and proper progress. Of course it does. It can be done and we shall have more such schools if we follow policies of choice and differentiation in our education system.

On all the crucial issues, the terrible twins discover that, far from wanting socialism, the public want more conservatism, so they go to their leader and say, "We have

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a problem, Leader. The public want the Government to be more conservative, not less. The public do not want a socialist Administration. You must shift your rhetoric and change your soundbites. You must show that you are becoming the greatest Tory of them all."

The problem for the leader of the Labour party is that he is not leading the Conservative party, nor influencing it. He is leading the wrong party. Whereas I and my right hon. Friends love our party and want to see it succeed, the leader of the Labour party clearly does not love his and is trying to drag it kicking and screaming into the 20th century when the rest of us are moving into the 21st century. That is the Labour dilemma.

As a result of all that, a large number of gagging orders are sent out to every member of the shadow Cabinet. I believe that they are allowed to make the tea on a rota but it is an idea-free zone, a debate-free zone. They get more and more gagging orders from on high and the soundbite of the week, however appropriate it may be.

We in the Conservative party have work to do. There are serious issues that worry the nation, and that only a Conservative Government can and must tackle. People are worried about the security of their jobs, their homes and their families and it is those issues which the Queen's Speech, followed by the Budget, must tackle and be seen to be tackling in a way that meets the mood of the times.

I am delighted that the Government are bringing forward measures on broadcasting. If we deregulate broadcasting as thoroughly as we did telecommunications, there is a chance that we shall have another great British success story on our hands. It is the Government's job to deregulate; it is the industry's job to innovate and to create jobs. That can happen only with the right deregulation policies pursued by a Conservative Government.

The Government are treading warily into the difficult issues of divorce and the family. I was reassured when my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said that there would be a free vote on the conscience issues and I am delighted that he intends the Bill to strengthen the family and not to undermine it. We need to look the nation in the face and say that the Bill makes divorce more difficult and helps the children of those families under pressure and threat. It will put the children first, as they will suffer from too rapid a divorce or too acrimonious a split in the marriage that was meant to sustain them.

Mr. Michael J. Martin (Glasgow, Springburn): The right hon. Gentleman talks about families and the difficulties that they experience. Does he agree that the rigid formulae which the Child Support Agency applies cause great difficulties for families, and especially for children?

Mr. Redwood: The important principle that if someone is old enough to father a child, he is old enough to make a financial contribution to the welfare of that child, had to be sustained. It is important that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security keeps rules and methods in view to ensure that they are fair and reasonable. We must never lose sight of the fundamental principle that the main responsibility for bringing up children must fall on the parents. If they have money, they should apply that money to doing just that, not rely on neighbours—taxpayers—to pick up the bill.

I am delighted that, through the Queen's Speech, we shall tackle the issue of law and order. My right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary has made progress, for he has introduced several measures in past Sessions. Unfortunately, the balance is still not right. Too many criminals are still getting away undetected. Too many seem to be able to get through a trial unconvicted when the evidence against them seems to be quite strong. My right hon. and learned Friend must again consider the balance.

The nation will be relieved to learn that the scandal of too many illegal immigrants who abuse our generosity on asylum rules will be brought to an end. We do not object to paying benefits to those in need in our community and we do not mind helping those who face a genuine threat to their lives in the countries from which they are fleeing. At the same time, we do not want to see an avalanche of new people arriving in the country illicitly and illegally and abusing a system that was set up to help others and not them.

The Queen's Speech must be underwritten by a strong and good Budget. It is vital that we return £5 billion to the taxpayer. Current levels of taxation on home owners, small businesses and prudent pensioners are far too high. They are especially too high on families that are trying to cope with their children and their daily rounds. If we are to create the room to return £5 billion, we must cut public spending by £5 billion. That is to reduce not public spending, which is planned to increase by much more than £5 billion, but the rate of increase. We can do that while not damaging one teacher, nurse, doctor, soldier or policeman. Those important people provide vital public services that account for about one third of public spending, and can be put on one side in the public spending round.

There are, however, spending cuts that could be extremely popular with the public. For example, they would love to see the 7 million sq ft of empty office accommodation in the central Government estate sold or let, thus bringing in income or a receipt for the nation. They would love to see an end to the many hospital closures that often result in expensive reorganisation schemes that, far from saving money, cost money, and to see local hospitals supported by the Government. Through that approach, we could start to introduce some of the benefits and the good news that stem from the Government's health reforms, such as trusting patients and general practitioners, in a way that Labour never would, so that they can choose better treatment. If they are to have real choice, there must be enough different types of hospital from which people can choose. That means bringing an end to many closure programmes.

We can sell empty houses from the Government estate that are owned in the names of the health service and of the Ministry of Defence. We could start to reduce the Government overhead, as I believe that my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer wishes to do.

I would love to see the Labour health team put on the spot, but it will have a problem anyway. I believe that the members of the team are sponsored by Unison, which means that, under the new rules, they will be unable to speak in the House on health matters. Some of my right hon. and hon. Friends may say that that will make little difference. It might be a good idea, however, for the

shadow health team to tidy up its arrangements so that we can return to the good old debates to which we became accustomed.

We must ensure that our policies are geared to producing the jobs and the prosperity that the public are yearning to see. I hope that the £5 billion of public spending savings can be returned to mortgage holders, prudent pensioners, small businesses, and especially to families by increasing tax allowances.

I would like to see the Government marching boldly into the councils of Europe with a policy for jobs and prosperity for the whole continent. It is time for us to influence Europe for the better. Europe is not working as well as it should. One in five of the working population is out of work in Spain, one in seven in Ireland and one in eight in France. Those are unacceptably high levels of unemployment. Something is clearly going wrong on the continent with European policies. We should argue strongly for freer trade with eastern Europe. There should be freer trade across the Atlantic through the excellent idea of the North Atlantic and European Community free trade area, which we need to negotiate.

Let us deregulate business rather more and rid ourselves of the many directives that destroy jobs and do other damage, especially to small companies. We should say that the European Community should look again at the run-up to currency union, which is producing a dreadful fog of deflationary policy across the continent. Far from creating prosperity and bringing economies together, that is doing untold damage to the continent and its economies and causing them to slip further and further behind American and Asian competition.

Now is the time for Britain to make a positive contribution to the European debate. We should say in Madrid that we are committed to the success of Europe and to a Europe that works well. We must say that it is necessary to change the agenda dramatically if Europe is to become open for trade, business and success of the sort that we all wish to see.

The Leader of the Opposition has put forward a new means of negotiating in Europe. I hope that it is a method that he will ask the new Labour Chief Whip to adopt when discussing, behind the Chair, ways to expedite proceedings. The Labour Chief Whip would go to the Conservative Chief Whip to ask him about the Conservative view of business for the next week. The Conservative Chief Whip would tell him. The Labour Chief Whip would say, "That is excellent. I must not be isolated so I shall accept all of that." It would greatly improve our proceedings if we practised that negotiating style. I greatly recommend it to the Labour Chief Whip, but I am not so keen that my right hon. Friend the Conservative Chief Whip should adopt it. I think that we should adopt the continental view and get our retaliation in first. We should set out our agenda so that Labour can follow it, as it clearly would follow the European agenda from France and Germany, were the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) ever given the chance.

I commend the Gracious Speech and the remarks of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister to the House. The speech contains measures to tackle the issues arising from crime, housing and education in a way that only Conservatives can do, which is a way likely to produce success. We need more choice in the public services. There should be higher quality in those services. There should be stronger action on law and order. We need to reassure people about their jobs, homes and families. We need Conservative Budgets to complete the job. There is nothing on offer from the Opposition parties that would go to the heart of the matter.

5.7 pm

Mr. Roy Hughes (Newport, East): It is interesting to take up the remarks of the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood). Perhaps the House will understand why we in Wales were so pleased when he resigned his position as governor-general.

Much interest and attention has been focused on what the Prime Minister called the family Bill. I note that the reference to it is tucked away on the back page of the Queen's Speech. The relevant passage reads:

> "My Government will introduce legislation to reform the law governing divorce and other aspects of family law."

We are all aware that two in five marriages end in divorce; we have the highest divorce rate in Europe. As Members of Parliament, we see regularly the evil consequences. There is a multitude of single-parent families and there are wrangles with the Child Support Agency. Children are in care and many of them turn to crime. A recent survey undertaken by the directors of social services, which was published early last month, revealed that many local authorities have overspent on their child care budget. They are having to economise and consequently fewer young adults receive the support that they need. Children will have their needs recognised, but they will be largely unmet. The cause, say the directors, is the rise in the number of single mothers and of families where adults are unemployed.

I readily subscribe to the theory that children are best brought up in two-parent families. The alternative is there for all to see. That is the view of my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition: he believes in family values, and does not want the destabilising of society that we are witnessing.

In 1956, the Government of the day appointed a royal commission to advise on divorce. It concluded that making divorce easier would undermine marriage and threaten family life. In 1995, it is clear that the commission was absolutely right. I have no wish to question the sincerity of the Lord Chancellor in championing the Bill that is mentioned in the Gracious Speech; nevertheless, I am not at all sure that he has got it right. Certainly, the Government should encourage two-parent families—financially and in other ways.

This is the last full Session of the present Parliament. I am sure that any impartial observer would agree that we have had three and a half years of sleaze and mismanagement. Back in September 1992, on Black Wednesday, Britain was driven out of the exchange rate mechanism—an event that continues to hang like a dark cloud over all that the Government do. It is no coincidence that, ever since then, the Labour party has led in the opinion polls on the key issue of economic competence.

This Parliament also saw the Government's humiliating defeat over VAT on fuel. That was little more than a sordid attempt by the Government to penalise the poor, and it was vetoed by the House of Commons. Eventually, we witnessed the spectacle of the Prime Minister's

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resignation as leader of the Conservative party. Any impartial observer could only describe those events as a catalogue of ineptitude and failure.

By contrast, my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition has shown himself to be abreast of the problems facing Britain today. As he said this afternoon, and as he said on 25 April,

"I lead my party, he"—

that is, the Prime Minister—

"follows his."—[*Official Report*, 25 April 1995; Vol. 258, c. 656.]

What a contrast that shows between the two leaders.

The Gracious Speech should have contained proposals to start, at least, on the course of putting Britain back to work. It was, however, essentially irrelevant. It was, after all, the Conservative party, and the Government that it formed, that destroyed so much of our manufacturing industry almost immediately on coming to power in 1979. That destruction was a mistake of gigantic proportions: whole communities were decimated. In its wake has come social distress.

Wives are bravely going out to work in supermarkets, usually part time. I have nothing against the idea of women going out to work, but there has been a reversal of roles: the men are in the dole queues. According to the official statistics of 18 October, 11.7 per cent. of males in my constituency are unemployed; for females, the figure is 5.7 per cent. The national figures are 10.3 per cent. for males and 4.8 per cent. for females. Such developments can lead to domestic violence and family break-up.

As for young people, 650,000 aged 18 to 25 are out of work; 280,000 have been unemployed for more than six months. I was also struck by the fact that more than 60 per cent. of young black men in London are unemployed. Apart from creating social problems, that is waste on a colossal scale. What is more, only by returning people to work can we reduce the horrendous social security budget. An unemployed person can cost the taxpayer some £9,000 per annum.

I commend the plans of my right hon. Friend the shadow Chancellor, who a week or so ago presented concrete plans to tackle youth unemployment. The initiative would be paid for over the course of a Parliament by the proceeds of a proposed windfall tax on the excess profits of the privatised utilities. In particular, our young people must be brought back into society by being given a stake in that society.

Reading the Queen's Speech, I found my mind returning to 1979. In the intervening 16 years, we have experienced a huge polarisation of incomes and wealth—a vast increase in insecurity, and a fear of redundancy and the consequent loss of income that could eventually lead to the repossession of homes. There is toleration of circumstances in which most people are afraid to walk the streets at night because they may be mugged by the unemployed youths whose numbers have multiplied as a direct result of Government policy.

It seems that, in the past few years, the public have finally realised how they have been misled over the past 16. That is why the Government have collapsed in the opinion polls. When Lady Thatcher came to power, she promised to roll back the frontiers of the state. That certainly has not happened; indeed, there have been persistent attempts to claw more power to the centre. The Government have undermined the power of universities, of health boards and of others. Local authorities have been a particular target: they have been emasculated, and made into mere agents of central Government. Quangos have abounded, with elected representatives replaced by appointees—invariably of a Conservative persuasion. In Wales, where the Conservative party is thin on the ground, those patronage appointments have stuck out like a sore thumb.

It is obvious that the time has come for change. What could be more appropriate than the words of Oliver Cromwell to the Rump Parliament? They are appropriate, too, in that they were last used, to devastating effect, by the late Mr. Leopold Amery in the debate on 7 May 1940 that brought about the fall of the Chamberlain Government.

"You have sat too long here for any good you have been doing. Depart, I say, and let us have done with you. In the name of God, go!"

In less eloquent language, I would say that this Conservative Government have been rumbled. It is time for them to go—and, from the country's point of view, the sooner the better.

5.18 pm

Sir Patrick McNair-Wilson (New Forest): It is always a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Newport, East (Mr. Hughes). He and I have debated across the Floor of the House for the best part of 30 years, and—despite his youthful good looks—I still regard him as "old Labour". When I hear so much about "new Labour", I wonder what the Labour party's real views are. The hon. Gentleman's constituency contains one of the greatest steelworks in the country; he is also a long-term supporter of nationalisation. I wonder how he really feels now, with new Labour prepared to surrender all the policies on which it formed a Government when I first came here 31 years ago, and to do little more than try to copy the Tories in all that it does.

It was a first-class Gracious Speech. When I heard the leader of the Liberal Democrats listing all the Bills that he felt should have been included, I could only thank goodness that he is not the Prime Minister of this country. The problem with Parliament is that there has been far too much legislation, with the result that too much of it has been ill thought out and needs to be scrutinised a great deal more carefully. The mere passing of legislation cannot be a solution to our many problems.

The Gracious Speech does more than set out Bills for the next Session; it makes it clear that Britain's real priorities still remain the economy, Europe and education, a subject I want to talk about later. Those are the issues that really concern the ordinary people, not some mass of incomprehensible legislation.

It has been pointed out that this is the last full Session of this Parliament. For me, it is the last full Session of any Parliament because I shall be retiring at the next general election. When I hear the Opposition pleading for the occupation of the commanding heights of the economy and for a radical socialist programme, I feel that I am in strange territory debating the Gracious Speech with them tonight.

As is pointed out in the Gracious Speech, Britain's economy demands a great deal of our attention. It states:

"My Government will continue with firm financial policies designed to support economic growth and rising employment . . .

My Government will improve the performance of the economy, by encouraging enterprise and competitiveness and offering support for small businesses."

The Government's policies are now bearing fruit in a remarkable manner. Only yesterday, we were told of the large investment at what was the old Ravenscraig plant in Scotland. I came to the House 31 years ago from the Iron and Steel Federation. I was well aware that even the Conservative Government under Harold Macmillan had found the management of a nationalised steel industry almost impossible. There was that moment, subsequently called the judgment of Solomon, when some money was allocated for the Steel Company of Wales and some for Ravenscraig. As we all know, sadly that money was not enough and subsequently the Ravenscraig plant had to be closed.

Yesterday, we were informed of the creation of 3,000 real new jobs. It is far better for the people of that very lovely part of Scotland to have real jobs than to have phoney jobs fed to them by a Government, of whatever colour, in the belief that somehow throwing money at something nobody wants will make a success of it.

Another reason to be pleased with the economy is that the level of inward investment is growing all the time. Hardly a week passes without our hearing of companies from overseas investing in Britain. The reason why they invest here is simple—we have the sort of policies for the economy and for investment that attract them. We do not have the rules and regulations that would be part of the social chapter under a Labour Government. We do not try to cling to fixed exchange rates, in the way that is now ruining the French economy and causing strikes by French workers in almost every town in France, even as I speak. We have an economy free from regulation, which is attractive to overseas companies that want to invest. I am delighted that His Royal Highness Prince Charles is today in eastern Germany encouraging more investment to come to this country.

Britain's economic performance, our low inflation, our low unemployment compared with what it was—and I shall show in a moment how our policies are designed to improve employment—and the fact that we now have an economy recognised to be the one seriously growing economy in the European Union, are all factors of which we should be proud. I am delighted that in the Gracious Speech Her Majesty made it clear that the Government's policy is to continue to underpin those factors.

Of course, it is no good Britain, a small island in the North sea, thinking only of what happens here; we must see ourselves in a world context. We must be careful about our increased involvement in Europe. I have always regarded Europe as an opportunity to build a market for British goods—a real and genuine single market that would be of benefit to every citizen of Britain. Europe should not be some giant supranational grouping of nations where we would lose our sovereignty.

I still want to know what the Labour party's policy is on a single currency. The Leader of the Opposition was asked that question, but he skirted round it. I am convinced that, with the intergovernmental conference being held in Madrid in June next year, it is essential that we stand our ground. Only yesterday we were told about £2 billion of fraud and waste inside the Community. Earlier, my right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) referred to redundant offices in the centre of London, but it is the redundant offices in the centre of Brussels, with £15 million of furniture unaccounted for, with which we should be concerned.

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): I do not disagree with the hon. Gentleman on that point, but did not the report show that more than 80 per cent. of the money not accounted for was spent by national Governments? Therefore, there is a responsibility on national Governments, not just on European institutions, to ensure that the money is properly spent.

Sir Patrick McNair-Wilson: I agree with the hon. Gentleman. I am delighted that he made that point, because it is one that I intended to make. I listened with great interest to the speech of my right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham, in which he referred to reducing the Government's deficit. Rather than having more and more cuts in this country, we should look seriously at the contributions which, as the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes) rightly said, are made by national Governments to the European Union. Plenty of cutting and waste eradication could be done in Europe.

Mr. Foulkes: I shall try again to explain my point to the hon. Gentleman, who obviously misunderstood me. I was referring not to contributions by national Governments to the European Union, but to money spent by national Governments on behalf of Europe-wide programmes. There have been many problems with lack of accountability in those spending programmes within countries, including Britain. For example, a great deal of money is unaccounted for in the common agricultural policy within Britain. The British Government need to get a grip on that.

Sir Patrick McNair-Wilson: I well understand the hon. Gentleman's point and I, too, want those savings to be made. I have never understood why we make vast subsidy payments to the tobacco growers of Greece and Belgium while asking the taxpayers in Britain to finance no-smoking campaigns. A great deal of nonsense is attached to the way in which money is spent in Europe and I hope that stringent measures will be taken.

At the time of last year's Gracious Speech we heard, as we did yesterday, about fraud and waste and I entirely support what my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said about fighting it. However, we must do so in a way that shows the people of Britain that we are not just fighting it, but winning the battle. The information that we were given yesterday was extremely disturbing.

When the intergovernmental conference takes place next June, it will be in all our interests to recognise that, while we want a strong trading community and want the single market to be a success, there is a great deal of natural Euro-scepticism among the electorate of Britain, and not without reason. When we go to the conference, we must ensure that we do as Lady Thatcher did, and make our voice crystal clear.

My last comment is about education. I was especially delighted to hear a reference to grant-maintained schools in the Gracious Speech. In my constituency we probably

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have as many grant-maintained schools per acre of land as anywhere in Britain—probably more. Those schools are all working incredibly well and successfully, to the satisfaction of parents, teachers and administrators.

Indeed, the 100th grant-maintained school opened in New Milton, in my constituency, a year or so ago. The record of such schools' performance shows that they are doing a job superior to anything that was provided by the normal local education authority. So I find it incredible that the real resistance to grant-maintained status still comes from the county councils that are trying to protect their interests in connection with that responsibility. In my constituency, that comes from the Liberals who run Hampshire county council.

Only the other day, the headmaster of the grant-maintained school in New Milton that I mentioned had done some work to improve its performance and the availability of places there, only to have it condemned as naive by the representatives from county hall. I back that headmaster, Gordon Skirton, who has done a fantastic job and made his school one of the showplaces of that part of Hampshire.

I cannot understand why, when one of my hon. Friends asked the Leader of the Opposition about his policy on grant-maintained schools, he was so evasive. Here is something that works. If the Labour party is now taking leaves out of the Tory book and adopting things that work, surely here is one that the right hon. Gentleman could latch on to firmly. Indeed, he has done that for his own son, and I do not hold that fact against him. He has seen a success and has gone for it.

This may be the last full Session of this Parliament, but no one yet knows when the election will come. When it does, the people will have to make a judgment between a party with a proven track record and the Labour party, which is now trying to pretend that it is some new creature—new party, new Labour, new Britain.

Those of us who entered the House some years ago still see the same faces on the Opposition Benches. Admittedly, some of those people are very quiet, almost to the point where one feels that they have been silenced altogether. But those people are still here, and if the Labour party got into government, their voices would be heard again. New Labour, like all the other Labour party policies, would go into the dustbin.

The Gracious Speech is first class, and I thoroughly support it.

5.33 pm

Mr. Michael J. Martin (Glasgow, Springburn): My hon. Friend the Member for Newport, East (Mr. Hughes) spoke about quangos, and I am disappointed that the Government do not intend to do anything about them. The rights of Members of this House have been bypassed, because the Government have strengthened quangos and created more of them. Yet they said that they would not bring in more Government control.

I raise that point because of what happens when one asks a parliamentary question—about Government expenditure, say. For example, one of the biggest quangos in Scotland is Scottish Homes, and the taxpayer gives it a great deal of money to administer Scottish housing. I do not complain about Scottish Homes as a landlord, but I expect it to be accountable to the House, because of the millions of pounds that have been paid to it.

Yet when a parliamentary question is asked, the Minister merely says, "I refer the hon. Gentleman to the chairman of Scottish Homes, who will write to him in due course." That is always happening, with Scottish Homes and with every other quango, and it means that hon. Members can do nothing but wait for an answer from the chairman or chief executive of one of those bodies. That is not good enough.

Last week we debated the powers of the House, and shortly after the debate on Nolan, an official was appointed to look into hon. Members' affairs. Many Conservative Members complained that we were taking away the powers of the House, and of Parliament in general—the high court of the land. Yet every day Ministers can shy away from answering our parliamentary questions and send them off to the chief executive or chairman of a quango. We may have to wait weeks for an answer, although the rule of the House is that we can ask priority questions, and even get Ministers to come before the House and answer questions. I am disappointed that nothing is to be done about that.

I cringe when I hear hon. Members say that we shall tackle the drugs problem—even the Prime Minister said that. He and others harp on about what happened 16 years ago, but I cannot recall any young boy or girl dying of a drugs overdose in my community 16 years ago. Last year, in my community alone, seven children died of drugs overdoses. Probably other hon. Members can say the same, because that has been the experience in their communities, too.

It is frightening when decent mothers and fathers are scared to allow their children to go to a youth centre without accompanying them to make sure that they come safely back to their own homes, yet that is the sort of society in which we are living now. I do not lay all the blame for that at the Government's door, but we are entitled to more from the Prime Minister of the day than a statement that he will tackle the drugs problem. How will he do that?

Only a short time ago, the Prime Minister sacked Customs and Excise officers, and now we read in the papers every day about tobacco and beer by the lorryload coming across from France on the ferry. If beer and tobacco can get through, I am sure that many other items can do the same. We should have been strengthening, not weakening, Customs and Excise.

I am disappointed, too, that nothing is to be done about the problem of the Child Support Agency. Like many other people, I have brought up my children in difficult circumstances, and I am proud of the fact that I have a close bond with my wife and family, which I value. But I am realistic enough to know that families break up.

I am the first to say that if legislation had been introduced to chase up fathers and mothers who were not fulfilling their responsibilities, I should have supported it. But at the moment couples can have amicable arrangements for maintenance, drawn up with lawyers, and the father can be paying the maintenance that has been agreed, when in steps the Child Support Agency with a rigid formula, insisting that a certain amount of money has to be paid—or else. That rigid formula is causing terrible stress up and down the country. If a family breaks

up and the husband is left on his own, a decent man will allow his ex-wife to take away whatever bits and pieces of furniture—such as a washing machine or a bed—are necessary for the wife to set up a new home. But the CSA formula does not allow for the father to buy a bed, a carpet or a washing machine for his home. That is ridiculous.

The right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood), who has left the Chamber, said that the taxpayer must not pay for other people's children. But most of the people whom the CSA is chasing happen to be taxpayers, because the CSA gets hold of men and women who are paying tax through PAYE. The CSA is putting people under so much pressure that some are questioning whether it is worth their while keeping their job, and those people may decide to disappear or give up their job.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Andrew Mitchell): May I make two brief points to the hon. Gentleman? First, following a change to the rules earlier this year, we have now agreed that no absent parent can pay more than 30 per cent. of his net income—income after tax, national insurance and 50 per cent. of any pension contributions—in respect of maintenance. That gives protection that was previously lacking, and the hon. Gentleman is right that such protection should not be lacking in the future.

Secondly, the hon. Gentleman referred to cases where a maintenance agreement has been reached between a mother and father and in which the taxpayer is not involved. In the terms described by the hon. Gentleman, the CSA would not be involved in those cases. Where the taxpayer is involved, it is right and proper that the CSA should protect the interests of the taxpayer, the mother and the father. I hope that he will bear those two points in mind.

Mr. Martin: Thirty per cent. of the take-home pay of someone who is on a low income—or even a reasonable income of, say, £200 a week after tax—is an awful lot of money. The Minister should speak to some of his Conservative colleagues if he does not want to take my word for it. A decent man or woman who wants to talk to a CSA official is not allowed to do so.

Sir David Madel (South-West Bedfordshire) *indicated assent.*

Mr. Martin: I see the hon. Gentleman nodding in agreement. The CSA department for my area is in Falkirk, and I rang it yesterday on behalf of a constituent. The line was engaged several times. I, a Member of Parliament, was trying to get through to Falkirk. What must it be like for a man trying to earn a living in a factory? Does he have to ask his boss whether he can use the telephone? If he does not get through, does he have to ask his boss again in half an hour? The boss might ask him the reason, and he will have to reply that he is trying to call the Child Support Agency because he is having difficulties. What an undignified situation for any worker.

Mr. Mitchell: I visited the Falkirk department of the CSA recently, and there is a dedicated telephone line for Members of Parliament and their assistants to get through to the department. If the hon. Gentleman was unable to get through yesterday, he should give me the details and I shall look into the matter. I can tell him that most of his colleagues in the House who have sought to get through directly to the CSA have been successful. The hon. Gentleman may be aware that central call facilities have now been installed in all six CSA centres around the country, and those facilities have made a radical difference to the handling of these matters.

Mr. Martin: The Minister is missing the point. What is the use of me ringing a direct line? I wanted to know what my constituents were putting up with, so I used the number that they must call. Field Marshal Montgomery did not have fancy meals because he wanted to know what his troops were eating, and one must find out what is going on. There is no point in me using a fancy line and then telling my constituents that I can get through. Of course I can get through. I am concerned about a chap who works for the parks department of Glasgow district council, for example, and who wants to get through but cannot because the line is engaged.

I am not here to legislate or argue for rascals who are not looking after their children. I am talking about decent men and women who are going through the trauma of a break-up, but who want to keep their relationships with their children. They do not want to let their children think that they are letting the family down, even if the parents are living in different homes. But a person who calls the CSA to ask for the formula to be explained to him will not be dealt with by an official of the CSA. He will be told that the CSA will arrange for someone in the local social security office to give him an interview.

The Government have told us about the citizens charter, and they want all the utilities to provide good services. But the Government would expect better from a utility than it sending people to a third party because it does not do interviews. There is a very serious problem. "The Cook Report" television programme last night stated that people were contemplating suicide because of their difficulties. I hope and pray that that is not the case.

Every hon. Member who is dealing with such cases would agree that the men and women who are working hard to try to keep their head above water and trying to maintain their relationship with their children have been hit the hardest. One of my constituents rightly wanted to make sure that his child stayed with him at the weekends. He and his ex-wife agreed that, in our modern society, the child needed a bed of his own. The man had to go out to buy a bed for his child, but the CSA would not take that into consideration in its formula.

The CSA does not take all travelling costs into consideration, and the Minister will agree that consideration is given only to the cost of substantial journeys to and from work. I think that I am speaking for many hon. Members when I say that it is time for a review of the system, and it is time for those who have responsibility for the matter to look at it in a humane fashion. They must remember that people are not out to run away from their children, and that they want to give their children the best in difficult circumstances. They should be given every opportunity to do so.

I was worried by the Government's statement before the recess about the privatisation of HMSO. There is no mention of it in the Gracious Speech. Conservative Members might ask why we should complain about that, when we always complain about privatisation. But I see some method in the Government's madness. I think that the Government intend to reduce HMSO to a rump, a small unit, so that they do not have to introduce legislation

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in order to privatise it. That in turn means that the proposal will not be scrutinised by the House on Second Reading or in Committee, or by the other place.

The Government's proposals will have a profound effect on the important services of the House. Because of the dedicated work of *Hansard*, the printers and HMSO, all speeches are available for hon. Members in the Vote Office the following morning. If the Government reduce that service to a rump, the House, hon. Members and their support staff could lose an important service. The House does not have storage facilities for the publications that we need for our Standing Committees and Select Committees and for *Hansard*. Hon. Members should be aware that that is what the Government intend, and it will cause us hardship.

It is rightly said that the public, for whom we have a Public Gallery, and the media are entitled to scrutinise what we do and say. If we lose the excellent service that we have in *Hansard*, the facilities and the open government that we often boast about could be endangered.

How can an organisation that employs 2,800 people be reduced to 20 without damaging the services that we have in the House? That will not benefit the House or the taxpayer. If any private publishing company seeks to take over HMSO, it will zero in on the lucrative areas and dispense with the areas that provide a service to the British people.

Hon. Members have made representations to the Select Committee on Administration, of which I am the Chairman—I speak here in a private capacity—that colleges, schools and universities should be entitled to cheap editions of *Hansard*. That has been agreed by the House. Can there be a guarantee that that service will continue after privatisation? I put it to the House that that will not be the case.

In Canada, the privatisation of the publishing facilities of the House of Commons has turned into an absolute disaster, so much so that the Canadian House of Commons is seeking to get back that facility. It should be borne in mind that if the Government are allowed to go ahead, any private publisher will probably seek a five-year contract. If, after a year, we discover that hon. Members are not getting the service that they once had, we shall have to buy out that contract, and that will not be a saving to the House or to the taxpayer. HMSO has outlets not only in London, but in Glasgow, Belfast and Manchester, where people can buy a Select Committee report soon after its proceedings are concluded. We risk losing such services.

That matter is the responsibility of the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, who will be appearing before the Select Committee next week. Perhaps the Minister could tell him that he will not have an easy time. Will he convey it to the right hon. Gentleman that the decent thing to do would be to refrain from introducing such a far-reaching proposal? If that was not possible, the second option would be for the Minister concerned to introduce legislation, so that every hon. Member had the opportunity to say his or her piece.

5.55 pm

Sir Alan Haselhurst (Saffron Walden): I add my congratulations to my right hon. Friend the Member for Witney (Mr. Hurd) and to my hon. Friend the Member for City of Chester (Mr. Brandreth) on the excellent way in which they moved and seconded the Loyal Address. My right hon. Friend is leaving the House at the end of this Parliament, but I hope that that will not be his last contribution, as he has been a considerable servant of the House and the nation. I suspect that in the case of my hon. Friend the Member for City of Chester it is unlikely that another such witty speech will be delivered in the course of the debate on the Loyal Address—certainly not by me, even if my voice allows me to complete my remarks.

The Leader of the Opposition had some nerve in characterising the Queen's Speech as a lurch to the right when he has been in perpetual motion almost since he became leader of the Labour party. For the leader of the Labour party to win a headline yesterday, after his speech to the CBI, that he will not be taxing the rich must have come as faint surprise to the members of the party that he leads. When the music stops, one wonders what policies will be put forward by the Labour party under the present leadership.

We did not hear today what proposals would be made if the Labour party was managing our affairs in the next 12 months. It was all very well making points about the supposed inadequacy of the measures placed before the House, but there was not the glimmer of a suggestion of what a Labour Government might have done. Platitude after platitude tumbled from the mouth of the Leader of the Opposition, which really is not good enough if we are to have the constructive opposition that he claims to offer.

I do not see a lurch to the right in the legislative programme. Each measure must be judged on its own merits. In broad intent, the measures go very much with the grain of public opinion. What will ultimately matter is the detail—whether we get the balance of equity right in some of the more sensitive areas.

I hope that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and others on the Treasury Bench will pay serious attention to the way in which we scrutinise legislation—not in response to the Leader of the Opposition, whose big issue today was whether we should have a Select Committee to consider the one measure on immigration, but with regard to whether we should try to improve our scrutiny as a whole by using the Select Committee procedure more in conjunction with the Standing Committee procedure in ways that we have tried in the past.

We need to be concerned about the quality of the legislation that we pass. The hon. Member for Glasgow, Springburn (Mr. Martin) spent much time on the Child Support Agency, which is a classic example of how the House failed to understand some of the consequences of the original legislation. It is no criticism of the hon. Member for Springburn to say that his speech was not one that he or anyone else made during the passage of the original legislation. That is a commentary on whether our processes are entirely adequate.

On some of the difficult issues coming up in this Session, a certain amount of investigative work by the House, as opposed to the combative approach, might be helpful.

Mr. Michael J. Martin: I agree that, with hindsight, we will all see things differently. I am saying that things

have gone so badly wrong that the House must act. If we have made a mistake in legislation, we should move quickly to change it.

Sir Alan Haselhurst: I was not intending to debate the substance with the hon. Gentleman, but was merely making a glancing reference, to make a wider procedural point, but I accept what he says.

I am glad that the divorce Bill has been included in the legislative programme as it goes to the heart of what is wrong with modern society. Most of us would profess to believe that the family is a very important building block in the stability of society. It is deeply worrying that so many marriages are breaking down. One meets social workers, teachers and others who say that some of the difficulties that they have encountered can be traced to a disturbed and fractious home life. If we can place greater emphasis on reconciliation—marriage guidance, to use an old-fashioned term—it will be helpful.

Those who have reservations about whether we might appear to be making divorce easier by removing the fault element must face the fact that, if we are not careful, we will simply deter people from getting married, in which case we shall not have the problem of whether it is easy or otherwise to get divorced. People will simply live together, as increasing numbers are doing. We have to consider this question carefully.

Many years ago, I was much influenced by A.P. Herbert's book "Holy Deadlock". As the House will remember, he had a great impact on legislation to change the old divorce laws. Surely we cannot be thinking of moving back to the point where people have deliberately to construct a sin or fault to obtain a divorce. That cannot make sense. I hope that we can have a much more constructive approach and that the divorce Bill may be the path to it. Of course, there are no easy answers, but it is absolutely right that we should give the subject an airing in this Session.

The physical structure of a home, as opposed to what goes on in it, is another vital component of family stability. The measure in the Queen's Speech to give housing association tenants a right to buy has already given rise to controversy. I must express my appreciation to Ministers for excluding villages with a population of under 3,000. They have thereby excluded every village in my constituency. Clearly, there is a need to protect the structure of village life. If landowners can be persuaded to make gifts of land, or make it available at low cost, so that low-cost housing for part ownership or rent is available, we do not want to lose that opportunity. It is not likely that such housing could easily be replaced within the village envelope—not without some cost to the green belt. That compromise is sensible. If housing associations are to be the main providers of social housing, it is not right in principle that there should be a blanket prohibition on the right of the occupants of such houses to buy at some point. Within our larger communities, there should be scope for replacement houses to be built when some are sold to present tenants.

As the break-up of marriage has increased at such a pace, we have so many more families and part families to accommodate, which is deeply worrying. The demand for housing continually outstrips our ability to supply. It is all very well for us to point out that there might be enough physical accommodation. Nevertheless, it seems extremely difficult to get the numbers to fit what is available. It seems that, in certain cases, there is a need for more new-build.

I hope that the Government might consider using the receipts from council house sales. What the Labour party has to say on the subject has to be complete nonsense. It wants to release all the receipts—about £4 billion. The hon. Member for Ashfield (Mr. Hoon) is shaking his head. We are never quite clear from day to day what Labour Members think. A blanket release would have a tremendous impact on public expenditure, which would have to be compensated for by savings elsewhere.

Surely it must be possible to trickle more money from receipts into certain areas of housing need through the housing association movement and thus ease some of the difficulties. That might have a beneficial effect on the construction industry. Stable families also need a stable home environment and we have got some way to go in that regard.

After the stability of the home and the relationship within it, the third component is the quality of education that children receive, particularly in the initial years. I welcome the extension of pre-school learning. That has to be right. However, I hope that it will not be done at the expense of reception classes in infant schools. This is a serious dilemma and it is not an issue for party political point scoring. We must batten down the numbers in some reception classes before we launch into more pre-school provision. Overcrowded infant classes will to some extent negate the good foundation that pre-school learning will provide.

I confess to some neutrality on the use of vouchers. However, why not experiment with that method? Let us find out where it takes us and whether it is valid and welcomed by parents. It will help if we try to protect the pre-school playgroup movement, rather than let it be extinguished because of a takeover by universal nursery provision. Some children are more suited to, and some parents prefer, a different environment. If the voucher system helps us to be neutral between those two types of provision, it will be a wholly good thing.

I am pleased that there is provision to give grant-maintained schools borrowing powers. I very much hope that the Government will allow the grant-maintained school system to prosper, because it deserves to prosper on its merits. I have not met anyone involved with grant-maintained schools who does not remain wholly enthusiastic about them or who would wish to put the clock back, so the grant-maintained movement will spread of its own accord. If the Labour party wants to interfere with it, that is its affair, but tens of thousands of people see the system's benefits and we should allow the movement to develop because it is popular rather than rush to tell people that they have to choose it because we think that it is better.

On a very different theme, I suspect that one minor measure will appear during this legislative year from among the other measures that will be placed before us. It involves an important issue in my constituency—Stansted airport. In response to the airport authority's request, there will be a proposal to increase the number of passenger air transport movements. No doubt we will have a chance to debate the issue in detail later, but I hope that the Government will bear in mind the sentiments that they expressed on the recent publication of the rural White

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Paper when they determine their response to the BAA's request for a higher limit. If we are to retain proper management of the development of an international airport in the countryside, caution should be much in our minds.

Finally, if there is an issue missing from the Queen's Speech that I should have liked to see in it, it is further attention to land compensation. I relate that to what I have just said about Stansted airport. I find it absurd that, years after the new terminal opened, there are still people waiting for compensation for the loss of value of their homes.

The other day—as I believe he did; I hope that I have not got him wrong—Sir John Egan, wearing his tourist authority hat, complained about the long-drawn-out processes involved in planning inquiries. No wonder people want to draw inquiries out and protest against development: they know that on top of all else, they will have to wait an age to get the compensation that will be their due if the development takes place. We really should be more thoughtful about people's needs in that respect.

The programme before us today on the whole faces up to some difficult and sensitive problems that need attention. I hope that we will get the details right. Like my hon. Friends, I shall be watching to see how their new-found responsibility and respectable credentials will guide Opposition Members in their approach to the Bills before them and whether they will give them their blessing in the course of the year. I think that they are relevant and necessary. They will have my broad support.

6.11 pm

Mr. Bruce Grocott (The Wrekin): I shall start with a point that will receive wide support. Members of Parliament are often described as unusual in one respect or another. We are especially unusual this evening in that it is 6.11 pm and we are discussing the Queen's Speech. We may well be the only people in Britain discussing it.

I confidently say that, in the pubs and clubs of the United Kingdom this evening, there will no hushed silence if someone suggests discussing the exciting proposals that the Government have put before us for the coming year. I am pretty confident that the viewing figures for "Coronation Street" will stand up well today compared with last Wednesday. Television sets will not be switched off as people discuss what the Government have in store for us.

In common with the vast majority of the people, I have only one interest in this Queen's Speech: that it should never come to fruition—not because, as I hope will be the case, one or two measures will be voted down but because I hope that the year in Parliament will not be completed as a result of the people at long last having the chance to make a judgment in a general election, and the sooner, the better.

No party in modern history, certainly since the war—in fact, no party this century—has had quite the opportunity that the Tory party and the Government have had over 16 long years of experimenting with the economy and people of this country. What a dismal Queen's Speech comes at the end of those 16 years. This should be a time of unbridled optimism because no Government have had the massive economic advantages that this Government have had.

It is not being wise after the event to speak of the massive income from North sea oil revenues. Anyone who was in the House in 1979, as I and other hon. Members were—and as you were, Mr. Deputy Speaker—knows that we all knew then that whichever party won the 1979 general election would, in all probability, be able to remain in power throughout the 1980s because of the inexorable increase in revenues from the North sea. We knew that even a Government of unique economic incompetence such as we have had would be able to shore themselves up with those revenues. If we add to that the privatisation proceeds from the disgraceful sale of our national assets—a dubious way of getting the money—which now total £84 billion, we may think what an economic advantage that should have been to the Government.

It is said that one should never say "if" in politics—and probably one should never say it in life—but I would not be human if I did not think, "If only the Labour Government of the 1970s had had the oil revenues that the Government had in the 1980s. If only that money had been available to invest in our manufacturing industry, schools, the infrastructure that our railways need and in our hospitals."

I will make one constituency point. I know that this is a general debate and I shall observe the rules, but if I could mention one item of expenditure, I would think of the overwhelming support at the Princess Royal hospital in my constituency for a consultant maternity unit. Unarguably, the population would sustain such a unit but, time and again, despite overwhelming public pressure, that request has been turned down. My word, the money could have been better spent than it has been by the Government.

Mr. Michael Spicer (South Worcestershire): Anyone listening to the hon. Gentleman would think that public expenditure had gone down during that period; actually, it has been going up, especially on health.

Mr. Grocott: The hon. Gentleman was here, as I was, in 1979. That is precisely my point. The Government have had a massive opportunity to make investments but have squandered it on paying for unemployment. That is where the huge increase in public expenditure has come from. The hon. Gentleman knows that. That is why we cannot have a sensible debate across the Floor. The matter will have to be resolved in a general election and the sooner, the better.

Anyone who discussed what needs to be done in our country today without starting from the point of acknowledging the failure of the past 16 years could not have a sensible debate. There is no recognition of that failure from the Government or in what the Prime Minister said. If I had to encapsulate the failure in two or three words, I would say that the legacy of the Government is that people, after all those oil-rich years, feel insecure and uncertain; they have forebodings about the future. We have little confidence in the future for our children. The trendy way to describe that is as the lack of a feel-good factor. That is what it all adds up to—insecurity at work and concern about crime and a range of other matters.

I want to concentrate on what is for me the most important factor: insecurity at work. There is a lack of jobs and a lack of security in jobs for those people who have them. It will be painful to some hon. Members who were around at the time, but I make no apology for casting my mind back—as perhaps the Prime Minister should from time to time—to the 1960s and the contrast between today and then, when he and I were roughly the same age and starting to make our way in the world. We have 1960s nostalgia days now. Even Lord Lawson, I am told, goes to them sometimes and no wonder he is nostalgic about those days—nostalgic for the days when there were real opportunities, real apprenticeships and real jobs for people leaving school.

Tory Members often wonder why there is no discipline in our schools. One of the key reasons is that there used to be a sort of contract with children at school: if they worked hard, did their best and did well, at the end of a proper period of schooling there would be an apprenticeship or job for them. When that contract with our young people broke down, the series of social disasters—and I do not use that world lightly—that we have had was the almost inevitable consequence. The contract has been broken. Conservative Members seem to fail to understand it.

The figures on jobs are terrifying. I make no apology for mentioning the figures for my region. In September 1979, about the time that the last Labour Government left office, there were 99,200 claimants for unemployment benefit in the west midlands—3.9 per cent. of the work force. In September 1995, the figure was 203,700—8.1 per cent. of the work force.

The west midlands, the traditional heartland of manufacturing—engineering, industry and car-making—escaped the worst of the recession even in the 1930s. The number of jobs in manufacturing industry in the west midlands in 1979 was 985,000; the figure is now 507,000. According to a recent survey, 10 million people—40 per cent. of the work force—have had first-hand experience of unemployment in the past five years. Apprenticeships were the golden opportunity for school leavers in the 1960s—in which I grew up—and the 1970s. In 1979, there were 346,000 apprenticeships nationwide; in 1995, there were 216,000.

Mr. David Nicholson: I am afraid that I shall put to the hon. Gentleman a point that will be put to Labour Members again and again between now and the general election. If the hon. Gentleman's criticisms are so serious, why do Spain, which has been socialist for more than a decade, and France, which was socialist until a short while ago, have far worse levels of unemployment than this country?

Mr. Grocott: It would be far more profitable if, instead of making international comparisons, with all the problems associated with them, the hon. Gentleman made national comparisons. He should just make the comparison between Britain now and Britain under the previous Labour Government.

Conservative Members get things so horribly wrong. The issue is not just the level of unemployment, horrendous though that is, but the problems that people in jobs experience—the quality of jobs and the lack of job security. There has been a massive growth in part-time and temporary work. An estimated 1.3 million people who work part time or on a temporary basis simply do not want to work on that basis. We all have horrendous stories from our constituencies. I know of youngsters who have been employed in the same place for up to two years on the basis of a succession of weekly contracts, for heaven's sake. What basis is that for building an economy or for building a community in which people can feel confident about themselves and others?

Conservative Members totally fail to understand the problem of low wages. There are 1 million people earning less than £2.50 an hour and there are 300,000 people who earn less than £1.50 an hour.

I make all the allowances for opinion polls that others make. However, the following figures are so overwhelming that we should take note of them. I quote from the Gallup political and economic index poll of December 1994. The public at large were asked a simple question:

"From what you know, are most of the new jobs now being created skilled jobs requiring education and training, or are they low level, unskilled jobs requiring little or no training?"

The "don't knows", whom one eliminates as one always does, amounted to 19 per cent. Some 16 per cent. thought that the new jobs were skilled jobs which offered hope. Some 65 per cent. thought that the jobs were low-skill, low-level jobs. That is why there is no feel-good factor around.

In the same poll, a comparable question was asked:

"there is a lot of talk at the moment about economic insecurity—the feeling that people don't know whether their jobs, earnings or homes, are safe or not. From your own personal experience, do you think a lot of people are feeling economically insecure or not?"

There were 2 per cent. "don't knows", 4 per cent. who said no and 93 per cent. who said that a lot of people were feeling insecure. Even allowing for sampling error, the figure was similar to the poll in an Iraqi general election. The figure is overwhelming and not surprising.

I give another revealing answer. The question was asked:

"Or again, from what you know, are most of the new jobs now being created secure jobs with long term prospects or are they short term and temporary jobs without any real prospects?"

There were 11 per cent. "don't knows", 3 per cent. said that the jobs were secure and long term and 86 per cent. said that they were short term and temporary. Yet people wonder why there is no feel-good factor.

I worked in independent television before I came back to the House. The number of jobs there has gone down from 16,000 to 8,000 in the eight years since I left the industry. The Government tell me, "But lots of small, independent production companies are mushrooming and burgeoning all over the place." Those jobs are without training and without security, and no one can sensibly build a future on them. That is the Government's economic legacy to the next Labour Government.

The Government's employment policies have profound economic effects. Unbelievably, the Government have managed to make us a deficit country in manufactured trade. Who could have believed that Britain, the workshop of the world, would now be in deficit in manufactured trade? The figures are familiar and I will not repeat them.

Job insecurity and the waste of unemployment also have social effects. Does anyone, apart from a few Conservative Members, really suggest that economic

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insecurity and unemployment have nothing to do with the fact that crime has doubled under this Government? Conservative Members who believe that betray how totally out of touch they are with the vast majority of the people whom they and we represent.

Another consequence is homelessness—we all know the figures. Yet another consequence was reported the other morning in the *British Medical Journal*. I freely admit that I am not in the habit of reading that magazine, although it is a worthy specialist publication. It described the health of civil servants who were in secure jobs as opposed to the health of those whose jobs were threatened by reorganisation or privatisation. Is it any surprise to anyone in the world, apart from Conservative Members, that when the survey was carried out, the ill health reported by those in insecure jobs was substantially greater than that reported by those in secure jobs? That is common sense—we keep hearing about common sense—and we have to keep repeating it.

Mr. Foulkes: Did the survey include Conservative Members of Parliament with majorities of less than 10,000?

Mr. Grocott: I am sure that the health consequences would be the same. My hon. Friend refers to the job security of Members of Parliament. When I was first elected, being a Member of Parliament was rated as a peculiarly insecure job because one could usually be guaranteed only four or four and a half years. A job with four years' security is now a copper-bottomed, Bank of England job. Most of our constituents would envy such a job.

What do all the figures tell us about the future? I give one final example from the opinion poll, which Conservative Members really should take seriously. People were asked:

"Do you think that children today have a better future in front of them than you had when you were a child, a worse future, or about the same?"

The answer to that question is the real commentary on any Government. As everyone knows, that is the one question that almost always gets a positive reply. However rough things are, most people think that the next generation will have things just a little bit better. In this opinion poll, 15 per cent. thought that the future would be about the same for their children. Some 18 per cent. thought that the future for their children would be better. Some 63 per cent. thought that life for their children would be worse.

There we are. After 16 years of this Government's economic experimentation and after 16 oil-rich years, two thirds of people in this country are quite convinced that the future for their children will be worse than it was for them. That is a record of which the Government should be thoroughly ashamed. The sooner that the people have the chance to sling them out at a general election, the better.

6.28 pm

Sir David Knox (Staffordshire, Moorlands): The hon. Member for The Wrekin (Mr. Grocott) was my neighbour when he represented Lichfield and Tamworth between 1974 and 1979. It did not prove a terribly permanent base for him, and he wisely moved elsewhere. He did not make quite such controversial speeches when he was in Staffordshire. I can only assume that there is something about the air in Shropshire that has changed his views.

The hon. Gentleman exaggerated the benefits from North sea oil. He forgot the disadvantage, which was the effect on the exchange rate and on the level of unemployment, as we saw in the early 1980s. It is as well to remember that.

The hon. Gentleman seemed to take 1979 as the turning point for unemployment, but perhaps I can remind him that it was not that year but 1974 which represented the turning point. At the time of the 1974 general election, the unemployment rate was about 500,000. I share the hon. Gentleman's concern about unemployment, and he must accept that that rate started to increase under the last Labour Government—at one time, it reached 1.5 million people. The numbers declined a little after that, but then rose again. The problem of unemployment is not as simple as the hon. Gentleman has suggested.

If a Labour Government would have as much effect as the hon. Gentleman has suggested, however, I am rather puzzled about why the Opposition have adopted so many of the economic policies pursued by the Government. If the Government's economic policies are so bad, surely a Labour Government should opt for policies that are totally distinctive from them.

None the less, I do not in any way underestimate the problems caused by unemployment, which are real, and socially divisive. It is bad for people to be out of work, and particularly bad for young people. To that extent, I share the hon. Gentleman's views about the effects of unemployment.

The hon. Member for Glasgow, Springburn (Mr. Martin) spoke about the Child Support Agency. I had a great deal of sympathy with his comments about the difficulties that people encounter when trying to contact the agency. He mentioned people's difficulties when trying to contact it by telephone, but what about the problems encountered by those trying to contact it by letter? I have found that in many cases the CSA does not reply to letters.

Oh yes, the CSA replies to Members of Parliament's letters, but that is not the point. People should not have to go to their Member of Parliament to get their problems resolved. It is disgraceful to recall the number of constituents who come to us and say that they have written to the CSA up to five times, and not had a scrape of a pen back. I hope that Ministers will take that matter seriously, because, although the principles of the CSA are undoubtedly correct, I am afraid that its practice has not been. Although it has undoubtedly improved since its inception, it still leaves a great deal to be desired.

In the past, I have been extremely critical of the heavy legislative programme before the House, so it would be ungracious of me not to record my appreciation of the fact that the legislative programme in the Session that was prorogued last week was significantly lighter than that of previous years. I am also pleased to note that the legislative programme outlined in the Gracious Speech appears to be less onerous than in most of the years that I have been a Member of the House.

Before I get too carried away, however, I notice that, as usual, the ominous words

"Other measures . . . will be laid before you."

appear in the Gracious Speech. I hope that there will be few, if any, of those other measures.

It is important for those of us in the House to remember that, in the real world outside, the public are increasingly fed up with the mass of legislation that descends on them year after year. All too often, understanding and implementing that legislation diverts them from their real work of creating wealth and providing services.

That is particularly true when the legislation has been badly drafted or not properly thought out, as has far too often been the case. I therefore hope that the comparatively light legislative programme facing us will mean that those outside the House will be able to get on with the practical tasks of making industry and commerce more efficient and more competitive, and making the service sector, in particular the public service sector, more effective.

That does not mean, of course, that I think that there should be no legislation. I welcome many of the measures included in the Gracious Speech. In particular, I am pleased about the proposed housing Bill, which will, I understand, increase the opportunities for housing association tenants to exercise the right to buy and will include measures to help the homeless. We will, of course, have to wait for the details of the Bill, but no one can be happy about the current arrangements for dealing with homelessness. I hope that the Bill will lead to an improvement in the current situation.

I also welcome the Bill on nursery education, because it will enable the Government to fulfil their promise to provide nursery education for all four-year-olds whose parents wish it. That is a major step forward in improving the standard of education in this country, and it will be widely welcomed by parents.

I was pleased to see the positive remarks about the European Union in the Gracious Speech. In the past 40 years, this country has all too frequently adopted a very reluctant attitude towards European unity. As a result, British interests have often been greatly damaged.

We are told that, at the moment, enthusiasm for the European Union has declined in the other member countries of the union. That may well be true, but, if it is, I believe that the reason has been the severe economic recession experienced throughout that union. It is normal for the Governments of countries in the depth of an economic recession to be unpopular, and obviously the European Union shares that unpopularity. As the countries within the union recover from recession, however, I have no doubt that the popularity of national Governments, and also that of the European Union, will recover, and that enthusiasm for further development within that union will increase once again.

When that happens, there is a danger that Britain will be left behind. That would not be in our best interests. This country has been bad at assessing intentions in Europe in the post-war era. At the Messina conference about the establishment of the European Economic Community in 1955, we sent only a Board of Trade official, the unfortunate Mr. Bretherton, and only as an observer. When he left, he said:

"I leave Messina happy, because even if you continue meeting, you will not agree; even if you agree, nothing will result; and even if something results, it will be a disaster."

That must rank as one of the greatest political misjudgments of the post-war era, and it cost this country dearly.

A short time after the Messina conference, the scale of that misjudgment became apparent to this country. We had to apply to join a community that had been set up without any British input. Eventually, in 1973, to obtain admission, we had to accept rules that would have been different and more to our suiting if we had joined at the beginning. Britain was the loser.

Alas, the attitude of Mr. Bretherton has been the attitude of this country for too many of the past 40 years. At present, that seems to be the attitude that we are taking towards the single currency. The current British view is that there is little chance of a single currency being introduced in the European Union, and that we can be semi-detached about it. Some people even suggest that the Government should say that Britain will not join a single currency during the next Parliament. Others even go as far as to say that we should never join it.

I am afraid that that could well be the next major misjudgment about the European Union by this country, as I believe that it is probable that, within the next few years, the European Union, or at least a core group of countries within it, will move towards a single currency.

Fortunately, my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer is participating in the discussions about a single currency, and, as long as he continues to do so, British interests will be represented. There will be a British input in the arrangements that are eventually adopted. If the Government were to state, however, that under no circumstances would they join a single currency in the next Parliament, or that they would never join it, we might be asked to leave those discussions—or, if we stayed, our influence would disappear.

When the single currency was eventually introduced, Britain would be left outside. Sterling would come under enormous pressure. After a short time, such would be the effect on the British economy that we would be compelled to join, but we would be joining a system, and would have to accept conditions, in the latter stages of whose formulation we had played no part. Once again, in the name of an illusion about sovereignty, we would have suffered a self-inflicted injury.

I therefore hope that the Government will refrain from making any commitment not to join a single currency, and that my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer will continue to play a constructive part in the current negotiations about a single currency. In that way can British interests best be protected and advanced.

Finally, may I say a word about our approach in the House to the legislative programme? My anxiety arises from the change that has come about by moving the Budget date forward—not that I have any specific objection to the Budget being brought forward. My right hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Jopling) drew attention to that matter in an authoritative speech in the debate on the Address on 18 November 1993.

This Session is starting on 15 November, today's date. We shall debate the Gracious Speech until Wednesday 22 November. The following Tuesday, 28 November, will be Budget day, and the debate on the Budget is unlikely to finish before Tuesday 5 December. Although there may be a Second Reading debate the day before the Budget, it is more likely that the first Second Reading debate will take place on Wednesday 6 or Thursday 7 December.

[Sir David Knox]

That means that the Committee of Selection will not be able to appoint any Standing Committees until Wednesday 13 December, and that in turn means that the Standing Committees will not be able to meet until 19 December, and will probably not meet until after the House returns from the Christmas recess.

The consequence of all that is that the legislative programme will get off to far too slow a start, and the programme will be clogged up later in the Session. The position is further aggravated because one of the Standing Committees that previously considered other Bills in the spring will deal with the Finance Bill from the end of January until Easter.

It therefore seems to me, as it did to my right hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale two years ago, that the business managers should aim to clear all legislation and end the Session by the summer recess, that there should be no overlap period, and that the state opening of Parliament should take place in the middle of October, when the House returns after the summer recess. We could then hold the debate on the Gracious Speech and get several Bills into Committee before the Budget, thus smoothing the flow of legislation through both Houses of Parliament.

There is an especially strong reason for completing the legislative programme by next summer recess and holding the state opening in October. The Session of Parliament that starts in the autumn of 1996 will of necessity be a short one, because a general election will have to take place by May 1997. It would surely be sensible to allow sufficient time for some Bills to complete their passage through Parliament before that election. I ask business managers on both sides of the House to consider that important matter very seriously in the weeks ahead.

6.43 pm

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): The hon. Member for Staffordshire, Moorlands (Sir D. Knox) spoiled a very good case with his last few words, because many of us would regard it as one of the saving graces that the legislation in the next parliamentary year—if there is one—will be saved by the bell, as a general election will prevent it from reaching the statute book.

I agreed with the hon. Gentleman, however, when he said that he would have preferred there to have been much less legislation during the past 16 years. So would many of us; that would have avoided legislation introducing the poll tax, water privatisation and so on.

May I pick up the hon. Gentleman on the main theme of his speech—the enthusiastic thrust of his speech relating to Europe? I warmly approve of the tone of his remarks.

I was on the other side of the Atlantic ocean in the United States for two or three weeks this autumn, visiting industrialists to try to persuade them of the importance of investing in Wales, which would help overcome our economic difficulties.

While I was in the USA, the Secretary of State for Defence made his appalling speech at the Conservative party conference. Industrialists in the United States asked me, "Does that mean that the United Kingdom may not be a full part of the European Community? May that mean that you are on an outside track, that you may pull out? If that is the case, we don't want to invest in the UK; we shall invest in mainland Europe."

That is the effect that speeches such as that made by the Secretary of State for Defence have on the real living standards and prospects of people such as my constituents. Ministers should think very seriously indeed before they make that type of speech.

As the hon. Member for Moorlands said, the importance of the European Union—whatever the problems are with the details—to the industrial structure of these islands is immense. We have 160 American companies in Wales and 47 Japanese companies, and I am certain that they would not have been investing in Wales were it not for the fact that we were part of the European Union.

Yes, let us make Europe more effective and efficient. Let us cut out the waste. Let us avoid any fiddles that are going on. However, to rock the boat and suggest that we are pulling out is contrary to our interests in Wales, and, I suspect, to the interests of the inhabitants of the rest of these islands.

I am sorry that I did not speak sooner after the former Secretary of State for Wales, the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood). It was interesting to hear him address the agenda that is close to his heart. It was interesting that, in a speech made so soon after he relinquished office as Secretary of State for Wales, he made not a single comment about Wales. That was the extent of his interest in Wales while he was Secretary of State; we are very much aware of that.

The Government would be well advised to take good heed of the warnings coming from below the Gangway on the Conservative side; otherwise, they will have an almightily difficult task in the intergovernmental conference.

Conservative Members said that the Conservative party was proud to stand on its record. Well, we know what the Tory record for the past 16 years has been in Wales. Unemployment has increased. Having increased from 80,000 to more than 130,000, even after changes in definition bringing it down to 110,000, the net figure for unemployment is 35 per cent. greater now than in 1979. A devastating pattern has become visible in male employment, which has decreased from 618,000 to 492,000—a reduction of 20 per cent.

Gross domestic product per capita in Wales has decreased from 88.3 per cent. of the UK average in 1979 to only 84.7 per cent.—a reduction of 3.6 per cent. Wales is now at the bottom of the league. Industries such as the coal industry have been almost emasculated. That industry now employs only about 1,000 people in Wales, and only three of the former National Coal Board pits remain.

The one glimmering of hope that the Conservative Government had—the pattern of inward investment in Wales during the period of office of the previous Secretary of State for Wales, the right hon. Member for Wirral, West (Mr. Hunt)—has been totally undermined, and inward investment has been reduced from more than 11.5 per cent. to half that figure. That was the success of the Secretary of State who is now the Back-Bench Member for Wokingham. Thank the Lord that he is no longer Secretary of State for Wales.

As I read the Queen's Speech, I cannot help but notice that not one of the legislative proposals has anything directly to do with Wales. Wales is not mentioned in the Queen's Speech. It appears to be a Queen's Speech of a Government who have run out of ideas and lost direction. Its proposals appear to be geared as much to holding the Conservative party together as to any agenda that is required outside the Chamber.

Very different items would have been included in a Queen's Speech addressed to the needs and agenda of Wales. The priorities would have been, obviously, to try to overcome unemployment—the scourge that we have suffered so long—to invigorate the public services, to strengthen social justice, to improve community identity and community responsibility and to provide transparent and democratically answerable government in all its aspects.

I believe that those aims will be achievable only when we have our own Parliament in Wales, because they do not appear to have got any closer under successive Governments, albeit Conservative Governments, in the past 16 years.

Many aspects of the Government's proposals are disturbing for us in Wales. We are worried about aspects of the broadcasting Bill. I take a different line from the hon. Member for The Wrekin (Mr. Grocott), who commented on the independent television sector. There are as many as 14 small independent companies in my home town of Caernarfon, and 800 jobs are dependent on that sector. They may not have the security of jobs in the BBC 20 years ago, but they form an important part of our economy.

We are worried about possible changes to the broadcasting structure. If S4C has to share a six-megabyte slot with Channel 4 in Wales, we shall return to the bad old days of the 1970s and 1980s that have since been overcome by the present broadcasting structure. We are worried about the prospect of achieving an English language service for Wales, which is desperately needed. There is a danger that the ITV contractors that serve Wales may be gobbled up by super-national conglomerates, which are designed to meet not a broadcasting need but a commercial need.

We are worried about the implications of the housing Bill. The hon. Member for Moorlands said that it was an attractive Bill. For some people, the right to buy a house from a housing association may be attractive, but the hon. Gentleman should cast his mind back, as I do, to the time when there was an abundance of council-rented accommodation available. Such accommodation has now gone, because it has been sold. Many of my constituents who cannot—and will not be able to—afford to buy a house have had to depend on the housing association sector.

If that sector also starts to lose its housing stock due to the same mechanism, where will those people turn? It is no use saying that they will turn to the private sector, because, in my area, the rents in that sector are driven by the holiday home rents of midsummer, making it impossible for people to rent houses all year round. That is particularly true of those on low wages. The alternative for such people is to become totally dependent on housing benefit—it then becomes almost impossible for them to return to employment. That constitutes a trap, and I urge the Government, whatever changes they are undertaking, not to undermine the housing sector in that way.

I have doubts about a prospective nursery voucher scheme. I do not want to see the introduction of such legislation in Wales.

I agree with the sentiments expressed by the Opposition on the implications of the asylum Bill. I heard the Prime Minister's heartfelt assurances that he did not have racism in mind when introducing the legislation, and I accept that he is genuine. But I suspect that other people do not view the legislation in that way.

Documents have been quoted in the Chamber to show how such an agenda has been considered to secure a party political advantage, whether in the 1992 election, the European elections or other elections. Any general approach to asylum that cuts out certain countries—perhaps Nigeria or Sri Lanka—and does not allow asylum seekers from those countries is nonsense. The truth of that has been shown in Nigeria in the past few days, and, sadly, in the difficulties of the Tamil people and the Singhalese suffering in Sri Lanka.

There will be genuine asylum cases. I am aware that the present Home Secretary's family came to these islands not so many decades ago. I welcome the fact that it is possible for people like him to come here. What I find it difficult to understand is that he should be the man who closes the door on other families with equally pressing reasons to be seeking asylum.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Timothy Kirkhope): The hon. Gentleman makes a mistake in assuming that the Government have any plans to change their approach to the United Nations convention. We continue to support it, and always will, when we look at individual asylum-seeking cases in this country. It would be helpful if the hon. Gentleman waited to see our Bill before making such remarks, and carefully studied the proposals contained within it. Meanwhile, he should think carefully about what proposals he would introduce to stop the massive number of bogus asylum applications to this country, which come from all parts of the globe, not specific parts.

Mr. Wigley: I hear what the hon. Gentleman says, but I do not believe that that massive number of people—I have heard the figure of 17,000 mentioned—is the biggest problem facing the peoples of these islands. I believe that the figure is used for political reasons—it is one agenda item on which the Conservatives can unite. I shall wait to see the details of the Bill. I hope that the comments made in the press outside the Chamber and by hon. Members inside the Chamber will have an influence on the Bill, so that it does not end up as bad as it initially appeared.

We are worried about the forthcoming Finance Bill. We fear that it may contain a cynical tax bribe at the expense of pensioners, disabled people and, particularly, local government. If there is to be a 5 per cent. reduction in the money available to local government, that reduction will directly hit those who depend on services such as community care services, which will be unacceptable. If there is money available for a reduction in the tax take—I doubt whether there is—the Government should reduce or eliminate employers' national insurance. That would at least be a step in the right direction; it is crazy that we tax employment at a time of high unemployment.

When I consider the agenda set out in the Queen's Speech, I am conscious that a different agenda is needed in Wales. If we had our own Parliament with legislative

[Mr. Wigley]

power, we could produce a different agenda for the coming year. There is a need for employment legislation to overcome the problems faced by the 110,000 unemployed people in Wales. We should create a different education structure in Wales that will avoid the need for a nursery school voucher scheme and for schools to opt out of the state system.

There is a need to ensure an equitable system of charging for water, so that those on low incomes are looked after and single-person households receive a fairer deal. There is a need for legislation to safeguard disabled people against discrimination and provide them with an organisation that looks after their needs instead of sweeping them to one side, as the legislation passed here in recent weeks and months has done.

There is a need for a local government functions Bill to return to local government the powers that it once had. I would go further and abolish the ultra vires rule, and give local government general competence. There is a need to develop the arts in Wales, which are suffering from the Government's cuts and policies. There is a need for an agriculture Bill to assist new entrants into farming and to assist those farmers who want to retire and make room for others. There is a need for a Welsh language Bill to cover the privatised utilities that have escaped the intentions of the Welsh Language Act 1993.

We need a renewable energy strategy in Wales—a non-fossil-fuel-related energy. We need a housing Bill to meet the housing needs, which are chronic in many areas of Wales. We need more accountability in the health sector. We need an integrated transport structure. We need legislation to change the present non-accountable structure of quangos.

The present Conservative Government offer no help in any of those sectors. They have not introduced the necessary legislation, or given us an elected body to pass Acts on our own behalf. It is nonsense that we in Wales have a tier of government—the Welsh Office and the quangos—that runs so many aspects of everyday life, but does not have direct democratic accountability on an all-Wales level.

The need for more accountability is becoming more and more accepted by the vast majority of the people in Wales. In Wales, as in Scotland, the people have an overwhelming desire for greater democratic accountability and a structure of government of our own. Until and unless we have that structure of government, what can we do? We can continue moaning to this place, which takes not a blind bit of notice. Select Committee reports are left on tables and shelves; we hear Queen's Speeches that do not even refer to Wales.

The agenda of Plaid Cymru over the coming year is to bring forward detailed draft Bills on the subjects that I have mentioned, knowing full well that there will not be time in this Chamber to discuss them and that no commitment will be made to the needs of Wales. The people of Wales should be able to see what their own Parliament could be doing and what Westminster cannot and will not do on behalf of Wales.

When the Welsh people face that choice at the next election, there will be a surge of support in favour of Wales—like Scotland—having its own Parliament and taking decisions for itself, rather than leaving them to a Parliament in Westminster, with neither the interest in, time for nor commitment to Wales.

6.59 pm

Sir David Madel (South-West Bedfordshire): I agreed with the opening remarks by the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley), who pointed to the necessity of this country remaining a member of the European Union. He dwelt particularly upon the investment that is needed—and that will be forthcoming—in Wales. His comments apply equally to Bedfordshire, which has been dependent on inward investment for years and will remain so if it is to reduce local unemployment.

I am glad that the Queen's Speech refers to the Government's support for the middle east peace process. A terrible tragedy has befallen Israel with the assassination of Mr. Rabin, but I am convinced that Israel will draw strength from the past. It will remember that Mr. Begin reached an agreement with Egypt and that Mr. Rabin made the breakthrough with the Palestine Liberation Organisation and with Jordan. I am convinced that Mr. Peres will solve probably the most difficult problem of all and achieve a peace settlement with Syria. Everyone in the House and in the country wishes the Israeli Government well in their efforts to continue the peace process and bring stability and prosperity to the middle east.

I have always been interested in that part of the Gracious Speech which says:

"Other measures . . . will be laid before you."

I would like to add that the "other measures" will deal with the unforeseen problems that could arise when the original measures are passed. One such problem involving council tax has come to light.

A High Court judgment in the early summer ruled that the conversion of part of a house into a granny annex meant that two council taxes would apply to the property. One of my constituents received planning permission to alter part of his property to enable his parents to live with him. The planning permission contained the strict condition that the annex would not be a separate dwelling. Imagine my constituent's surprise when he was served with two council taxes. He, and many others like him, are assisting the country and the social security system by caring for elderly parents. What will happen to the problem of the two council taxes when his parents die?

Judges regularly ask—one reads about it in the text of their judgments—what Parliament intended when it passed particular legislation. They then go on to interpret the law in each case. I assure judges that Parliament intended the council tax to be simple and fair. We did not want to revisit the hideous poll tax anomalies that occurred with students, second homes and unoccupied properties. Parliament did not want to see a dwelling that is changed—not expanded—attracting two council taxes. Other measures should be introduced to ensure that the law is clear in that area and that people will not continue to suffer.

I welcome the announcement in the Gracious Speech about divorce law reform. That is a very important matter, but not a party political one. I hope that votes throughout the legislative process will be based on cross-party support and agreement. The divorce law reform Bill

presents us with an opportunity to do something about the Child Support Agency and the way in which it operates. I do not believe that the CSA can continue to function in its present fashion.

We sometimes forget that, in the difficult personal circumstances that arise out of separation or divorce, people are up against it not only financially but emotionally. They come to our surgeries seeking information about benefits and it is our constitutional duty to help them, which we do with enthusiasm. But Members of Parliament are hardly qualified to deal with emotional problems.

Reasonable payments for children must be made and enforced by law if necessary. However, in view of its record of mistakes, clumsiness and insensitivity, I do not believe that the Child Support Agency is the appropriate avenue through which to proceed. We could, and should, revive the 1980s proposal to create new family courts whose first task would be to bring the parties together in an informal and conciliatory atmosphere to calculate what could be reasonably afforded and paid to meet children's needs.

Such a change would take time; in this country we are suspicious of courts. It was once said that the problem with English courts is that there is a

"presumption of innocence in an atmosphere of guilt".

I believe that we can overcome that problem. We could, and should, replace the Child Support Agency with family courts that would make a fresh start by assessing reasonable levels of maintenance and ensuring that maintenance was paid. We all agree on that.

Of course, change will not occur overnight. In the meantime, I plead with the Child Support Agency to sort out the existing cases before it takes on any new ones. That is a small request, but it is supported by those who are in the middle of dealings with the agency.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Staffordshire, Moorlands (Sir D. Knox) pointed out, the Queen's Speech comes very close to the Budget announcement and to the public expenditure statement. Therefore, hon. Members may make final appeals to the Chancellor of the Exchequer at this 11¾th hour. The news of increased levels of inward investment are encouraging for the Chancellor and for the country, but we cannot let up for a moment in our drive to attract more modern industry to this country and to reduce unemployment.

I wish to make two brief points on tax and on expenditure as a prelude to the Budget. The Government are concerned about the cost of nursing and general care for old people who are forced to leave their homes because they cannot care for themselves. Widows and widowers are particularly worried about the costs involved with selling their homes and about what will occur when the sales go through. We should make a legislative change to assist them. When people sell their homes and go into care, I believe that the income from the capital raised and invested from the sales should be tax free in order to help people to pay for their care. That would cause many old people far less worry at a difficult time and would be a sensible and sensitive use of the tax system.

As to expenditure, schools in my constituency in Bedfordshire have had a difficult time with their budgets this year. People are interested in what the Government have said about the assisted places scheme, but that is not their immediate priority. They are interested in nursery vouchers and in the development of nursery education, but that is not their immediate priority either. People are very interested in the development of grant-maintained schools, but there is bound to be a short pause in parental enthusiasm because of uncertainty about who will win the next general election and what a possible change of government would mean for grant-maintained schools.

The lack of enthusiasm to opt for grant-maintained status does not denote a lack of interest: parents are being realistic about the present political situation. People believe that the priority is to inject more money into schools, and therefore into the classroom, in the next financial year. I have a long list of improvements that must be made to schools in my constituency—not least to ensure better delivery of the national curriculum.

I am aware that Conservatives control only one county, Buckinghamshire, but the Government need to make it possible for Conservatives on county councils to produce realistic and sensible budgets in February that will put more money into schools in 1996-97. If those realistic Conservative budgets, which it is their duty to produce, with us supporting them, command support—as they will if they are sensible and balanced and presented to the public as putting more money into schools—and are voted down by Labour and Liberal groups on county councils, the electorate will know where to put the blame. Conservatives in every county hall in the land should make it their priority to produce budgets that prove to the electorate that more money can go into schools in the next financial year.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer presides over a strengthening and rapidly improving economy. It is of cardinal importance that we begin the next century with our education and skills capable of keeping us right in the forefront of industrial nations. That is the only way to reduce unemployment in Britain.

7.10 pm

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): I am most grateful to be able to say a few words about the Queen's Speech as I have not done so for many years. It is also a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for South-West Bedfordshire (Sir D. Madel). Until he mentioned education, I found what was saying very thoughtful and intelligent. I thought that it would be difficult to follow him in the same vein—especially for me—but then he got on to education and became rather more political, so I am encouraged.

My hon. Friend the Member for The Wrekin (Mr. Grocott) said that people in the pubs and clubs of Telford, Cumnock or anywhere else would not be discussing the details of the Queen's Speech and that we are the only ones debating it. Perhaps they are more interested in discussing a few words from another member of the royal family. We, however, have to talk about what was said earlier today in another place.

Each year, with a diminishing degree of credibility and authority, the Government almost seem to pretend that they have suddenly found themselves in office. They put forward a programme as if they were a new Government taking over the legacy of the past. They keep forgetting

[Mr. George Foulkes]

that the legacy of the past 16 years is their legacy. The failures of 16 years represent a millstone that is constantly around their necks.

In the past 16 years, we have witnessed Ministers privatising utilities, then retiring and sloping off to line their pockets with part of the profits of the utilities that they have privatised. That is part of the legacy of the past 16 years.

We have seen our manufacturing industry decimated. It is all right for France, Germany and other European countries to continue their manufacturing industry, but somehow it is not all right for the United Kingdom to do so. That is one of the failures of the past 16 years.

As my hon. Friend the Member for The Wrekin said, we have a growing drugs culture that is fuelled by the increasing grinding despair of many young people who are unable to find work. Crime has doubled, and the numbers of beggars in the streets and homeless people have increased. That is another failure of the past 16 years.

With respect to Conservative Members who have spoken, they cannot get away from that and slough it off as if it has not happened and as if they did not have that legacy as they seek further support.

The leader of the Liberal party, the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown), said that the Government had run out of ideas. The hon. Member for Staffordshire, Moorlands (Sir D. Knox) said how wonderful it was to have a light legislative programme. That might demonstrate that they have run out of ideas, but we can recall some of the so-called big ideas of the Government and of the Prime Minister himself.

I remember the cones hotline. That was heralded as a big idea. I remember sitting in a traffic jam hour after hour thinking about the cones hotline. I could imagine all the other people sitting in the traffic jam line thinking exactly the same. That was the Prime Minister's so-called big idea. It did not come from a junior Minister in the Department or even from the Secretary of State for Transport but from the Prime Minister. That idea was abandoned ignominiously earlier this year.

There was also back to basics. We do not hear much about that now. We used to hear of it all the time. We were attacked for having a soundbite of the day or the week, but the Government's soundbite used to be back to basics. We know what went wrong with that. We know about the sleaze that was exposed, the concern that was expressed and the parrot-like repetition of back to basics beliefs, which seemed rather strange in the light of what was happening.

I have chosen two examples, but other equally daft ideas were dismantled and discarded and bit the dust in the same way as the cones hotline and back to basics. Although all those ideas were discarded, some of the policies of the past 16 years, and the past few years in particular, are continuing to bite hard on the way of life of the people we represent.

Rail privatisation is an absolute disaster, but it is still going ahead. It was described by one late hon. Member as the poll tax on wheels. The whole process has been a total disaster. Now there is not even a timetable of the trains running in Britain. Crash follows crash on the rail network. No connections are now guaranteed. The running times have been lengthened to make sure that the trains arrive on time occasionally and the people who were heralded as the saviour of the railway—those in private enterprise—are pulling out day after day. That failure continues to haunt Conservative Members.

There was also the reform of the national health service. Apparently, more money is being spent on the national health service, as the hon. Member for South Worcestershire (Mr. Spicer), who is falling asleep, said in an earlier intervention. In reality, we have witnessed the creation of trusts duplicating the work of boards and the development of the market within the health service, which means that more accountants are necessary to pay bills and pass them from one level to another, thus leading to a huge increase in bureaucracy. Money is spent on bureaucrats, not on nurses and doctors.

Conservative Members would like to forget it, but we should not let them forget the appalling legacy of the poll tax. The Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, who used to enjoy his days at the Foreign Office, shrugs his shoulders. They want to forget about the poll tax. They want people to forget about it, but it brought injury upon Scotland, England and Wales. People were rioting in the streets even in the south of England because of the injustices of the poll tax. It was finally abandoned, but it cost billions of pounds to introduce the poll tax and it cost billions of pounds to get rid of it. Money that could and should have been spent on services was wasted on an ideology, a dogma in which the Tories said they believed. When they saw it in practice, they realised that it was an absolute disaster. All of us and all the taxpayers and the people of Britain share the cost and suffer as a result. So there is a whole legacy of failure. I wanted to dwell on that legacy for a few moments because we shall not let Conservative Members forget it.

It is clear that the Gracious Speech represents an attempt to cling on to power at the next election. It is clear also that the attempt will be made in vain. We, the Opposition, will not let the Government forget their record of failure over the past 16 years.

What is in the Gracious Speech? We are told that the President of France will visit next year. Is that wise when he continues to ignore the protests of the world about nuclear tests? The Government, however, continue to support him in the continuation of the tests. There will be a real danger of unrest if the President arrives and the tests are continuing.

We are told in the Gracious Speech that it remains the Government's priority to prevent

"the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction".

If that is their position, how can they justify supporting the French nuclear tests? These tests are an essential part of proliferation. How can the United Kingdom expect other countries to adhere to the non-proliferation treaty? They must do so, of course, if we are to ensure a safe future for our children. How can we expect other countries to adhere to the treaty if we encourage nuclear tests that are an essential element of proliferation? I hope that the Government will think seriously about their support for the French Government in their nuclear tests. We are alone in our support. We were isolated at the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting. It does the Government no credit to continue with their support.

We are told in the Gracious Speech that a

"substantial aid programme will be maintained, focused on poorest countries".

I hope that that will be the Government's position. As we say in Scotland, I hae ma doots. There has been well-informed speculation about two levels of cuts in the Overseas Development Administration—a 12 per cent. cut in the public expenditure round and cuts as a result of the fundamental expenditure review. It is rumoured that the Government, in their bilateral programme, will leave the Caribbean, Latin America, the Pacific, south-east Asia and parts of eastern Europe. If that happens, the Government will not have a substantial aid programme. That would be a disaster.

The Prime Minister said, as is stated in the Gracious Speech, that a central part of the Government's programme is a fight against drugs. If that fight is to succeed, we must continue to help the smaller Caribbean countries with mono-economies that depend on the production and sale of bananas or coffee, for example. These are vulnerable and fragile economies. I know that the Minister has heard directly from the Prime Ministers of some of the smaller Caribbean countries that if they suffer as a result of cuts made by our Government, they will find it difficult to prevent an increase in the production of marijuana and other drugs in their countries. It would be disastrous if the Government moved in line with some of the rumours that I and others have heard. I hope that what is stated in the Gracious Speech becomes a reality. Those of us who are concerned specifically about overseas development will be watching the Government carefully.

I am glad to see that the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland, the hon. Member for Aberdeen, South (Mr. Robertson), is on the Government Front Bench. That is fortuitous. I understand from reports in the Scottish media today that among the other measures to be introduced will be one to deal with the control of raves in Scotland. I see that the Minister is nodding. I am delighted by the news. The Minister will be aware that one of my constituents was one of the first to die in a tragic incident at Hanger 13, a nightclub in Ayr.

I am not against young people enjoying themselves. Indeed, I encourage them to do so. I have three children. They are getting on a bit now but, like us all, they were young once. They went to nightclubs. At the same time, I am aware of the dangers. There is the tragic case of the girl of 18 who obtained an Ecstasy tablet—it was not contaminated—on her 18th birthday. It is a dramatic and awful case. There were three such cases in one nightclub in Ayr.

There were some who shrugged their shoulders and said that there was nothing wrong. There was a clear need for better stewarding. Lord Milligan, a senator, said that in the High Court in Airdrie today when sentencing someone. He said that the stewarding in Hanger 13 was appalling. He observed that the selling of Ecstasy and other drugs had been allowed to continue for a long time.

Ecstasy contributes to or results in an increase in body temperature and dehydration. When many young people are involved in energetic dancing and there is nowhere for them to cool out or chill out, there is danger. The situation for three young people in Ayr was fatal. I welcome what I understand has been proposed by the Scottish Office.

The hon. Member for Ayr (Mr. Gallie) has made a breathtaking U-turn. When I was expressing concerns about Hanger 13—lack of stewarding and the lack of a chill-out area—he was shrugging his shoulders and saying that I was scaremongering. He alleged that I had it in for the proprietors of Hanger 13. I am glad that he has converted on the road to Westminster. I do not know whether the Scottish Office Ministers have effected the conversion, but I am glad that the hon. Gentleman has changed his stance.

I used to be the chairman of the Lothian region education committee. Being in office in local government gave me at least a little power. In this place I have experienced the continuing frustration of 16 years in opposition. To have a small amount of power at local authority level was a much more enjoyable and satisfying experience. I learnt a great deal about the education debate, albeit in a Scottish context. It is appalling and offensive that personal and puerile attacks should continue to be made by Conservative Members on my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition. These attacks should be discontinued immediately.

My right hon. Friend has made his individual decision within the terms of the current education system. It comes ill of Conservative Members to attack his individual decision when many of them do not use the state system. They do not use grant-maintained schools. Instead, they send their children into the private sector. They tell us that class sizes do not matter but they send their children to private schools where there are smaller class sizes so as to give them a privilege.

The next Labour Government will not encourage opting out. When I was chairman of the Lothian region education committee, I encouraged opting in. Two private schools came close to opting into the local authority system in 1978 and 1979. I would like to see that happening again. It is fortunate that there is not much opting out in Scotland. It is not a popular move.

The Under-Secretary of State for Scotland has been going round the country trying to encourage schools to opt out. That has had a counter-productive effect, but we do have the appalling assisted places scheme. It is ridiculous that, when the education budget is limited, increasing amounts of money should be taken away from local authority schools and spent on assisted places: money is being poured into the pockets of private schools, and taken from the public sector schools to which people such as me send our children—whether they be grant-maintained or, as in my case, run by local authorities.

The hon. Member for Moorlands spoke of the prospect of nursery vouchers. Conservative Members continually describe that scheme as extra provision of nursery places, but that misrepresents the proposals. Again, money will be taken from the public sector—which is currently providing good nursery teaching places—and given to people with vouchers who will buy places in playgroups. Again, the Government will extend provision only through cheapjack solutions, while bypassing the real problems of education.

In regard to Scotland, Conservative Members talk of "jobs for the boys". It is interesting to note that recently in Monklands—when Mr. Nimmo-Smith has been getting to the truth in a proper judicial way—some of the accusations have been falling by the wayside, and proving untrue. What we do know is that, in health trusts all over

[Mr. George Foulkes]

Scotland, people like Aileen Bates—a well-known Tory—are getting nice, highly paid jobs. That is a job for the girls! Meanwhile, Scottish Office Ministers with whom we do not agree but who we thought had a little political nous are spending more and more on appointing political advisers. First Gerald Warner from *The Sunday Times* was brought in; now the Tory party's public relations officer has been moved to St Andrew's house, paid for by the taxpayer. That is outrageous: jobs for the boys and girls are being financed by public funds for the advancement of Tory policy. It is disastrous, ridiculous and disgraceful.

I could continue at length, but I know that others wish to speak. Finally, let me say something about devolution of power in Scotland. Alone among 72 Scottish Members, the Secretary of State for Scotland—the right hon. Member for Stirling (Mr. Forsyth)—and nine other hon. Members, one of them the Under-Secretary of State, are steamrolling policy through a House of Commons in which an English Tory majority is legislating for Scotland and has done so for a number of years.

Scotland did not vote for the poll tax, but we got it. We did not vote for national health service trusts, but they were forced down our throats. No one in Scotland wanted the reorganisation of local government, but a minority Tory Administration in Scotland—with the right hon. Member for Stirling and the former Secretary of State, the right hon. Member for Galloway and Upper Nithsdale (Mr. Lang) in the forefront—forced it on the people of Scotland. That is causing great resentment. What Scotland wants is real devolution of power to its people—and that is what a Labour Government will bring. That is what ought to be, and will be, in the first Queen's Speech under a Labour Government. *[Interruption.]*

But we do not just want devolution of power to Scotland. Power must devolve to Wales, Northern Ireland and, ultimately, to the rest of the United Kingdom. It must take place within England as well. *[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. There have been several seated comments during the hon. Gentleman's speech; indeed, there has been almost a running commentary. I deprecate that.

Mr. Foulkes: I deprecate it too, Madam Deputy Speaker. We have become used to the running commentary of the Under-Secretary of State in Scottish debates—his nickname is Peter O'Sullevan—but I am grateful to you. It is good to be protected by someone who is almost from the same clan.

We will not forget the legacy of the past 16 years. We will constantly remind the Government of it in the run-up to the general election. We will expose the fact that they have run out of ideas, and over the next few months we will make sure that they are run out of office. We will also present our positive plans for Scotland and for education, the health service and local government—all the plans that Labour spelt out in its recent conference.

I look forward to making the same points, not on the green Benches of Westminster, but on the stump throughout the United Kingdom.

7.35 pm

Mr. David Evennett (Erith and Crayford): I am delighted to be able to speak today. I deplore the attack made by the hon. Member for Caenarfon (Mr. Wigley), who is no longer present, on my right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood); he was an excellent Secretary of State for Wales, and worked extremely hard for the Principality. Let me also say—following the speech of the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes)—that most Opposition speakers seem to forget the many achievements of the Government over the past 16 years, including the improvement in living standards for all sections of the community. *[Interruption.]*

Opposition Members do not like the facts. They may wish to recall the 1960s as a golden age; I regret to tell them that it was in that period that the problems were created. Labour Governments ignored long-term problems for the sake of short-term advantage. Rewriting history now will not help.

I believe that the contents of the Queen's Speech are important, constructive and relevant to the needs of the people. I am convinced that the legislative programme proposed by the Government will be well received in my borough of Bexley, and throughout the country: it will be supported by all ages and all groups in my constituency, because it addresses the real issues facing my constituents. I refer to education, law and order, training and immigration and asylum, for instance.

I appreciate that the electorate are interested in our legislative programme and the forthcoming Budget. On both those important events, they will judge the Government. Although the Chancellor of the Exchequer's part of the equation remains a closely guarded secret for the next two weeks, the detailed legislative programme has been unveiled today. In my speech, I shall concentrate on the education proposals.

Contrary to some of the siren voices that we have heard from the Labour party—both in the House and, I regret to say, outside—the Government have not run out of steam. We have a coherent philosophy, and a programme to implement it. One of the Conservative party's problems has been our failure to highlight our vision and our achievements—our vision of the future of our country and its people. I am confident that that vision is one that the country needs and strongly supports.

Of course, every Government and every political party must implement unpopular measures at times. It is a credit to the present Government that they were willing to make unpopular decisions in the national interest. The real question for the people of Britain at the next election remains the same: what sort of Britain do we want? Is it a country willing to travel a socialist road of Government control, bureaucratic rule, higher Government expenditure, higher taxation, more decisions from Brussels and a bland uniformity, or does it involve our Conservative vision of choice, opportunity and less government? To me, the socialist philosophy is alien to the lives and aspirations of my constituents—and, I believe, those of people throughout the country; and nowhere is the stark contrast between the philosophies of the two major parties more apparent than in education.

The Gracious Speech contains two important legislative measures on education: two important steps to build on the successful education reforms of the past decade. Bills are proposed to deal with nursery education, and to extend the powers of grant-maintained schools. We in this

country have an education system that is still the envy of the world. Choice, diversity, standards and opportunity are the basis of our system.

During 20 years of Conservative control in my borough of Bexley, we continued to provide a wide variety of secondary schools. Regrettably, in May 1994 control of the council passed to a Labour-Liberal Democrat coalition. However, even that group maintains the single-sex, grammar, religious, technical and—although it does not like them—grant-maintained schools. It does not want to get rid of grammar schools because it fears a parental backlash.

Bexley has maintained different types of school, offering diverse education to cater for the wishes and needs of its children. The Labour party, nationally and locally, would, if it could, end that choice and diversity. It would end the grammar schools, take away the powers of the grant-maintained schools and attempt to gain what it failed to gain in the 1960s and 1970s—to impose its aim of an all-embracing neighbourhood comprehensive.

Conservative Members believe in standards, and crucial to the maintenance of academic standards is the A-level examination. While no examination is perfect, at least A-levels provide a benchmark. However, we understand from Labour Front-Bench spokesmen outside the House this week that Labour wants to destroy the A-level examination. Instead, it wants a watered-down version that would allow more pupils to pass. Labour wants pupils to be able to pick and choose their courses under a new post-16 qualification that would broaden their study. We all welcome any broadening of study, but we do not want to lose the benchmark of academic excellence. Such a change would diminish standards.

Instead, we should be encouraging and improving vocational education, building on existing blocks and raising it to the standard of A-levels. We do not want to legislate to reduce the standard of A-levels or to replace them with something inferior. We must build, improve and raise up—not, as the Opposition want, diminish and destroy.

Labour would remove grant-maintained status from schools and reintegrate them into some sort of local education authority control. I believe that the principles behind GM status are right—to remove the dead hand of LEA control, to allow the head and governors of a school to run their school and to ensure greater parental involvement. The policy has been worth while and effective. It works.

The new Bill to give GM schools more borrowing powers is welcome as it will extend their opportunities to run their own affairs. I want there to be more GM secondary schools and I believe that that will be the case. At any rate, the new Bill will command tremendous support from parents, governors, heads and teachers in existing GM schools. We look forward to more parents being allowed to vote for GM status. We want all of them to be more involved in the affairs of their schools.

The Labour party, both in Bexley and nationally, opposes GM status at every turn. It actively campaigns against it in local ballots. It opposes GM status in principle, yet, as we have heard already this evening, many Labour politicians still choose to send their children to GM schools—they just want to deny my children and the children in my constituency that same opportunity.

In the neighbouring borough of Greenwich, Hawksmoor primary school, under the able leadership of the headmaster Paul Adams, faced a determined and vitriolic campaign against its attempt to obtain GM status. There was opposition from Labour-controlled Greenwich council and from the local Labour party. They were frightened that they would lose control over the school and would not be able to dictate education policy. However, the parents voted for GM status and the school is now flourishing in Thamesmead, both academically and in the support that it has from its parents. It has an increasing number of pupils on its roll. The headmaster is no longer subject to the criticism and party political antics of Greenwich council.

In Bexley, the local Catholic schools and BETHS boys' school say that they have tremendous advantages in being free of LEA control. The Barnhurst primary grant-maintained schools, which I regularly visit, are thriving. All those schools are benefiting from GM status. The pupils benefit and the parents like GM status.

Other schools, both in my borough and across the country, have benefited greatly from local management of schools, another Conservative Government initiative. It allows schools more freedom from LEAs. I had hoped that there might be a provision in the Gracious Speech to give even more power and responsibility to such schools. I am sure that that will be the case in future. Long term, the role of the local education authority will be diminished and its control over individual schools reduced. That will be good for education and for the education service generally. A much smaller LEA, providing services that can then be bought by schools locally, will be of advantage to the schools.

Mr. Clive Betts (Sheffield, Attercliffe): The hon. Gentleman suggested that people vote for grant-maintained status so that schools can escape from local authority control. Can he therefore explain why, throughout the country, it is predominantly Conservative-controlled authorities that have the largest number of school opt-outs to GM status, while cities such as Sheffield—which has been Labour-controlled for a number of years—have had few opt-outs?

Mr. Evennett: As the hon. Gentleman has been listening to my speech, he will know the answer to his question. The propaganda, the fear factor and the activities of the local Labour party have frightened parents. The LEA tries to claim that opting out will be the end of civilisation as parents know it. I mentioned Hawksmoor school earlier. The activities of Greenwich were phenomenal in trying to urge parents and teachers to vote against opting out. The politically motivated Labour party and LEA, using the fear factor, encouraged parents not to vote for opting out. I believe that that will change when a Conservative Government are re-elected at the general election. There will be a groundswell of support for opting out, despite the opposition of the Labour party.

The other new education Bill relates to nursery provision. I have always been a keen supporter of nursery education and some years ago I served on the Select Committee carrying out a detailed study on pre-school provision. For many children, it is a vital building block for their future. Under the previous Conservative administration in Bexley, there was a phased programme for increasing nursery provision. That is continuing under the Labour-Liberal Democrat regime.

[Mr. Evennett]

I welcome the proposals in the Gracious Speech to increase the provision of nursery education for four-year-olds and the pilot scheme to introduce vouchers. At a recent meeting with the Labour chairman of Bexley education committee, I deplored the council's decision not to participate in the pilot scheme. Of course, that decision was taken for party political reasons and not in the interests of Bexley children. Labour deplores parental power and choice because it reduces Labour's control and its ability to dictate local education policy and provision.

I have never believed that local authority nursery provision is the only worthwhile pre-five provision. I believe, as do all Conservative Members, in choice and variety. I accept that, nationally, playgroups have done a marvellous job and I would not want them to be destroyed or diminished in the job that they do and the reputation that they hold. Many independent nursery schools and independent primary schools with nursery classes also provide a good service. Parents must be allowed freedom of choice. Competition between providers of nursery education will undoubtedly improve standards and enhance that sadly underrated sector of education. We should all pay tribute to the nursery teachers and nursery nurses who have a rewarding but demanding working week, and whose career development and progression are often considerably less structured than those in other sections of the teaching profession.

It is essential that nursery education is relevant to the needs of the pre-school child, and is of high calibre. Mere child minding, or constant structured play, is not the answer. The proposed legislation will allow best practice to develop, give parents more real choice and provide the foundation for effective provision for nursery education.

The Labour party always cries out for more nursery education, yet manages to oppose any constructive proposals. Despite what it says, the general public, especially parents, will welcome the Bill as a constructive step that will increase nursery provision for all four-year-olds. The expansion of nursery education to cover all four-year-olds has been an aim for more than 25 years. Now, under the Conservative Government, it looks as if that aim will start to become a reality.

I have concentrated on the nursery proposals in the Queen's Speech, but I am also convinced that the overall legislative package will command widespread support throughout the country. I welcome the fact that this year's programme is not overburdened with Bills. Over the past few years, many of us have been concerned that there has been too much legislation. Conservatives believe in less legislation, but effective legislation.

I believe that more help for small businesses, more deregulation and firm financial policies to increase economic growth and employment will not only be welcomed by everyone in the country but will build on the improving economic situation. Contrary to what we have heard from Opposition Members, although it is not overburdened with Bills, the Gracious Speech has plenty of content, and will provide a wide and successful legislative programme.

7.51 pm

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley): I do not intend to follow the line taken by the hon. Member for Erith and Crayford (Mr. Evennett), because I disagreed with so many of his comments that if I dealt with them all, I should not have time to make the contribution that I intended. So I hope that I shall be forgiven if I do not refer to his speech at all.

However, I shall briefly mention two previous speeches. In the first of those my hon. Friend the Member for The Wrekin (Mr. Grocott) talked about unemployment, which we all know is still unacceptably high. He also referred to the problem of the large number of people who, although employed, are in low-paid, temporary and part-time jobs.

When I look in my constituency, in the local press or at the job centre, I see that too high a proportion of the jobs on offer are temporary, even in the public sector, which traditionally has permanent jobs. There are also far too many part-time jobs on offer to people who seek full-time jobs—although I accept that things are different if people actually want part-time jobs. An appalling number of jobs are low paid—an issue that I have raised many times in the Chamber and elsewhere in the House. I mean not simply low pay but poverty pay, which is unacceptable. It is a scandal that such low levels of pay should exist in Britain today. I find nothing in the Queen's Speech to address any of those problems. Indeed, it is regrettable that, after 16 and a half years in office, the Government are allowing them to get worse and worse, and they have still failed to do anything to change direction.

I shall also refer to the speech by the hon. Member for Staffordshire, Moorlands (Sir D. Knox), who spoke about the business of the House—I was going to call the hon. Gentleman's constituency Leek and Moorland, but I believe that that is a building society. I serve on the Procedure Committee, which recently considered the Jopling reforms so as to produce a report for the House to read before deciding what it wanted to do in the new Session. The matter was dealt with towards the end of the previous Session. In evidence both from the Leader of the House and the shadow Leader of the House, it became clear how much the introduction of a November Budget has changed the procedures of the House and how great an effect that has had on the Government's legislative programme. Whichever party is in government, we shall have to address that problem.

As the hon. Member for Moorlands rightly said, if the Queen's Speech is on 15 November and the Budget and the debate on it only a couple of weeks later, there is almost no time for either the present Government or an incoming Labour Government to arrange for the Second Readings of Bills and to get them into Committee before the turn of the year. We need to tackle that problem because it will cause a major headache for any Government, and delay legislation.

I shall pick out three main statements from the Queen's Speech. The first is:

"A substantial aid programme will be maintained, focused on the poorest countries".

The second is:

"Legislation will be introduced to enable students to choose between private and public suppliers of subsidised loans."

My final extract is:

"My Government will bring forward legislation to make better provision for housing and to promote the smooth running of construction contracts."

The Government have floated the idea, and allowed it to become general knowledge, that they may consider a 12 per cent. reduction in the overseas aid budget. I do not believe for a moment that they intend to do that. The Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, who is now on the Government Front Bench, was closely involved with overseas aid in his previous position, and I know that Baroness Chalker is also committed to that cause, but my theory is that it will not be she who determines how much is spent on aid. I believe that if it were her decision, there would be no reduction.

The Government will probably not make a 12 per cent. reduction but will suggest a smaller figure, in the hope and belief that people will say that as it is not as bad as they expected, it is acceptable. If that is the Government's intention, they have got it sadly wrong.

Overseas aid is in the interests of this country, because if we do not assist other nations, we must accept that they may be forced to take decisions that are not in the world's best environmental interests. We all know that environmental issues are no respecters of national boundaries, and decisions taken in other parts of the world can have severe environmental consequences for us, however many thousands of miles away we may be. I emphasise my hope that what is in the Gracious Speech about aid will prove to be true.

Oxfam says:

"Instead of cutting aid, we believe that the UK should be increasing aid in line with its international promises and obligations. In this year's budget, aid agencies are calling for . . . No further cuts in the aid Budget . . . Bilateral assistance to be maintained at its current level. In 1996-97, this would require an increase in the ODA's total budget of £100 million".

The Government must not allow aid to be cut either in cash or in real terms. We want to see an increase. I give the Minister the benefit of the doubt, as I know that he is sympathetic to overseas aid. I hope that he will give to the Government the message that there is an overwhelming feeling throughout the country, and that people want us to move towards the United Nations target of 0.7 per cent. of GDP. We are way below that target, and the figure has fallen in percentage terms. I am realistic and I know that the target will not be achieved overnight, but we must not make further direct reductions; we should move in the right direction.

The second issue to which I want to refer is student loans. I was surprised to hear people questioning whether students should be able to get a loan from the private or the public sector, because that is not addressing the real problems being faced by so many of our students. The student loan system has been discredited. It is wrong, and the Government should reconsider their approach to student finance. I accept that it is not an easy issue, and there is a lot of money involved, but it is totally unrealistic to expect students to take out loans which they must pay back when they enter work and reach a certain percentage of average national earnings. Not all students get work speedily nowadays when they finish their course.

I accept that the loan scheme has a neutral interest rate and that repayment is index-linked to allow for inflation, but most students—certainly my two daughters, and others of whom I am aware in my constituency—have debts to banks and other people when they finish their education. The student loans scheme is adding to the burden of debt that those students face. Students finishing education may also be entering into relationships, getting married or wanting to buy a house. They will find that they must repay student loans, as well as bearing those other financial burdens. While looking at how loans can be provided in the future, the Government must reconsider whether the loan system is the best way of financing those who go on to university education.

My main comments today concern the housing Bill. In principle, I welcome the fact that we are to have a housing Bill, but I do not believe that that Bill will in any way address the real housing problems in Britain in 1995. The Government will fail to deal with the problem once again. I accept and agree that people should have the right to buy from housing associations, but we must look at that issue carefully. I am worried about the population figure of 3,000 that has been set for a village, as it is an arbitrary figure, but that issue can be properly debated and all of its implications can be considered.

When I heard that the Government were extending the right-to-buy scheme, I thought that one of the things that they might do was to give councils the right to buy back houses from people who are unable to sell them, although I do not mean that in the way that the Government might think. I know many people who would love it if the council were able to buy back their house, but the council has neither the finance nor the powers to be able to do that. The Government might receive more votes in many parts of the country if they gave councils the right—as well as the finance and the powers—to buy houses back.

A few weeks ago, I received a letter from the Manchester and District housing group. The letter stated:

"An independent study carried out for the 30 housing associations who are part of the Regional Equity Group has revealed an astonishing difference between the Government agencies spending on Regeneration in the North. Most agencies spend over 45 per cent. of their allocation in the North but the Housing Corporation allocates for housing associations less than half of this at 22 per cent."

While we recognise that there is a demand for more resources in the north because of deprivation and aging properties, insufficient funding is provided to meet the problems that occur. Housing Minister after Housing Minister has visited my constituency in the 12 years that I have been a Member of Parliament. I should warn any Housing Minister not to come to Burnley, as nearly all of them have lost their jobs and ended up on the Back Benches after visiting Burnley.

A previous Housing Minister—the right hon. Member for Ealing, Acton (Sir G. Young), who has moved on to higher things in the Treasury—once said that Burnley had a peculiar cocktail of problems. My constituency had a traditionally high percentage of home ownership, a high percentage of older properties and a high percentage of people on low wages. The combination of those factors meant that Burnley faced a particularly difficult situation.

A survey done by the Lancashire housing inquiry was presented to the right hon. Gentleman. The committee involved in the inquiry was chaired by the then Bishop of Burnley, the Right Rev. Ronald Milner. The report stated that there were 34,000 households in Lancashire on council waiting lists, and added that 9.9 per cent. of the private housing stock in Lancashire was unfit, while a further 21.7 per cent. was in need of renovation. The report added that more than 50 per cent. of the private housing stock in Burnley, Pendle, Hyndburn, Blackburn and Rossendale was built pre-1919, and that is why so many houses need improvement.

[Mr. Peter L. Pike]

Shelter says that it believes that

"there is an annual shortfall of at least 100,000 affordable homes to rent".

That and similar figures are quoted by many independent bodies which believe that there is a shortage of housing to rent in this country. There is nothing within the Gracious Speech—I am sure that the housing Bill will not deal with it—that will solve the problem by meeting the housing demand. The Government fail to recognise that many people choose to rent, or have to rent because they have no alternative.

Another aspect to which I want to refer is homeless households. Shelter has said:

"Local authorities' duties to provide emergency help for homeless people, including families with children and vulnerable single people, are to be seriously weakened. Local authorities will have a duty to provide a minimum of 12 months temporary accommodation to homeless people who are in priority need and who are not intentionally homeless. Some groups will be excluded altogether from even emergency housing."

During the Government's consultation on homelessness, almost everyone said that they had got it totally wrong and that their proposed solutions would not solve the problem. I have said on previous occasions that the Government have made homelessness a national problem. Some 12 or 15 years ago, homelessness was a problem for the big cities. It is now a problem throughout the country, and it exists in almost every constituency. A combination of the Government's social security and housing policies has created that problem, but their current proposals will not make the situation better, and could make it worse.

People are worried about what the Government are going to do to housing benefit in the Budget. Will they make it more difficult for people to be able to afford the portion of the rent that they must meet if they do not get full housing benefit? Will they make local authorities pick up a bigger share of the cost of housing benefit? That is a danger.

I received a letter this week from the Bradford and Northern housing association which referred to the opening up of social housing and difficulties with rent. The letter stated:

"In particular, if social housing is opened up to the private sector, under the principle of increasing choice, we are concerned that there should be a level playing field in terms of both regulation and standards . . . there is no doubt that, even amongst the best private landlords, standards of properties and service are different and affected by commercial motivation."

That is a great worry to many people. The private sector is not meeting public demand for rented accommodation. I have often said that without housing benefit and state intervention there would be no private rented sector.

On the condition of stock in the private housing sector, the Bradford and Northern housing association went on to say that if the Government move away from the mandatory grant system

"it will leave those in unfit housing which is outside of a particular strategy in a very precarious position."

I have met and written to various Ministers on that issue. We all know that in many parts of the country, councils are unable to meet their obligations for mandatory housing grants. Mandatory housing grants are, in theory, public led, because they depend on whether the public ask for grants.

In theory, if, following the means test introduced by the Government for grants, a house meets certain conditions, the Government have to give a grant. Because the Government know that that policy is failing in many boroughs, they intend to leave it to local authorities to target particular areas. But if additional resources are not provided, the problems will not be solved.

Of course councils will be able to deal with the worst areas, but in a constituency such as mine, which has many long terraces of pre-1919 housing stock, a single empty house which is not maintained can gradually destroy a complete terrace. What are local councils supposed to do if they do not have sufficient resources? That major difficulty remains.

The Government have failed to recognise that the only way to deal with housing problems—the shortage of property to rent and the need to improve housing stock—is to make more cash resources available. The Government cannot abolish homelessness by virtue of an Act of Parliament. The shortage cannot be dealt with unless there are houses for the people. That is the difficulty.

My final point concerns houses in multiple occupation. Recently, the Campaign for Bedsit Rights said:

"Two in five houses in multiple occupation were unfit in 1991 and the risk of death from fire was 28 times higher than in self-contained housing".

Burnley borough council has highlighted its belief that there should be a licensing system. It has responded to the issues of multiple occupation and homelessness in detail. One problem is that although the Government consult, we all know that they will not take any notice of the results. They make their decision before the consultation takes place. People increasingly believe that it is pointless to respond. However, I hope that on these issues the Government will listen carefully.

Burnley borough council says that a licensing system is necessary because

"it is important to protect the health and safety of tenants".

That underlines the point made by the Campaign for Bedsit Rights to which I referred earlier. The council continues:

"it ensures that houses in multiple occupation known to authorities in England and Wales are inspected; that HMOs are inspected to the same standards throughout the local authorities".

The council says that such a licensing system would be

"a useful tool in reducing the number of deaths."

Those are all objectives that we should seek to achieve. The council says:

"the licensing system gives a more pro-active approach, generally, so preventing as many problems occurring."

Many hon. Members know from their own constituencies the problems caused by such properties, often occupied by poor or unemployed people. Some are appalling. Just going through the door makes one ask oneself why people should have to live in such conditions in 1995.

The housing Bill should do more than just touch on the problems; it should ensure that there is an adequate licensing system so that units of multiple occupation are of the best possible standard throughout Britain and, most

importantly of all, so that those who live in them do so safely without running the risk of being burnt because of the failure to meet many of the safety requirements.

I am disappointed at the measures in the Queen's Speech. I hope that the Government have listened to the few comments that I have made and that they will listen to others that will be made during the remaining days of the debate, and will respond positively. Burnley's reservoirs are only 2 per cent. full and there is equally little content in the Queen's Speech. I hope that the Government will deliver a little more than we were led to expect when we first heard it this morning.

8.15 pm

Mr. Michael Spicer (South Worcestershire): I begin with two specific questions arising from the Gracious Speech that trouble me and on which I genuinely seek guidance and information. Will my hon. Friend the Minister be good enough to arrange for his appropriate colleague to write to me about them?

The first question concerns the phrase:

"to allow grant-maintained schools to borrow on the commercial market."

Does that set some new precedent for borrowing by public sector undertakings? Will they still be subject to Treasury permission or are we breaking new ground? I was under the misapprehension, perhaps, that public undertakings were allowed to borrow in the best markets already, so I should like some clarification on what exactly is new about that statement.

The second detailed point concerns the phrase:

"to promote the smooth running of construction contracts."

I understand that that could involve penalties for late payments by contractors to sub-contractors. If so, does it not open up the whole issue, which has been the subject of past consultation and which I gather will be the subject of future consultation, of statutory provisions affecting firms that pay sub-contractors' bills late? Will not that open up the whole issue before the Government's future survey on the matter? What precedent, if any, has been established? Will it apply only to the construction industry and, if so, why? I should be grateful for some detailed response to that.

When the history of our times is written, surely only two matters will stand out in the year ahead as having real political significance—the Budget, as has been said several times already in the debate, and the matters surrounding the intergovernmental conference in Rome next year.

The Budget should have three objectives. First, it should ensure that the present halt in the economy, as measured by the most recent manufacturing output figures and by the leading indicators of the Central Statistical Office and the unemployment figures published tonight, is reversed.

The second objective is the need to ensure that the amount of GDP that the Government take falls below its present debilitating level of 42 per cent. In that context, I warmly welcome the phrase in the Gracious Speech that reads:

"The share of national income taken by the public sector will be reduced."

That seems to be extremely good recognition of that second objective.

The third objective should be to ensure that whatever fiscal measures are taken, they do not further distort the economy. This all adds up to an across-the-board reduction in taxes and interest rates—the crucial emphasis should be on across the board. I realise, however, that that position is not shared by a number of my hon. Friends. They argue, for instance, that special measures are required to stimulate housing or, more particularly, home ownership or, even more particularly, first-time buyers. I do not agree. If there is an overall and continued revival of the economy, the housing market will revive with it if there is genuinely unsatisfied demand for houses.

Speaking as a former Housing Minister, I am not totally convinced that there is massive unsatisfied demand for housing. Just before the House was prorogued, I received a written answer from the Minister with responsibility for housing, which showed that there are 845,000 vacant dwellings, 737,000 of which are in the private sector. I understand that some will be unsuitable for habitation, because they are either in poor condition or badly located. I also know, however, that many of them are empty because we still discriminate against private letting. Proportionally, we have the fewest such lettings in the western world. When I was Minister for Housing I tried to do something about that. Baroness Thatcher was generous enough to accept that in her book, but went on to say that she did not much like my suggestions because they detracted from her laudable emphasis on home ownership.

The quicker that we remove the distortions in the private housing sector, the better. The housing Bill foreshadowed in the Queen's Speech, to which the hon. Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike) referred, provides such an opportunity. I would abolish all discriminatory arrangements for home ownership and state intervention in the rented sector. I would completely open up the private rented sector, while retaining heavy criminal penalties against landlords who exploit tenants.

Exploitation of any kind is wrong and should be stopped. One of the things that the Government do not shout from the rooftops enough is that they have been extremely tough in attaching the criminal law to landlord and tenant legislation. They may have to use the proposed housing Bill to extend those provisions to include banning extortionate service charges by the managers of leasehold properties.

It is worth giving three qualifications regarding exploitation. First, it is not only private landlords who charge tenants excessive management fees—Labour-controlled local authorities, such as Ealing, also do so. Secondly, much exploitation is of the landlord by the tenant who knows how to use the courts to his or her advantage. That is even true of shorthold tenancies where, by clever use of the courts, six-month tenancies are often turned into 12-month periods, with the landlord often earning no rent in the last six months. For that reason, there may be a case for shortening the minimum shorthold period from six to three months.

The crucial point is that much exploitation occurs when there is a shortage of supply. If renting were made more attractive and more rented properties were available, tenants faced with, for example, excessive service charges would simply move elsewhere, which would act as a deterrent to bad landlords. Exploitation is one symptom of a distorted rented housing market. That is why it is so important for roll-over relief to apply to property to let as much as to any other business.

[Mr. Michael Spicer]

On the theme of loosening up the market, I would certainly abolish the Housing Corporation and all aid to housing associations. The Spicer Budget would give all the money saved directly to those who needed it through housing benefits, which would be managed in the manner that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security is rightly proposing. In other words—in response to some of the mockery from Opposition Members—I would give the money to those genuinely in need of help with housing, rather than spending it on bricks and mortar, which benefits the deserving and the undeserving alike. I suspect that, after 50 years of resenting such attempts to focus money on those who really need it, the Labour party is beginning to change its mind. Some of the mockery may die on the lips of some Opposition Members fairly soon when the Labour party, after all these years, at last begins to realise that, if one is going to help poor people, one should do so directly. That is my view and the perfect instrument is housing benefit, rather than by spreading money across the board through the Housing Corporation and housing associations.

I hope that the Chancellor of the Exchequer will firmly resist calls further to discriminate, intervene and distort the housing market because it would not help to create the dynamic and flexible economy that he is seeking.

Similar points could be made against some of the arguments of my hon. Friends about preserving special tax treatment for executive share options. The policy should be one of reducing the general level of taxation rather than preserving, let alone extending, the number of exemptions to tax. In the case of share options, there may be a reasonable way through, if the policy is to tax at the point at which shares are sold rather than, as proposed, that at which the option to buy is exerted.

Clearly, one issue is whether executive share options are to be treated as income or capital. The way around that problem would be to abolish all tax distinctions between capital gains and income. That would certainly bring down the rate of capital gains for those on low incomes. Rather than introducing more exemptions, I would reduce to 15 per cent. the entry point for income tax.

Above all, the Budget and the Queen's Speech need to be seen as part of a strategy for encouraging enterprise, risk and work, as opposed to being capable of interpretation as any sort of one-off sweetener to the electorate. That would badly backfire and, quite mistakenly, would threaten to bring into disrepute the whole concept and purpose of low personal taxation.

The second question is that of Europe and I do not want to detain the House for long on that matter. In practice, the die is cast for the year ahead. I am not confident that, for the time being, much will be done to reverse what Lord Denning has called

"the tidal flood of European law".

The treaty of Maastricht is in place and the process of establishing the appropriate institution for monetary union now gathers pace under the protection of law. Whatever anyone says, the law of Europe is that a single currency must be established by 1 January 1999. In that context, the sooner that the Government and the Conservative party give a firm commitment to maintaining the opt-out on the single currency, the better.

Moves by the Commission and others to create a federal defence, immigration and foreign policy must clearly be resisted. The Queen's Speech refers to the Western European Union and to strengthening it, but I trust that that is not to be undertaken at the expense of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation.

Above all, I hope that the Government will build on the increasing anxiety in Europe about the premature destruction of national democracies in favour of an undemocratic super-state. The objective now must be to build on the momentum in Europe aimed at substantive revisions to the treaty of Rome so that the European Court of Justice, the Parliament and the Commission are once again brought under the control of national Parliaments.

This is, of course, a momentous task in whose fulfilment the British Government will undoubtedly have to play a leading part. Nothing less than revision of the treaty of Rome will do if we are serious in our intent of maintaining a Europe of closely associated, freely trading nation states.

I suspect that the credibility of such a policy now largely hangs on attitudes in Germany, whose economy is the size of those of Britain and France put together. There is no doubt that there is growing anxiety in Germany about the future of the deutschmark. What is less clear is whether it is accepted there that, as Germany did not opt out of the single currency laid down by the treaty of Maastricht, whatever German politicians may say, Germany has no option but to go ahead with joining a single currency—unless, that is, Germany secures the appropriate amendments to the treaty of Rome. If she were to do that she would, of course, have to accept the rejection of the concept of acquis communautaire, which goes to the heart of the present development of the European Union. Increasingly, there are those in the Bundestag who want to amend the treaty but realise the full implications of such an amendment.

There is certainly not a cat in hell's chance of all that being supported by a Labour Government, were such a thing ever to happen. They would press on as fast as possible with the process of creating a centralised, socialised state of Europe. That is as good a reason as any for supporting the Gracious Speech—almost whatever it says—and I do.

8.31 pm

Mr. Clive Betts (Sheffield, Attercliffe): In the debate so far, there has been much mention of the concept of one nation. I want to examine that concept and how the Queen's Speech addresses some of the inequalities in our society, especially in the inner-city areas, part of one of which lies in my constituency. I shall consider briefly how the housing and education proposals in the Queen's Speech fit in with the concept of one nation.

At best, the traditional one-nation Tory approach is that the Government should be even-handed with different individuals across society, irrespective of the various inequalities from which those individuals suffer. On the other hand, many Tory Members today have the idea that all a Government should do is stand back from problems, allow market forces to determine how resources are allocated and watch how, by some miraculous trickle-down process, the benefits of wealth creation affect and help everyone in society.

That may be a marvellous economic theory, but many of my inner-city constituents are still waiting for the trickle to come down; it has not affected or benefited them. They have suffered grievously in the past 16 years under the Government.

The Opposition have a different meaning in mind when we use the term "one nation". We support the concept of one nation, not because we believe that it exists in Britain today, but because we believe that it should exist. We look around us at what has happened to our nation, which has been torn apart by the Government's economic and social policies over the past 16 years.

We see a nation in fear of crime—the crime rate has doubled while the Government have been in power. At the same time, we see a nation that needs unifying and in which attention needs to be paid to the problems of the poorest and neediest individuals and communities in our society. For us, the concept of one nation is the concept of a fair nation—something which Conservative Members appear not to recognise.

It is also interesting that a Government with such a profound belief in the free market have at least recognised some of the problems of our inner cities, to the extent that, in the past few years, they have brought into play a number of distinct policy initiatives to try to deal with some of the problems. Unfortunately, there are no more of them in the Queen's Speech, but we must question the validity and worth of what there has been.

There was the creation of the urban development corporations—we have one in my constituency in Sheffield. We have had single regeneration budgets, city challenge, city grants, estate action—a whole range of different initiatives which in many senses are interventionist and go against the main thrust of Government policy, which is to let the market sort out such problems.

At the same time, those resources, which, by and large, have been top-sliced from existing Government programmes and so have not involved new money, have gone only part of the way towards dealing with the problems, which have been exacerbated throughout by continual cuts in local authority budgets caused by cuts in central Government grant and by capping. It will be interesting to see whether capping will continue as the local authority settlements are announced later in the Session.

As well as cuts in the help that local authorities can give to inner cities, there are measures such as local management of schools, under which the formula funding approach has taken money out of the inner cities and redistributed it to other schools.

Government policy has thrown up projects that have attempted to deal with the problems of our poorest communities but, in general, has taken money which could have directly addressed those problems out of the hands of local authorities and schools in inner cities. Over the past 16 years, a whole range of indicators have shown that the inequalities in our society have become greater. There is nothing in the Queen's Speech to give us any encouragement that that trend will be reversed.

Let us consider some of the indicators, such as health. A King's Fund report this year showed that, for the first time in the past 50 years, death rates among the poorest in our population are rising once again. Ken Judge, the director of the King's Fund, described that as "a striking and alarming new feature".

The report also stated:

"Social divisions have accelerated at a rate not matched for such a sustained period by any other rich industrialised country."

It is not only a matter of death rates. A good recent study by Dr. Snell, the responsible medical officer for Sheffield health authority, showed that in the city of Sheffield there was a whole range of inequalities which meant that people suffered in different degrees from different illnesses, especially in respect of respiratory and heart disease. There are major differences in health conditions, which have become worse rather than more equal over the past few years.

This year, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation inquiry into inequalities of wealth in this country showed again a picture of a Britain more divided than at any time since the second world war. The bottom 10 per cent. of people who are earning have suffered a 17 per cent. reduction in their living standards since 1979. The top 10 per cent. were 60 per cent. better off. It is not only a problem of unemployment. The wages of the poorest people who are working fell in real terms during that period.

Unemployment has also worsened those inequalities. Among households in the economically active age range, there was an increase from 3 to 11 per cent. in the number of households in which no one was earning. At the same time, there was an increase in the number of households where two people were earning.

The increase in households where both people are earning and the increase in households where no one is earning have led to a disparity in wealth and living standards. The increasing disparity in wages and earnings, the increasing disparity in overall income levels, and increasing unemployment, have created ghettoes of despair in inner-city areas, which are in themselves a threat to the fabric of our whole society. They are a threat to the whole idea of one nation and unity.

Fear of unemployment and fear of crime are not confined to inner-city areas. People in affluent suburbs are in fear of crime, and are often afraid to go out at night. They are in fear of losing their jobs; in the most recent recession, unemployment has hit middle-class people on middle earnings in the suburbs, as it has hit people in the inner cities. The reality for many people in our inner cities is not that they fear losing their jobs, but that they are certain that they will never get a job. Young people may have been on one or two training courses, but their prospect of getting a job is extremely remote.

Nothing in the Queen's Speech suggests that the Government recognise the worsening health in some areas, with greater disparities shown in all the health indicators, worsening inequalities in income and wealth, as the Rowntree report so accurately demonstrated, and enormous disparities in unemployment. Whatever the Government may say about what they are doing to deal with unemployment nationally—we must recognise that unemployment is far higher than when they came to power in 1979—there are enormous disparities between different parts of the country, and between different communities in Sheffield.

In parts of Sheffield, unemployment is below the national average. In Sheffield, Hallam, unemployment is well below the national average. In my constituency and in Sheffield, Central, unemployment reaches 30 per cent. in some areas. Youth unemployment is far higher and

[Mr. Clive Betts]

unemployment in the Bangladeshi community is at 80 per cent. There are enormous disparities in the opportunities for people to get a job. Those are unacceptable figures and unacceptable inequalities in this day and age, and they give the lie to the claim that we have one nation in any meaningful sense.

In May last year, in the Darnall area of my constituency and Sheffield, Central, we had some quite serious race disturbances. They were race disturbances because they involved fights between young people of the Asian and white communities in the Darnall area. They involved fights in the street, damage to vehicles, the stoning of a public house and general unrest on the streets. There were a number of arrests, which were followed by demonstrations against the police.

I and my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Central (Mr. Caborn) recognised that the problems went far deeper than the incidents of two nights might have led us to believe. The incidents were triggered off by particular events, but they reflected, in our view, some fundamental social and economic problems within the area.

We therefore commissioned a review. We asked the Government for support, but they would not support the review, and said only that they were interested in looking at it. With the financial support of the Rowntree trust, which had commissioned a work on inequalities, we commissioned an independent review of the problems of the community to try to get a basis for action to stop racial disaffection continuing in the community. Our view was that, although the community had a history of living together, wanted to live together and wanted peace and harmony, enormous problems were beginning to tear it apart.

The review was conducted independently by Professor Paul Wiles, the dean of the faculty of law at the university of Sheffield. He was helped by Blanche Flannery, a former chair of the trades council, Alan Aikin, previously a managing director of a local company, and the assistant chief executive of Birmingham City council. We made sure that the review was independent, and we made sure that local people were asked what they thought were the problems of the area and what should be done.

It was not surprising that some organisations were criticised. The police were criticised in some respects for their policing of the area. I am pleased to say that they have made every effort to improve the situation and that the community has responded positively. That has been a positive outcome of deliberations in the past few months. The city council was criticised for the way in which it operated its youth service, which was fair criticism, although it was rightly praised for its housing service, for its schools and for the planning service it offered.

It is not surprising that, when the authors of the report looked at what needed to be done, they said:

> "Many of the problems of Darnall spring from its poverty, lack of employment for its citizens and lack of facilities for its young people. Those responsible for providing services to Darnall cannot be held responsible for these basic conditions. Instead the major responsibility must be laid at the door of national government policies which have exacerbated inequalities of wealth, worsened employment rates and reduced public expenditure on local services."

That reflected the views coming from local people, who were widely consulted in a major public consultation exercise, about their community, about what the problems were, and about what needed to be put right to make their community a better place in which to live.

I have written to the Secretary of State for Education and Employment and to the Minister for Local Government, Housing and Urban Regeneration to say that it is now up to central Government. Of course, there are problems at local level; the police and the local council must respond. However, their response will not help to solve the problems unless we also have a proper response from central Government.

It is not acceptable that the community has 30 per cent. unemployment and has no chance of its young people getting jobs, whether they are white or Asian, when it has on its doorstep the Sheffield industries where most of the jobs are. Something must be done. We have in Sheffield a training and enterprise council—a Government quango—which has millions of pounds to spend. We have a development corporation next door which has £50 million of resources at its disposal.

The Government and their quangos have a responsibility to ensure that resources are directed to the areas in greatest need. If we do not tackle these problems in our inner-city areas and if we do not address the polarisation and obvious inequalities of our society, we shall provide a breeding ground for racism, racial tensions and racial unrest, and we shall again have the riots that we have had in the past couple of years. We can stop that happening if we address the problems together.

I have already talked to the chair of the TEC, and I have had a letter back from the Minister of State, Department for Education and Employment. They both say that they will now start to address the issues and do what they can to help. The theory of trickle-down will not deliver jobs and resources to these communities; it simply will not happen in that way. We need positive training programmes directed at these areas.

We need to convince business that it has a responsibility to employ people, once they have got the proper skills, from these areas. We need to ensure that proper local employment projects are created and that resources are diverted to them. We need to ensure that construction projects go ahead in these areas, using local labour as a basis for training local people to build the homes in which people in the community can live. If we do not address those problems, the corrosion of collective despair will affect not only the local communities, but our whole society.

One of the issues that came out in the review was that there was a belief in the white community that there was unfair treatment in the allocation of housing, whereby Asian families had a better chance of a house. The review investigated the matter and found that not to be true. The real problem is that there are people in desperate housing need—it does not matter whether they are white or Asian—who are competing for houses that do not exist in sufficient numbers. More social housing which people can afford is needed in communities such as Darnall.

We want to create a new village called Attercliffe village next door to Darnall. The concept has the involvement of local people, housing associations, local builders, the city council and the development corporation. If we used that scheme imaginatively and

trained young people to build their own homes for their community, we could not merely create homes for that community and remove a source of racial discontent, but house that community and give people jobs at the same time.

If the Government's housing proposals in the Queen's Speech were genuine, they would be about building more homes and putting into decent repair many houses in inner-city communities. The Government do not intend to deal with the housing crisis by building homes for people to live in. Instead, they intend to make certain homeless families the scapegoats, and they will try to use those families as the justification for unfair competition among some people in our community for housing. They will say that those homeless families are jumping the housing queue.

I accept that, under the current homeless persons legislation, it is possible for people who live with their parents or in-laws to go down to the housing department and claim that they are homeless in an attempt to jump the housing queue. I am sure that that happens in some cases, but let us be absolutely certain about the facts.

At the beginning of the 1980s, people in Sheffield had to wait two years for a decent family home. It may be acceptable to people to live with their parents or in-laws for two years, but imagine when that waiting time extends to six years, with the possibility of being on the waiting list for up to 12 years. At that point, family tensions, discontent, in-fighting and bickering start to pull relationships apart. When that happens, it is no surprise that people decide to go down to the housing department, because they simply cannot stand it any longer.

Other people may lose their homes because of repossession or because of harassment from a private landlord—unfortunately, that happens. Those people and others suffering family turmoil need, most of all, some security. They need a permanent roof over their heads. The Government are planning to take away that security and permanence by saying that such people can have only a temporary tenancy.

That means that those people will have to live with instability—the threat of having to move to another house will hang over them. Such a move means not just another house, but coping with another district, another set of neighbours and perhaps another school for children. All that disturbance to family life, which those people have already gone through once, will be repeated every year, or every two years, as a result of the Government's proposed legislation. That is not acceptable. It is not a fair way to proceed, and it is discriminating against those in greatest need in our society.

If the Government pursue that policy towards the homeless, the Labour party will fight them. I support my hon. Friend the Member for Greenwich (Mr. Raynsford), who has said that the next Labour Government will repeal that legislation, because it is not the legislation of a fair and civilised society. It is certainly not legislation designed to unite the country and create one nation.

We should obtain the capital receipts of local authorities and use them to build new homes and repair existing ones. That is what local authorities want to do, but they are prevented from doing so.

The Government's education proposals are not fair and are unacceptable. It is interesting that the Government should allow extra capital spending for grant-maintained schools, which can borrow on the private market, presumably free of Treasury control. It is interesting that the Government have nothing to say about the thousands of schools that have not chosen to opt out, and whose buildings are often in a deplorable state.

A school in my constituency has a two-year lifespan, after which it must be pulled down; its 500 pupils will have nowhere to go. The cost of replacing that school is greater than the capital allocation that Sheffield has received this year for the maintenance of its education buildings. The Government's proposals for GM schools are unfair, and they fail to address the problems faced by most of our schools, which have not opted for GM status.

No new funding has been offered to meet the cost of the Government's proposals on nursery education. That simply means that the resources currently devoted to providing nursery education for children in deprived communities will be spread to cover a nursery voucher scheme, and will ensure a place in a playgroup should parents want that. I have nothing against playgroups, whose development I encourage, but if playgroups for all are to be provided at the expense of proper nursery education for inner-city children, that proposal will be utterly opposed by the Opposition.

It is extremely important that we see the proposals in the Queen's speech for what they are. They do not address the reality of the concept of one nation. They do not address the real problems of inequality in our society. In fact, they will make the problems of housing and education worse. Those proposals reveal that, as far as the Conservatives are concerned, the concept of one nation is a myth rather than a reality.

8.54 pm

Mr. David Nicholson (Taunton): As a one-nation Conservative, I listened with interest to what the hon. Member for Sheffield, Attercliffe (Mr. Betts) said about housing. I also listened carefully to the remarks by the hon. Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike) and my hon. Friend the Member for South Worcestershire (Mr. Spicer). I do not intend to develop my thoughts on housing now, but I register my political interest in legislation on it, in particular the regulation of homes in multiple occupation, to which the hon. Member for Burnley referred.

I must apologise to the House because I was carried away during my intervention on the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) by a sense of excessive chivalry and generosity. I said that, 18 months ago, he worked with Conservative Members in Somerset to save Somerset county council. In fact, that is not true, and I want to correct the record. He initially favoured the abolition of the county council, but then went strangely silent when he discovered that a number of his own supporters did not agree with him. That is why, in reply, the right hon. Gentleman reiterated his party's support for regional assemblies.

As the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes) will know, England will be lumbered with regional assemblies, according to proposals from both Opposition parties, in order to address the West Lothian question. The hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell), who happens to be my parliamentary pair, will be proud to know that there is now a research paper in the Library entitled, "The West Lothian Question".

[Mr. David Nicholson]

I commend to my right hon. and hon. Friends, particularly those on the Front Bench, an amendment to a famous statement by Dr. Johnson. According to this version, he might have said, "Depend upon it, Sir, when a Government knows that in 18 months' or so time a determined attempt will be made to hang it, it should concentrate its mind wonderfully."

I shall set out certain longer-term objectives which the Queen's Speech has given us the opportunity to pursue, but I also emphasise to my right hon. Friends that we need to win the tactical skirmishing, week by week. I simply note that we did not win the skirmish last week.

Among the longer-term objectives, I include advancing on the Home Office front; advancing, most importantly, on the small business and deregulation front, where there is much more to be done; and holding ground on the health front. In recent years there have been good increases in spending on health, but we need to address the considerable problems currently facing national health service dentistry and the financial plight facing those elderly people in residential homes, to whom my hon. Friend the Member for South-West Bedfordshire (Sir D. Madel) referred. We must regain ground on education; that also I shall discuss later.

Regarding the Home Office, the Opposition parties claim that there has been a lurch to the right in the Conservative party. I am not exactly a fully paid-up member of the right of my party, but I entirely commend a discriminatory, careful lurch to the right on various issues.

The difference between the right of the Conservative party and the left of the Labour party is that I cannot think of a single issue about which the left of the Labour party has ever come up with any proposals or policies that are popular—which commend themselves to the public outside the narrow enclaves of the left of the Labour party. That is why the Labour party has remained in opposition for so long, whereas the right of the Conservative party frequently has proposals or policies that are widely popular. The proposals in the Queen's Speech to tackle asylum seekers and adopt a tougher approach on law and order are both very popular.

Regarding asylum seekers, I shall briefly present an argument of much wider significance on the migration issue. We are constantly told that the United Kingdom and Europe must be able to compete with the United States of America and the far east, but the two latter have an advantage that we in Europe do not have. They have enormous reserves of what I would call cheap—perhaps "coolie"—labour.

In the far east, those reserves arise from the underdevelopment of the region. In the USA, they arise from the massive social inequalities that the tradition and the geography of that vast country permit—there is not much "one nation" politics in the United States—and from the illegal immigration that, in spite of their efforts, they are unable to control and which, I am told, may make Spanish the first language of the United States some time in the next century.

Europe is different because the various peoples of Europe will not tolerate their Governments allowing much migration into western Europe, whether legal or illegal. I draw far-reaching conclusions from that phenomenon, but I must pursue that subject another time.

I simply say, on law and order, that we must tackle the nonsense whereby debatable decisions or sentences or courses of action are reported in the courts almost daily. I am grateful that my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary is tackling that matter. Judges and magistrates are not elected, unlike local councillors or Members of Parliament. They can be influenced only by legislation or public opinion, both of which have a role to play.

We need to make more progress in deregulation, especially in food hygiene. If we do not make that progress by administration, I am afraid that some of us will have to advocate the repeal, or at least the drastic amendment, of the Food Safety Act 1990, which I believe led to several of those difficulties. We must tackle that issue in the remaining months of the present Parliament.

On Europe, I should say, having heard the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for South Worcestershire, that I have become a consolidationist. There is so much wrong with the European Community that we must tackle those problems and put them right before we start any of the fanciful developments that some of our partners would like to develop. Those problems include fraud, which we read about in the papers this morning; the massive problems of the common agricultural policy; the common fisheries policy, if that is subject to reform; and harmonisation, which has led to many of the problems that I have mentioned.

There must be a significant increase in education spending this year. When I met my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury a couple of weeks ago, I told him that he should give the Secretary of State for Education and Employment whatever she asked for and round it up by another £50 million. The fact, which I support and welcome, that the Government propose to invest more money in the assisted places scheme means that they should also apply extra money to the rest of the public sector.

I have had reservations about the assisted places scheme, which was intended to replace direct grant schools. I recall my right hon. Friend the Member for Witney (Mr. Hurd) referring earlier today to the abolition of direct grant schools. It was perhaps the biggest act of vandalism that has been carried out in recent politics in the United Kingdom. Unlike my right hon. Friend, I have an interest to declare because I was educated at a direct grant school.

I am sorry that it was not possible to re-establish direct grant schools instead of creating the assisted places scheme, because that means that in the public sector of education, as my hon. Friend the Member for Erith and Crayford (Mr. Evennett) said earlier, we do not have nationally the variety of provision that existed, at least at the time that I was educated, when there were direct grant schools and grammar schools.

That is a weakness of the public sector of education. The development of grant-maintained schools, which I emphasise should continue to be subject to parental approval, may be an indirect way of restoring that variety, but it is an indirect, not a direct, way.

I listened to the remarks by my right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) about budgetary policy. He, having been recently in the Government, is in a position to know whether spending may be cut by £5 billion and whether taxation may be reduced by a similar amount.

I have already described what needs to be done in the education sector. We probably need greater expenditure at the Home Office if we are to continue to beat back crime. We cannot cut the health or defence budgets. I am glad to see that the Minister of State for the Armed Forces, my hon. Friend the Member for Crawley (Mr. Soames), and the parliamentary private secretary to the Secretary of State for Defence, my hon. Friend the Member for Basildon (Mr. Amess), are present. We cannot cut the defence budget any further. A proposal was announced yesterday to close the Culmhead GCHQ station in my constituency in 1999. I shall go into the details at the appropriate time and I have tabled a written question, but I hope that that closure will not weaken our surveillance facilities which, given the huge uncertainty that continues to exist in eastern Europe, central Asia and the middle east, remain important.

Given those pressures, there is a case for a more cautious approach to budgetary policy than has been suggested by my right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham or my hon. Friend the Member for Bridlington (Mr. Townend), who is chairman of the Back-Bench Conservative finance committee and who has talked of, I think, £7 billion-worth of cuts.

The bulk of Conservative supporters in my constituency to whom I have spoken in recent weeks are reluctant to espouse the case for reductions in taxation. I have to persuade them that after three years of economic success and growth, the British taxpayer deserves a dividend. A reduction in taxes will reinforce the recovery which, until now, has been substantially based on exports and investment. We seek a reduction in taxation to stimulate the domestic market, which needs it. I differ from my hon. Friend the Member for South Worcestershire; the housing market needs stimulation. A Budget without those measures would have a considerable hole at its centre.

When I am asked, "Where would you make the reductions?" I have one suggestion arising from recent correspondence. I do not think that the issue will make a substantial contribution to the search for reductions in public spending, but it is a social matter that angers a number of people. I am referring to the ability, under present legislation, for young people to live a vagrant and sometimes vulnerable life style—even when they have a parental home prepared to take them and when they enjoy good relations with their parents—at the public's expense. No one suggests that those young people should not live independently, but we should question whether they should live at public expense.

A constituent told me that her adopted son had been in trouble with the police, was regularly attending the doctor for drug and alcohol abuse, and had lost three stone in weight. She wrote that he was living in a bedsit in Taunton, paying rent to a landlord who was no doubt also being supported by the Government. Her letter stated:

"we adopted our son at three years old after he had been removed from circumstances similar to the ones he is presently living in. It seems ironic that the social and medical services who were eager to place this child at two and a half years, are no longer able to help either him or us, saying that after 16 years old, parents have no rights."

Other constituents have written to me about the sad case of their daughter. I shall not give the House all the details, but the letter said:

"Our daughter has been given the opportunity to live independently but in extremely vulnerable circumstances."

My constituents spelt out the difficulties that their daughter had encountered, involving rogue landlords and others. They continued:

"We are caring parents who have in no way expressed a wish that she should leave home. Indeed, our daughter has every convenience at home and can make use of them at her leisure. Social Services have given her money to allow her to live independently. There has been no discussion with us of any kind."

Ministers who have discussed such matters in recent years have failed to address them directly. I hope that in the Budget, and possibly through housing legislation, such issues will be tackled. In all other respects, I commend the Queen's Speech to the House.

9.8 pm

Mr. David Amess (Basildon): The state opening of Parliament is always a splendid occasion and today has been no exception. Today's ceremony makes me particularly proud to be a member of the greatest democracy in the world. It is therefore a great shame that the speech of the Leader of the Opposition did not measure up to the splendid occasion that we enjoyed today.

Before referring to the comments of the Leader of the Opposition, I must point to one omission from the Gracious Speech that was brought to my attention by my local evening newspaper. I am told that the newspaper is tonight running the headline, "Wife to follow in MP's footsteps". According to the front page of my local evening newspaper, my wife intends to submit her name for consideration as the Conservative party candidate for the new Basildon borough constituency. Husbands and wives occasionally keep secrets from one another, but my wife is the mother of five small children, and when I return home tonight, I hope to discuss with her what arrangements she intends to put in place to make that happen. It is yet another example of responsible journalism.

I return to the remarks of the Leader of the Opposition. It is not good enough for him to come to the Dispatch Box and, like a failed Shakespearean actor, utter empty words. I have never heard a speech as infantile as the one that he made today—it must have been written by a bunch of kids who know absolutely nothing about life.

Only yesterday, the Leader of the Opposition addressed the Confederation of British Industry and put his foot in it. He said that the social chapter is a statement of principle. Today, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security wrote a letter to the Leader of the Opposition, in which he said:

"It is a transfer of power to make decisions about social policy".

The social chapter is certainly not just a statement of principle. The Leader of the Opposition seems to be obsessed with the so-called right wing of the Conservative party. The right hon. Gentleman came to this place to represent his constituents in exactly the same month and year as I was sent here to represent my constituents. In the intervening period, his political beliefs have changed dramatically. It is absolutely staggering.

We also heard today a typically sanctimonious, humbug speech from the leader of the Liberal Democrats. As usual, he said that he wanted to break up the United Kingdom and lead the country into a united states of Europe with one Government.

[Mr. David Amess]

The most important part of the Gracious Speech upon which I shall dwell is the section about drugs. In his speech today, the Prime Minister said correctly that no drug was soft or safe, and he promised the country that the Government would put in place a host of measures. I particularly welcome his remarks about MI5 entering the international sector, and the fact that the European Union will be asked to find resources to prevent drugs that emanate from Latin America entering Europe via the Caribbean countries. The Prime Minister reassured the House that the Government would do all that they could to clamp down on the drug barons. I believe that the new legislation that is to come before the House will assist in the conviction of more drug criminals.

As 18-year-old Leah Betts lies in her hospital bed tonight, I am ashamed to admit that it appears that the drug she took came from the constituency that I represent. I know Basildon college, Raquel's discotheque and my local police force very well. I am ashamed that it appears that drugs have been peddled in my constituency. I understand that four people have been arrested today in connection with the matter, and I hope that the House will unite in the crusade against drug abuse. It is a most evil practice and there is no such thing as a soft drug. I hope that all Members will do everything in their power to stop drug abuse in their constituencies.

The Queen's Speech includes the following sentence:

"The United Kingdom's minimum nuclear deterrent will be maintained."

When I first became a Member of Parliament, the Opposition Benches were full of supporters of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament. A recent amendment to a Bill was signed by 43 Members, but a number of them withdrew their signatures before the debate. I hope that the country will watch carefully how Labour politicians behave in regard to defence. Had it been left to the Labour and Liberal parties when I entered the House in 1983, Britain would not have reached its current position whereby we are well defended. It would appear that the world is more peaceful than it was some 12 years ago. The intergovernmental conference in 1996 will be a momentous occasion for the United Kingdom.

I had the honour of having my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister visit my constituency on Friday, and he shared with 200 business representatives just how the United Kingdom has the competitive edge on many of our European partners. It would interesting to hear the weasel words of both Opposition parties on our membership of the European Community. They will have to stand up and be counted, just as my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister will be at the intergovernmental conference.

I am delighted that legislation will be brought forward to enable the construction and operation of a high-speed rail link between London and the channel tunnel. I have long been a supporter of the channel tunnel. Had I been fortunate enough to speak in the transport debate a week ago, I would have pointed out to the House the incredible hypocrisy of the Opposition in respect of the channel tunnel. Had it been left to socialists, they would still have been talking about who would build the channel tunnel. After 100 years, it was the Conservative party that made that fine engineering feat possible. I do not believe that my party has taken enough credit for it.

When the Bill comes before the House, my particular desire is that Stratford should be given the opportunity to become an international railway station. Although politically I have nothing in common with the three Members of Parliament representing Newham, the four of us are united in believing that Stratford is the best possible site for an international rail station, and it would be of enormous economic benefit to my constituents in Essex.

The speech of the Leader of the Opposition was blown out of the water when my hon. Friend the Member for Chingford (Mr. Duncan Smith) intervened. It is hypocrisy beyond belief for the Leader of the Opposition to lecture the House and the country on grant-maintained and selective education in view of what he has chosen for his own son.

The Leader of the Opposition and the deputy leader felt fit to mention me in their speeches to the Labour party conference. It is unfair of me to comment on their remarks when they are not here. I shall wait until they are present, but when I have the opportunity, I shall deal specifically with the education of one's son. This may have affected the Leader of the Opposition's choice of education for his son, but it also affected the education of my own son. When he spoke about the smirk on my face when I was re-elected for the third time as Member of Parliament for Basildon—

Mr. Andrew Smith (Oxford, East): And for the last time.

Mr. Amess: The hon. Gentleman says from a sedentary position that I shall not be re-elected to represent the constituency of Basildon. He is out of touch. I shall not be standing for the new constituency. I am delighted to be able to say that I shall be the first and last Member for Basildon.

Mr. Jim Dowd (Lewisham, West): Is this the chicken run?

Mr. Amess: No. The chickens are Labour Members who do not have the guts to stand as socialists in the next election. That is the reality of the so-called chicken run. Some Labour Members are still proud to be socialists, but many Labour Members are chicken. As I say, they are frightened to stand in the next election as socialists. I hope that over the next parliamentary year we shall be able to deal with the issue in greater detail.

I am delighted that a measure will be introduced further to streamline the handling of asylum applications and to strengthen enforcement of immigration controls. My hon. Friend the Member for Brentford and Isleworth (Mr. Deva) was right to intervene to say that if asylum seekers enter the country in circumstances that are not entirely as they claimed them to be, they bring immigration into discredit.

It seems that the Government intend to introduce legislation to reform divorce law and other aspects of family law. I remember trying to amend a divorce Bill that was being introduced during my first year in this place. It is well known that there are many solicitors and barristers in the House, and I was ridiculed when I tried to amend the proposed legislation. I felt that we would be wrong to agree to the changes that were being proposed. It seems that time has proved me right. Many of my constituents—mainly women—came to my surgeries to say, "David, we had no idea that it was quite so easy to obtain a divorce."

I would like to see fewer divorces and, perhaps, fewer marriages. Once a couple have children, they should think extremely carefully about their responsibilities. Perhaps the Government should introduce a Bill to deal with parenting. I have visited every education establishment in my constituency over the past year, and it is clear that the heads have come to the conclusion that we must focus on parenting above all else. Of course, it is always a minority of parents who cause concern.

The gloves are off. If anyone wants to know what Labour and the Liberals do when in office, he should suffer Basildon district council, or Essex county council, which has disgracefully sabotaged care in the community and undermined our excellent grant-maintained schools. The Opposition parties will have to stand up and be counted, and I believe that they will be found wanting.

Debate adjourned.—*[Mr. Bates.]*

Debate to be resumed tomorrow.

Munitions (South-west Scotland)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Bates.]*

9.23 pm

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for giving me the honour and privilege of speaking in the first Adjournment debate of the new Session, which deals with the important topic of the dangers of munitions dumping in and around Beaufort's dyke off south-west Scotland.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Jarrow (Mr. Dixon), the deputy Chief Whip, knows, although I was not granted the opportunity to speak under my Standing Order No. 20 application at the end of the last Session, I have been given an early opportunity to speak on this important matter. I think that that shows that Madam Speaker—as well as many others—is concerned about it. I hope that the Minister of State for the Armed Forces, who has been given the task of replying to the debate, also understands that there is great public concern in the south-west of Scotland, in Northern Ireland and in Parliament.

The all-party group that has been pressing Ministers and the Government over the past few weeks was set up spontaneously to express that concern in Parliament. I am glad that two of its members—my hon. Friends the Members for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) and for Argyll and Bute (Mrs. Michie), who have both taken an interest in the matter—are present. I am also glad to see the right hon. Member for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro); I had the pleasure of visiting his constituency recently, and spoke at a meeting attended by more than 100 people. That illustrated the extent of the concern even in an area such as Dumfries town, which is not on the coast.

I thank both the Minister and the Secretary of State for information provided earlier today about all the materials known to have been dumped in the Beaufort's dyke area. Although it was provided for the debate at the eleventh hour, it was nevertheless welcome. However, I think that the Minister will accept—we certainly know—that most of the potentially dangerous material is that which has been dumped outside the permitted area. Most, if not all, of that is not recorded, and we do not know its extent and location. That is one of the main problems that have faced us over the past few weeks.

Having thanked the Ministry of Defence, I must return to the attacking style of debate with which I am rather better acquainted, and make some criticisms of the Minister and of the Government. Over the past few weeks, my hon. Friends and I have become increasingly fed up with being sent from one meeting and Department to another in Whitehall: it has been like a game of pass the parcel. It is interesting that a representative of the Ministry of Defence has been asked to reply to the debate, although both the Department of Trade and Industry and the Department of the Environment are involved. I must say that I am pleased to see that the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland is present, because the Scottish Office also has an important responsibility in this regard.

I hope that the Minister of State for the Armed Forces will answer as many of my questions as possible, and that, if he is unable to answer any other questions relating to other Departments, he will pledge that I will receive

[Mr. George Foulkes]

answers to all of them which will be copied for those of my hon. Friends who share my concern. After all, over the past few weeks, we have asked for relatively simple assurances. We want proper, full surveys of the area; we want the information to be made public; and we want any action that is necessary to make safe the areas that are being used for commercial developments. Meanwhile, we want any commercial activities to be suspended in the areas that have not been surveyed until there is a full clearance of those areas. I do not think that that is too much to ask.

Let me return to the events of the weekend of 7 and 8 October, and to subsequent events. We knew that a number of phosphorous incendiaries had washed up over the past few years—in ones and twos; perhaps half a dozen here and a few more there—but the surge in the number washed up during and immediately after that weekend took us all by surprise. More than 4,000 phosphorous incendiaries have now been washed up on the shores of Ayrshire, Argyll and Northern Ireland.

I pay tribute to the emergency services in Scotland. The local authorities, the fire brigade and the three armed services did an extremely good job. Unfortunately and tragically, as my hon. Friend the Member for Argyll and Bute said in our earlier debate, one young boy was badly burned. However, the situation could have been a great deal worse had it not been for the work of the emergency services.

It probably would not be right to describe the phosphorous incendiaries as the tip of the iceberg; they are a small sign of the potential danger in and around Beaufort's dyke. We now know that as well as incendiaries, there is nuclear waste encased in concrete. There are 1.5 million tonnes of conventional munitions, 120,000 tonnes of mustard and phosgene gas, 25,000 tonnes of nerve gas, 330 tonnes of arsenic compound, 50 tonnes of nitro cellulose from ICI at Ardeer and 1,890 tonnes of gas wastage. It is a great witches' brew of chemicals and munitions. We also know from today's letter from the MOD that there are German torpedoes, rockets, US air force bombs and many other things dumped in and around Beaufort's dyke. Altogether, it is a pretty lethal combination.

As my hon. Friends and I know only too well—all three of us are honorary presidents of the Clyde's fishermen's associations and I have done some sailing in the Firth of Clyde—it is an area of intense marine activity. There are two military ranges which, among other activities, carry out torpedo firing, mine exercises and the dropping of flame and smoke markers. British Gas has already started drilling at one site, although I accept that a survey was undertaken before work started. There is the raking of the sea bed and the gas pipeline and trenching work to which I have already referred. Now—I hope this does not go ahead—there is a proposal from Northern Ireland Electricity and Scottish Power for an interconnector. If the Secretaries of State for Northern Ireland and for Scotland give permission, that will mean thousands of volts of electricity going through the area. There are three ferries in the area, two conventional and one Seacat, there are the fishing boats from Scotland and Northern Ireland and there are submarine exercises. All in all, it is an area of intense marine activity, which adds to the potential dangers from the munitions and chemicals that I described earlier.

There have been a number of reports on the issue, beginning with the BBC programme "Lethal Cargo". There have been newspaper reports in the *Daily Mail* and Scottish newspapers highlighting the dangers. Frankly, only pressure from the media, from the public and from Members of Parliament has resulted in action. I fear that, without that pressure, there would have been continuing Government complacency about, and a cover-up of, what has been happening and the dangers involved.

We have obtained some action and I give credit for that. The Secretary of State for Scotland has brought forward a routine survey by the marine laboratory at Aberdeen which originally had been scheduled for next spring. I paid an all-too-brief visit to the survey ship, the Culpea, on Monday. I would have enjoyed going out on the ship with the Earl of Lindsay. If the Under-Secretary had been there, I am sure that he would have taken me out with him and I would have been able to see more of the work that is being done. We have also been promised that the reports produced by the survey will be published.

I fear that our meetings with Ministers have been a record of evasion, pass the buck and less than the full truth. I know that my hon. Friends will recall that, on 16 October, we met the Secretary of State for Defence. To give the right hon. Gentleman some credit—I am trying to be balanced—he speedily agreed to the meeting. I accept that, and I pay tribute to him for it. It was a courteous meeting and, we thought at the time, a useful one. The following day we met the Minister for Industry and Energy.

However, we found out afterwards that although they knew at the time of the meeting, neither of the Ministers told us that the Ministry of Defence had opposed the gas pipeline route from the start. That is an important point for the Minister who will answer the debate. The Ministry of Defence was against the route because it knew that it was too dangerous. Only after our meeting with the Minister for Industry and Energy did the BBC reveal that fact. Moreover, the Secretary of State for Defence did not tell us about the prohibition notice that had been put on the pipeline work because of concern that had been expressed about it.

The reaction of British Gas was the worst of all; indeed, it was outrageous. The company continued to deny that there was any connection between its pipe-laying activities and the incendiaries. To anyone with any clear understanding of the situation, that is unbelievable.

In tomorrow's *New Scientist*, marine laboratory scientists will be directly quoted as saying that it is now beyond reasonable doubt that the pipeline laying was responsible for disturbing the phosphorous incendiaries. So I hope that the Minister will not repeat the totally discredited statement that there is no evidence to show that the British Gas pipeline caused that problem. The scientists have looked at the dump and at the details of what is there, and have made some analysis of it. As a result, tomorrow's *New Scientist* article will also warn of potentially greater dangers in the area. I hope that the Minister will understand that when he considers what needs to be done.

While my hon. Friends and I were trying to get at the truth, British Gas ploughed ahead with the pipeline from dawn to dusk at double-quick speed, trying to get it

completed before there could be any further questions about the potential dangers to people in south-west Scotland. The pipeline is now complete, but the crucial factor is that it still has to be commissioned for the passage of gas. That process must be approved by the Health and Safety Executive and the Department of Trade and Industry, and it must be considered extremely carefully. My hon. Friends and I will keep a close and vigilant eye on the matter.

As I have said, British Gas has started drilling in that area, but the company also intends to drill in other parts of the area that have not yet been surveyed. I understand that other companies, such as oil companies, are interested in drilling, also in areas not yet surveyed. Yet we now know that munitions were dumped outside the permitted areas. Disturbing any of those dumps will certainly be dangerous, and could be catastrophic.

That brings me finally to the questions, concerns and doubts that I shall put directly to the Minister. I hope that he will try to answer them today, but that if he cannot do so, I shall receive a written reply later.

The Minister of State for the Armed Forces (Mr. Nicholas Soames) *indicated assent.*

Mr. Foulkes: First, the House needs to know why the Ministry of Defence originally objected to the British Gas pipeline route. What dangers did it foresee? Can we be told clearly? The Ministry of Defence is responsible for the dump, knew the dangers and told British Gas, the Department of Trade and Industry and the Health and Safety Executive about them. On what evidence was that based?

Equally, and perhaps more importantly, we need to know why the MOD's objection to the route was withdrawn. What evidence was given to counter its original concerns, and who provided it? Was it provided by British Gas alone? I think that it was. I believe that evidence from British Gas alone was used to give the clearance. If so, I suspect that such evidence should be examined most carefully.

We need to know how the original fears and concerns of the Ministry of Defence were answered. We also need to know why the Secretary of State for Defence did not tell us about the Ministry of Defence's fears. Why did the Secretary of State not come clean with us? Why did he not say that the Ministry of Defence did not like the proposal and opposed the route right from the start? The right hon. Gentleman must have known that. He cannot say—as he did when we asked him why he had not told us about the prohibition notice—that we never asked about it. We were asking questions about matters we were aware of, but we were also expressing general concerns. If the Secretary of State knew about the Ministry's fears, he should have given that information to us. We were asking not just for the truth, but for the whole truth, and we certainly did not get that on that occasion.

We need to know the basis on which the prohibition notice was imposed. I understand that some concerns were expressed by European Marine Contractors about safety, and I know that 25 workers on the contractors' ship faxed their headquarters to express their concerns. Other concerns must have been expressed, and we need to know why the prohibition notice was put on. More importantly, we need to know why it was taken off. Why did the genuine fears of the work force and others evaporate a few days later?

I suspect that commercial pressure was given greater consideration than public safety. My hon. Friends who went to the meeting with British Gas will recall that the chief executive of Premier TransCo, Mr. McConnachie, revealed that British Gas was behind schedule with the pipe laying. British Gas is worried about its profits going down because of the hot summer and the warm winter, and there are commercial pressures on the company. *[Interruption.]* The Under-Secretary of State for Scotland understands as well as I do the importance of speaking with one's hands as well as with one's voice. The commercial pressures that were on British Gas could have been one of the major factors in the lifting of the prohibition notice.

I want to raise the question of the current marine laboratory survey. *[Interruption.]* I am sure that hon. Members will have an opportunity to speak, since the Adjournment debate can go on to half-past 10 if the House wishes. I am not trying to prolong the debate, but there is time for other Members to speak.

I went to see the marine laboratory survey at Ardrossan, and I was impressed by the equipment and by what the scientists were doing—as far as it goes; but it does not go far enough. The survey surveys only what is on top of the sea bed, when the real danger for those involved in drilling, trenching and pipe laying is what lies below the sediment and below 40 or 50 years of marine growth. The scientists told me that that cannot be detected with the equipment that they have at the moment.

I was told that a much more sophisticated sonar system called acoustic profiling would be one way of improving the survey, and that a laser-enhanced television system would be another. Both systems are needed, and that equipment could be made available for a few thousand pounds—perhaps tens of thousands—from the Scottish Office budget. What is a few thousand pounds compared to the safety of the public and the potential loss of life which could occur if such surveys are not undertaken?

Operators have a responsibility to undertake surveys, and the House has a responsibility to require them to do so. I hope that the Minister will give an assurance that a proper enhanced survey will be undertaken. If that cannot be done now, the Earl of Lindsay has said that it might be possible to consider an enhanced survey when the next survey is due to be carried out. That will move things forward. I hope that the Minister will also consider having more co-ordination with the Institute of Oceanographic Science and relevant Government agencies, and with the world-renowned Institute of Offshore Engineering at Heriot-Watt university.

I make this plea from the heart on behalf of those of us who traipsed from one Department to another. We told the then Minister responsible for energy that it was essential that the Ministry of Defence, the Department of Trade and Industry, the Department of the Environment and the Scottish Office co-ordinated their activities in such an area. If it had not been for our pressure, some of the co-ordination and contact that took place would not have taken place and that was necessary.

Genuine public and parliamentary concern has been expressed at public meetings that have taken place in Dumfries and Stranraer; others are scheduled to take place in Girvan on 30 November and in Kirkcudbright on 1 December. Those meetings have been arranged spontaneously by local groups concerned about the matter.

[Mr. Foulkes]

Those groups will be concerned about future activities. First, there is the commissioning of the gas pipeline that I mentioned earlier to take place in the spring. That is one area where we shall keep a constant vigil. Secondly, there is drilling in areas beyond the present area that has been surveyed. Thirdly, there is the electricity interconnector. I do not want that to go ahead—this is an extra reason why it should not go ahead—but if it does, the survey must be undertaken and the dangers eliminated.

Any further commercial activity that is considered for the area needs to be considered very carefully in the light of all the potential dangers. We do not want to frighten away tourists by having a dangerous area. We want it cleared up and sorted out so that the tourists know that the danger has gone. We do not want to stop commercial activity which can bring wealth and prosperity to people in the south-west of Scotland and Northern Ireland. Before that commercial activity goes ahead, we want to ensure that it goes ahead safely and without any danger to either the work force or the public.

As I said earlier, there has been too much evasion, buck-passing and lack of honesty. We seek openness, clear accountability and, above all, action to ensure that in this issue, public safety is given top priority.

9.46 pm

Mrs. Ray Michie (Argyll and Bute): I am grateful to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and to my hon. Friend the Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes), for allowing me a few minutes this evening. I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing the debate on a subject that has exercised our minds and been a source of considerable anxiety to me and my constituents during the past weeks.

I believe that the Minister is aware of my interest in the matter, and I am sure that he will pleased to know that my young four-year-old constituent who was injured by one of the phosphorous devices is making good progress. I, too, pay tribute to the emergency services and to the doctors and nurses at the hospital who tended him.

The Secretary of State for Defence, in his letter to me today, says that the devices are likely to be the

"flammable fills of British World War II incendiary bombs."

If anything more is to be dumped at sea, that serves as a warning that lessons must be learned for the future, because we do not necessarily know how what is dumped will react, how it will decompose, and how it will come back to haunt us in 30 to 40 years. We cannot continue to regard the oceans as a convenient dustbin for anything and everything.

The Secretary of State goes on to say:

"To date, we have been unable to trace any records of this type of incendiary bomb being disposed of in Beauforts Dyke."

I have been told that the Royal Air Force was also dumping in the area, and I wonder whether the Minister can throw any light on that suggestion, particularly as the bombs were used by the RAF.

The other day, an anonymous caller telephoned me to tell me that there had been dumping opposite Cairn Ryan pier. Very often, because of the type of craft used, people could not go out, or did not want to go out, to the approved dumping site when storms were brewing. It was a case of, "Put it in a box, tie it with a ribbon and dump it in the deep blue sea."

Other people believe that, in view of the fact that 4,000 devices have been washed up, they did not come from the inside of incendiary bombs, but might have been surplus to requirements and dumped in drums that subsequently corroded. Is it possible that some other country could have dumped them? If so, which one and when? I wonder whether the Ministry of Defence has any light to cast on that possibility.

While I welcome the survey, it needs to be as extensive as possible. Most particularly, as I am sure the Minister will agree, any future commercial activity of the type mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley, such as laying electricity cables or drilling for oil and gas, should be preceded by an in-depth study of the relevant sea bed area.

What has been disappointing is that it has been so difficult to extract information from Government Departments—like trying to extract blood from a stone. At the very least, there seemed to be a lack of urgency. When we met the Secretary of State for Defence, why did he not tell us that the Ministry of Defence had warned against laying a gas line through the munitions dump? Did he really not know, or did he not want to say?

I am concerned for the safety of my constituents, the Clyde fishermen, the Navy and the submarines that exercise in the area, and for the good name of the west coast of Scotland. Any damage done to the marine environment or to the beaches will do damage to the whole area as we try to promote it as a clean, non-polluted and lovely part of Scotland.

9.51 pm

Sir Hector Monro (Dumfries): I am grateful to have the opportunity to say a few words from the Conservative Benches, because it is important that the constituents of Dumfries and of Galloway and Upper Nithsdale realise that we too are concerned about the events of recent weeks. I shall look forward to hearing what my hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces can tell us about recent developments.

I appreciate and welcome the fact that the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes) had a meeting in my constituency, although at the time I was at Arlington cemetery for the ceremonies for the Lockerbie disaster.

While expressing concern as to what is going on, however, we should not go to the extent of causing alarm, until we have found out the reason for the appearance of the incendiaries, which largely landed up in the constituency of the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute (Mrs. Michie).

It may be circumstantial evidence, but the incendiaries have lain on the sea bed for 50 years, until we started to plough it up, which makes me think that that might be why they have come to the surface after such a long time. I hope that the videos taken by the scientific staff working on the survey ship will disclose whether ploughing has disturbed ammunition and other explosives on the sea bed, and whether the incendiaries, which are lighter, have floated with the strong tide and currents in that part of the world, on to the Ayrshire and Argyll coasts.

I look forward to hearing what my hon. Friend the Minister has to say about the latest state of play and the latest information, whether from the Ministry of Defence or the Scottish Office. Like the other hon. Members present, I must point out that there has been some concern about getting a co-ordinated response from the Government on such an important issue.

Finally, I would like to echo the tribute that the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley paid to the local services for going into action at once to deal with the incendiaries on the beach, to minimise any further accidents that might have occurred. With such a large number on the beach, we are fortunate indeed that so few serious accidents took place.

I want the whole matter to be cleared up as soon as possible, so that, as the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley said, any concerns that those involved with future development and expansion on the mainland may have had about the matter will be swept aside, and a clean bill of health can be given to the Clyde estuary, right round into the Solway firth. The sooner that we can get that information, the better. All the fears, which are justified at the moment, will then be allayed.

9.55 pm

The Minister of State for the Armed Forces (Mr. Nicholas Soames): I begin by congratulating the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes) on securing the first Adjournment debate of the new Session—I cannot think of anyone whom I would rather see get it.

I welcome the remarks of the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute (Mrs. Michie) and of my right hon. Friend the Member for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro). I wholly understand and endorse their concerns. I declare an interest in that part of the world as I have known bits of it extremely well in my capacity as a highly itinerant sportsman. I share their concern that the matter should be resolved.

I understand the comments of my right hon. Friend the Member for Dumfries who, as a distinguished and long-serving former Minister, will understand the difficulties that arise when more than one Department is engaged on a matter as complex as this. It seems as though co-ordination is not as good as it could be. I assure my right hon. Friend, as he will know and as I hope Opposition Members realise, that the co-ordination and co-operation between Departments has been extremely close.

I reassure the hon. Members for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley and for Argyll and Bute that all the matters that they have raised with which I do not deal in my speech, and those that relate to other Government Departments, will be dealt with comprehensively by letter tomorrow and we will let the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley have a more detailed reply about the assurance that he wanted.

I have listened carefully to the speech of the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley and I share his and his colleagues' legitimate concern about the phosphorous canisters that have been washed up on the beaches of that beautiful part of the world. The hon. Gentleman has been extremely assiduous in investigating the issues surrounding the matter, as all who know him would expect. I know that, along with a delegation of other hon. Members, he met my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on 17 October. Further to that meeting, my right hon. Friend today wrote to those hon. Members with all the details that we have been able to gather on military sea dumping operations at Beaufort's dyke.

I welcome the recognition of the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley of the excellent work of the emergency services, which was wholly endorsed by the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland, my hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen, South (Mr. Robertson). Other hon. Members have praised the emergency services, especially the service ordnance disposal teams, for dealing with these items and safeguarding members of the public. I am extremely glad to hear from the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute that young Gordon Baillie is making good progress and that he was so well looked after.

I welcome this chance to try to restore a sense of proportion. The hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley made a very reasonable and measured speech, but this is a matter that leads to alarmist speculation and I should like to restore some sense of proportion to the debate and clarify the situation, in so far as we are able to do so.

The incidents have provoked a great deal of understandable but sometimes highly alarmist speculation about dumping at Beaufort's dyke and the hazard that poses to health and safety and the environment. Claims that my Department has been secretive about past sea dumping operations and allegations of looming environmental disasters are wholly untrue, as today's extensive release of information shows.

In common with our European counterparts, my Department no longer disposes of redundant munitions by sea dumping. We ended all sea dumping in October 1992 in line with various international conventions and agreements to which we are party. The agreements reflect an international wish to phase out most kinds of waste disposal in the marine environment. Although that is to be welcomed, it would be quite wrong to apply today's standards to the situation facing the Government and the country in the years after the second world war when most of the munitions were, of necessity, dumped in Beaufort's dyke.

At that time, the dumping of munitions in deep water was a reasonable, wholly accepted and welcome method of disposal. It was used by all the allied powers to reduce the vast quantities of munitions remaining in Europe when hostilities ceased. Anyone who knows, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Dumfries does, of the unbelievable scale of the munitions that were around at that time will understand the scale of the problem and the need of the Government of the day to try to secure a return to more sensible levels of ammunition. The scale of the problem was such that at the end of the war, there were almost 2 million tonnes of munitions stored in the United Kingdom. It was necessary to reduce this amount quickly and safely to peacetime levels.

It being Ten o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn—*[Mr. Bates.]*

Mr. Soames: There was never any secrecy about the dumping operations undertaken at Beaufort's dyke. A

[Mr. Soames]

notice to mariners showing the full extent of the dumping ground was issued in 1945. As hon. Members who represent the area know, the work of service men employed at Cairn Ryan and Silloth was well known. Of course, memories will have faded over the past 50 years, but *Hansard* records from the time show that the operations were by no means shrouded in secrecy and were, indeed, raised in the House.

Beaufort's dyke was our main sea dumping site for surplus and redundant munitions for many years. It was probably first used as early as 1920. With the exception of one emergency operation in 1976, dumping there ceased in 1973. We estimate that more than 1 million tonnes were disposed of at the site.

Surviving records confirm that between July and October 1945, some 14,600 tonnes of 5 in artillery rockets filled with phosgene were disposed of in Beaufort's dyke. There is, however, no evidence to suggest that any munitions containing nerve or biological warfare agents were dumped by my Department in Beaufort's dyke, the Irish sea or the north channel and we did not dispose of radioactive waste in those areas.

Part of Beaufort's dyke also operated as a licensed dump site for civil waste from 1974. My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland provided details in his written answer of 26 October to the hon. Member for South Down (Mr. McGrady). I assure the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley that before dumping operations took place, great care was taken to pack the material so that it would sink to the sea bed and stay there.

Where possible, fuses were removed to minimise the risk of detonation. The weight of the munition cases alone would ensure that the material would, over time, compact itself on the sea bed. The risk of explosion is at its greatest with fused munitions during and immediately after dumping. It is reduced substantially with the passage of time and the corrosion and decomposition of fusing mechanisms. Nevertheless, our advice remains that any munition on the sea bed is potentially dangerous and should be left well alone, hence the restrictions put in place in 1945 to stop disturbance of the site.

The combined effects of dilution, dispersion, hydrolysis and low temperatures act to reduce the toxic potential of conventional explosives and other munition materials. The conclusion of investigations carried out by the United States navy in the early 1970s at disused deep water dumps in the Atlantic was that long-term effects on the marine environment appeared to be minimal. Similar conclusions were reached by the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Fisheries for Scotland in 1990 after it completed a survey of the explosive waste disposal site in the Firth of Clyde.

The potential hazards of sea bed dump sites which contain chemical warfare munitions and the question of whether there is a need for remedial action have been considered by both the Helsinki and Oslo-Paris commissions. The results of this work have been reported to the London convention, which is the principal international forum concerned with the disposal of wastes at sea. The consensus of international scientific opinion based on this work is that such sites present no significant risk to human health or the marine environment if left undisturbed. Phosgene, the only chemical warfare agent known to have been disposed of in Beaufort's dyke, is destroyed by hydrolysis on contact with sea water and presents little risk to the marine environment.

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food undertakes an extensive monitoring programme for contaminants in the UK marine environment and the results are published annually. In a previous incarnation at the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, I saw a good deal of that work, particularly that undertaken in those days at the laboratory at Aberdeen. Its analyses of fish and crustacea to date show that where any contaminants can be detected, the levels involved give no cause for concern.

As part of this work, samples were taken from Beaufort's dyke dumping ground this summer. The preliminary results show no degradation in water quality. In addition, on Monday, the Scottish Office marine laboratory began a survey that will include underwater television studies of Beaufort's dyke dumping ground. We will, of course, keep the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley closely informed of how that work goes.

During the survey, sea bed sediment and commercially exploited fish and crustacea samples will be collected and examined for any contamination that may be related to dumped materials.

A further survey of the north channel will take place next year, and that may include further work at Beaufort's dyke. As the hon. Gentleman said, quite rightly, the focus of concern in recent weeks in his part of the world has, of course, been the beaching of large numbers of phosphorous-impregnated canisters on the beaches. Isolated examples of similar items have been washed ashore in Northern Ireland, the Isle of Man and on the western coast of Scotland for many years.

My Department and independent experts examined those objects in 1990, but at the time there was nothing to indicate that they had ever been issued to or used by the armed forces. Samples from the recent beachings did, however, provide evidence of a variety of munition features from which Ministry of Defence scientists have concluded that they are probably the solidified remains of the thickened flammable fills of British second world war incendiary bombs.

The effect of corrosion on the munition cases and chemical decomposition of the fillings, which usually lead to their breakdown and dispersal, have acted instead to make the fillings buoyant and therefore liable to float to the surface if disturbed.

The cause of this recent disturbance can only be a matter of conjecture, but there have been suggestions that recent pipeline work in the area was responsible. I would like to make it clear, however, that there is no direct evidence that this is the case. A contractor working for British Gas did, as the hon. Gentleman said, survey the proposed route north of the Beaufort's dyke dumping ground before the pipeline was laid and filmed metallic objects and other debris on the sea bed.

On 29 September, the contractor notified my Department that it intended to clear the proposed route. We advised against that in view of the possible risks to the pipe-laying vessel or other vessels in the vicinity, even though the material on the sea bed could not positively be identified from the available footage. However, and in

answer to one of the hon. Gentleman's questions, following confirmation that the Health and Safety Executive had accepted the company's own risk assessment for that work, and my Department having been satisfied that all appropriate measures had been taken to safeguard life and shipping, the work was allowed to continue.

The hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley is, of course, well aware of the survey that is currently being carried out by the Scottish Office, which is undertaking an underwater television survey of Beaufort's dyke dumping ground and is collecting samples from the sea bed for analysis.

I am plainly not in a position to comment further on that work, but I know that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland will ensure that the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley is kept informed of developments, as will my Department.

Procedures for dealing with old munitions that have been trawled up or washed ashore are well established. Appropriate guidance to fishermen is given in an annual notice to mariners and beached items are the responsibility of the police and local authorities, which call in Ministry of Defence explosive ordnance disposal teams when necessary.

The Clyde submarine base clearance diving unit, augmented when required by other military teams, has responded promptly to such requests on this latest occasion and will, of course, continue to undertake clearance work for as long as is necessary. Liaison between service units, the police and local authorities is being conducted at local level. Those arrangements have worked most efficiently, and I can assure the hon. Member that everything possible has been done to publicise the potential hazards posed by the phosphorous objects. In common with the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley, the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute and my right hon. Friend the Member for Dumfries, we should all congratulate them on their efforts. They have done very well indeed.

In addition to work by the Strathclyde police, all local head teachers have been advised to tell children not to handle any suspect objects or material. Local authorities have also placed clear warning signs on all affected beaches.

I assure the hon. Gentleman that my Department will continue to provide the police and local authorities with the expert advice and support that they need.

Finally, I should emphasise that my Department has made very considerable and real efforts to locate and release all or any material connected with its past sea dumping operations at Beaufort's dyke and other dumping grounds. As the hon. Gentleman was good enough to say, there are no grounds for accusations of secrecy, cover-ups or complacency. We are fully aware of how seriously the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues take that matter and, indeed, how seriously we take them.

The simple fact remains that many of the relevant records were destroyed many years ago because no purpose was then seen in their retention. What remains, we have released, and if we find any further records we shall release them.

The fact also remains that, although some danger is posed by material being washed up on beaches, a far greater danger would be posed if the dumped munitions were to be disturbed. The Government have instituted survey work, the outcome of which will inform any consideration of whether the current maritime restrictions in the area need to be strengthened or extended. We shall keep the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues wholly involved and up to date on those matters.

I hope that I have been able to give the hon. Gentleman, who mentioned the matter in a temperate and measured way, the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute and my right hon. Friend the Member for Dumfries some reassurance about old munitions dumps and Beaufort's dyke in particular. I do not underestimate their anxiety or the anxiety of people living in that part of the world. I am not in the least surprised to hear that there have been well-attended local meetings.

We must remember, however, that Beaufort's dyke is largely a legacy of a war that took place more than 50 years ago, and it is a fruitless exercise to make judgments with the benefit of hindsight on decisions and actions taken many years ago in circumstances very different from those of today.

That does not alter the fact that we understand the anxiety that has been expressed in the House tonight. The hon. Gentleman may be assured that he will receive by letter any answers that I have not given him but that he is owed. I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman, the hon. Lady and my right hon. Friend for discussing this extremely important matter in such a measured and sensible way.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at eleven minutes past Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 16 November 1995

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Business of the House

2.34 pm

Mrs. Ann Taylor (Dewsbury): May I ask the Leader of the House to give us the details of future business?

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Tony Newton): As the House is aware, the debate on the Address in reply to the Gracious Speech will be brought to a conclusion on Wednesday 22 November.

It may be helpful to remind the House of what you, Madam Speaker, said yesterday about the pattern of debate so that all the information about the next fortnight is conveniently available in one place. The debate today is on foreign affairs and defence. On Friday 17 November, it is on health; on Monday 20 November, on investment—that is trade, industry and transport; on Tuesday 21 November, on social affairs, embracing education and home affairs; and on Wednesday 22 November, on the economy.

The business for the three days following the conclusion of the debate on the humble Address will be as follows:

THURSDAY 23 NOVEMBER—Second Reading of the Chemical Weapons Bill.

Second Reading of the Hong Kong (Overseas Public Servants) Bill.

FRIDAY 24 NOVEMBER—Debate on earnings top-up on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

MONDAY 27 NOVEMBER—Second Reading of the Student Loans Bill.

TUESDAY 28 NOVEMBER—My right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer will open his Budget statement.

WEDNESDAY 29 NOVEMBER—Continuation of the Budget debate.

THURSDAY 30 NOVEMBER—Continuation of the Budget debate.

FRIDAY 1 DECEMBER—The House will not be sitting.

MONDAY 4 DECEMBER—Continuation of the Budget debate, which will be brought to a conclusion on Tuesday 5 December.

[Thursday 28 November: Budget Statement

The following document is relevant: The unnumbered explanatory memorandum submitted by Her Majesty's Treasury on 26 July 1995 relating to the Council recommendation to the United Kingdom with a view to bringing an end to the situation of an excessive deficit in the United Kingdom, prepared in regard to Article 104c(7) of the Treaty establishing the European Community.]

Mrs. Taylor: I thank the Leader of the House for that information. During the last parliamentary Session, he assisted Members very much by giving early notice of business and recess dates. I hope that, in the spirit of Jopling, he will be able to do that and to improve on it during this Session.

With regard to next week's business, may I ask the Leader of the House about the debate on Wednesday morning on water supplies in west Yorkshire, a debate in which, of course, I have a special interest? Will the Leader of the House ensure that a senior Minister responds to that debate, because Yorkshire Water has shown itself to be utterly incapable of dealing with the crisis? We need to hear what action Ministers intend to take to ensure that water supplies remain available to my constituents and people throughout west Yorkshire and to local industry. Will the Leader of the House take steps to ensure that we get not just sympathy from Ministers, but action to tackle the crisis?

The Chemical Weapons Bill has its Second Reading on Thursday 23 November. The Leader of the House will be aware that there is a general welcome for this measure. Will he confirm that the Bill will be committed to a Committee of the whole House following Second Reading as that would meet with the general approval of Members on both sides of the House?

On Monday 27 November, the Leader of the House has announced the Second Reading of the Student Loans Bill. Will he confirm that the proposed student loans legislation will be an enabling Bill, and that its implementation will consist of nothing less than an auction among the banks to try to find someone to finance the scheme? In light of the banks' rejection of the previous Government-inspired private student loans system, should not Ministers satisfy themselves that the latest scheme commands enough support to be viable before introducing the Bill? Or is this another example of the Government legislating in haste only to repent at leisure later?

Finally, on the matter of the asylum Bill, the Leader of the House will be aware that the Prime Minister said yesterday

> "In the interests of good race relations, I will ensure that we have a fair system of asylum—fair for those who need help, and fair for those who do not believe that this country should receive bogus asylum seekers either."—[*Official Report*, 15 November 1995; Vol. 267, c. 30.]

As that is common ground, and especially as the Government are introducing the legislation a mere two years after the last asylum Bill, would not it be wise to ensure that Parliament gets this attempt at legislation right? Will the Leader of the House give full and proper consideration to the constructive proposal made yesterday by my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition—which, I understand, some Conservative Members also consider worthy of serious consideration—that the Bill should be considered by a Special Standing Committee?

Mr. Newton: It may be convenient if I take those questions in reverse order.

Of course I recall the exchanges yesterday, and I remind the hon. Lady of what my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said about considering what the Leader

[Mr. Newton]

of the Opposition said. That consideration will be given. However, I am not in a position this afternoon to add to what my right hon. Friend said.

The hon. Lady or other hon. Members will have their opportunity to develop their arguments on the Student Loans Bill in due course, but the Bill will be designed to provide a better loans system and a better deal for students, and I hope that the private sector institutions will take advantage of the opportunity that we plan to provide.

On the Chemical Weapons Bill, I hope that I may take the hon. Lady's remarks as a more public than usual representation through the usual channels about the way in which business should be handled. I would expect to respond positively; that is to say, we shall propose that the other stages beyond Second Reading are taken on the Floor of the House.

On water, I had noted the debate next Wednesday, which I believe is in the name of the hon. Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon). I am not in the business of ordering my colleagues about, but I will bring the hon. Lady's request to the attention of my colleagues in the Department of the Environment. I hope that it will be recognised that a massive operation has been mounted to move water into that region by tankers—probably the largest exercise of its type ever undertaken.

I had harboured some ambitions of announcing the dates of the Christmas and Easter recesses today. Those have been frustrated by one or two bits of further consideration that we need to give, but I shall use, as the phrase goes, my best endeavours to say something at the conclusion of the debate on the Address next week.

Sir Peter Emery (Honiton): Will my right hon. Friend take into consideration the recommendation of the Procedure Committee, which affects the debates on the Queen's Speech and on the Budget? The Committee felt most strongly that, now that the Budget is no longer in March or early April, there is a considerable need for a two-day debate on the economy at that time, and that we could find the time for such a debate by cutting a day off the Budget debate and a day off the debate on the Queen's Speech. Can my right hon. Friend carry that further, perhaps through the usual channels, so that he can give us an assurance when he next comes to the Dispatch Box?

Mr. Newton: I am not sure that I will be able to give any assurance the next time that I come to the Dispatch Box, but I will discover whether it is possible, through the usual channels, to give further consideration to that very constructive suggestion.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): Following the answer that the Leader of the House gave about water, will he acknowledge that anxiety exists on both sides of the House—and is widespread throughout the country—about the regulation of all the privatised utilities? Will he give us an undertaking that there will be a statement and, if possible, a debate following, specifically, the Ofwat criticisms, which appear to suggest that at least three water companies and sewerage companies are "cheating their customers"? Will he acknowledge that that is a matter of considerable concern?

No reference was made to that matter in the Gracious Speech, so we would have difficulty introducing it in the current debate. Does it not demand a debate on a wider scale than the one that has been mentioned, which is simply about Yorkshire? In that connection, perhaps the Leader of the House would like to read early-day motion 37:

[*That this House notes the criticisms made by the Director of Water Services of the management of North West Water, South West Water and Yorkshire Water; especially notes the application by the latter company for a 24 hour drought order, potentially leaving half a million domestic customers and many industrial users without water, despite promises to reduce leakage and introduce a grid to improve the supply; believes that all three water and sewerage companies should be the subject of a full public investigation under the auspices of the Environment Select Committee; and urges the Government to review the powers of the regulator, particularly with reference to penalising companies for inadequate performance with mandatory compensation payments.*]

Mr. Newton: I have had a quick glance at early-day motion 37. However, I would not want to add to what I said earlier about next week's debate. It seems to me that the first thing to do is to hold that debate.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): When, as we hope, my right hon. Friend gives us the details of recesses on Wednesday next week, will he also try to list the sitting and non-sitting Fridays? Will he also bear it in mind that there is a great deal to be said for the Special Standing Committee procedure; and that all ideas proffered from the Opposition Front Bench are not necessarily bad ones?

Mr. Newton: I shall respond to my hon. Friend in a way that he will find appropriate. Of course I acknowledge his last point. *[Interruption.]* My confrontational colleague from Essex, the hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay), regards that as such an inflammatory comment that he wants me to resign. I have no intention of resigning for being reasonable. The hon. Gentleman has now distracted me so much that I cannot remember what my hon. Friend asked me—

Sir Patrick Cormack: About the Fridays.

Mr. Newton: My hon. Friend can take it that the House will invited to agree those arrangements before too long.

Mr. Gerald Bermingham (St. Helens, South): The Leader of the House will no doubt have noted that, between the prorogation of the last Parliament and the start of this one, the Court of Appeal delivered its judgment in the case of Ordtech, for which an appeal was allowed. In that case it was shown that ministerial certificates denied the defence the documents necessary to conduct the defence, which led to a suspended sentence being imposed on a number of persons. Should we not debate, as a matter of urgency, the fact that ministerial decisions of this kind—whether or not misleading Parliament over Iraqi arms sales—seem to outweigh the interests of justice?

Mr. Newton: In view of the tenor of the hon. Gentleman's remarks, he will not expect me to accept the basis of his question; but with, I hope, my usual reasonableness and courtesy I shall of course reflect on what he has said.

Dame Jill Knight (Birmingham, Edgbaston): Will my right hon. Friend consider, in the light of a certain incident

yesterday, the advisability of holding an early debate on the security of Members who are pursuing their perfectly legitimate and legal duties while talking to the media on College Green?

Mr. Newton: My hon. Friend's remarks clearly drew an echo from other parts of the Chamber. That is not of course a matter for me alone: it is for the House authorities in a much wider sense. But I think it will be right to give some consideration to our arrangements in the light of what happened yesterday.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): I agree with the representations from the hon. Member for South Staffordshire (Sir P. Cormack) about using the Special Standing Committee procedure for the asylum Bill. Is not the right hon. Gentleman aware that it covers a highly sensitive issue for many people in many parts of the country? Furthermore, as the Prime Minister himself said, this should not be and will not be a party political matter. Does the right hon. Gentleman recall that the Procedure Committee of 1976 to 1978, which introduced Select Committees, commended this very procedure for such a Bill? If it is not adopted, the matter will not be dealt with in the way the country believes it deserves to be.

Mr. Newton: Of course I note what the hon. Gentleman says, but I cannot add at this stage to what I said when responding to the hon. Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor).

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): Will my right hon. Friend consider holding a debate next week on equal opportunities, in the light of a flagrant example of sex discrimination in my constituency: the national imposition of a women-only shortlist on my constituency Labour party? It will not surprise my right hon. Friend to know that, as a good constituency Member, I raised the matter with the competent authorities. I wrote to the Leader of the Opposition, only to receive a reply from some junior spin doctor who did not answer my constituents' questions and who just swept the matter under the carpet. Why should Labour voters in my constituency be confined to choosing a candidate from a minority of potential candidates?

Mr. Newton: I cannot provide an answer to the last part of my hon. Friend's question. Indeed, I rather doubt whether Labour Front-Bench spokesmen can either—even if they want to. I will only observe that I find that large numbers of women are offended by sex-based shortlists.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): In view of the vote that was taken in the House on 6 November about financial disclosure arising from the Nolan report and the fact that a number of Conservative Members have said that they will not observe the resolution of the House, will there be an early statement about what will occur if hon. Members refuse to obey the instructions of the House? Should we not make it perfectly clear that the resolution that was passed on 6 November must be implemented in full?

Mr. Newton: The hon. Gentleman knows that that is not a question for me, but it might be put to the Committee on Standards and Privileges when it is established—I hope fairly swiftly.

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): Will my right hon. Friend allow time for a debate on inward investment, which has provided tens of thousands of jobs in this country and transformed whole sectors of British industry? Does he believe that we would attract more or less inward investment if we signed up to the social chapter and to a national minimum wage?

Mr. Newton: The answer to the last part of my hon. Friend's question is that clearly we would attract less inward investment—probably a lot less—in those circumstances. I welcome the latest significant investment, the Chunghwa project, which is a big coup for both Scotland and the United Kingdom.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): While welcoming the forthcoming Chemical Weapons Bill, may I ask the Leader of the House to provide some guidance on whether the Government will make an early statement about the misuse and abuse of Internet? It can be used to pass messages in support of terrorism, as was witnessed in the mathematics department of the university of Texas, and the problem has not yet been rectified.

Mr. Newton: I am not aware of any plans for an early statement about the matter, but I shall bring the hon. Gentleman's question to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Heritage Secretary, and my right hon. and learned Friends the Home Secretary and the Northern Ireland Secretary.

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cirencester and Tewkesbury): Will my right hon. Friend reject the advice, which is coming mainly from the Opposition Benches, that the asylum Bill should be committed to a Special Standing Committee? If we stick to the usual Standing Committee procedure, we will demonstrate that the Opposition are not only soft on crime but soft on the bogus asylum seekers who are coming into this country.

Mr. Newton: As I have said to Opposition Members, I note my hon. Friend's point but I cannot add to what I said to the hon. Member for Dewsbury.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Why cannot the Leader of the House allow time for another statement about the Nolan committee? Why cannot the committee meet again before the next general election to discuss the funding of political parties? The people want to know before the next general election what the Tory party did with the £440,000 that Asil Nadir gave to it before he jumped bail. How did he get to Cyprus? Did someone help him? What about all the other money from the Greek colonels, the Chinese and the rest of them? Is it not important that, before we have the historic vote in the next general election, the public should know exactly where the money is coming from?

Mr. Newton: I shall treat the hon. Gentleman's comments as an open letter to Lord Nolan, as clearly the timing and the nature of the committee's meetings are for him and not for me to decide.

Mr. Michael Fabricant (Mid-Staffordshire): Further to the interesting point raised by the hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick), may we have an early debate on the practical workings of Nolan? I notice that today's Order Paper contains an amendment about local authority and trade union rights and global capitalism—so much for new Labour—that has been tabled by 15 hon. Members, at least nine of whom belong to trade unions such as the National Union of Public Employees, the

[Mr. Michael Fabricant]

National Union of Mineworkers, Unison, the MSF and the Transport and General Workers Union. None of those hon. Members has an "R" against his or her name, in contradiction of the Nolan requirements.

Mr. Newton: That is an interesting point and it is the first time that it has been brought to my attention. The newly appointed Commissioner for Parliamentary Standards took up his post yesterday and my hon. Friend may wish to bring the matter to his attention.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): As someone who is not sponsored by a trade union, I impress upon the Leader of the House the urgent need for an early debate on the Government's implementation of the recommendations contained in Lord Donaldson's report, entitled "Safer Ships, Cleaner Seas". Are not the Government ducking some very important issues, including the need to confine large vessels—especially tankers—to the deep water route west of the Western Isles? May I tell the right hon. Gentleman that Lord Donaldson was wholly wrong when he said that such vessels could use the Minch in exceptional weather? In heavy weather, those and other large vessels should stay west of the Western Isles in deep water.

Mr. Newton: The best thing for me to say, appreciating the hon. Gentleman's reasons for raising the matter, is that I shall draw it to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport, who is due to answer questions on Monday 27 November. I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman's introductory remarks were a plea for sympathy or support, but I offer him my sympathy if he wishes to have it.

Mr. Patrick Thompson (Norwich, North): Will my right hon. Friend arrange for an early debate on the treatment of war pensioners, particularly the payment of benefit to them? It would provide an opportunity for myself and others to draw attention to the mean behaviour of Labour-controlled Norwich city council, which refused to disregard war pensions when calculating benefits. I hope that my right hon. Friend will help with such a debate.

Mr. Newton: I shall bring my hon. Friend's remarks to attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security. No doubt, either by this exchange or in other ways, my hon. Friend will draw his remarks to the attention of the relevant council.

Mr. George Mudie (Leeds, East): Does the Lord President understand the disappointment felt by thousands of haemophiliacs who received impure blood from the national health service and have the additional affliction of hepatitis C? The Lord President has always shown genuine sympathy when the matter has been raised. Will he now use his real influence to find time for a debate on this important matter?

Mr. Newton: I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's reference to me. As he knows, I was the Minister for Health when the problems first arose in relation to AIDS and haemophilia, but he will understand that my right course is to draw those remarks to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health.

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): May I add my voice to the remarks of my hon. Friends the Members for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor) and for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) and the hon. Member for South Staffordshire (Sir P. Cormack) in support of a Special Standing Committee for the latest asylum and immigration Bill? That would be in the best interests of obtaining a calm and informed public debate on the issues.

As a very dissatisfied customer of Yorkshire Water, may I declare that interest and urge the Leader of the House to ensure that the Environment Minister who replies to the debate on Wednesday will announce that every necessary action will be taken to ensure that there are no interruptions to the water supply in any part of Yorkshire and that there will be a wholly independent public inquiry into the mismanagement and total incompetence of Yorkshire Water and several other water companies, as the matter is now of widespread public concern?

Mr. Newton: I note the hon. Gentleman's remarks on both points. He will realise by now that I have little alternative but, to use a time-hallowed phrase, to refer him to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton): May we have a statement on the comment by the President of the Board of Trade to the CBI that job insecurity is just a state of mind? It certainly matters to millions of people in Britain who are worried about their employment and their future. Is it just in the Government's mind that job insecurity does not matter?

Mr. Newton: What is in the Government's mind is to pursue policies that will further strengthen the economic recovery that is under way and address the concerns to which the hon. Gentleman has referred.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): When may we have a debate on early-day motion 1?

[That this House supports Bristol Coroner Paul Forrest's call of 14th November 1995 for a ban on bull bars at the inquest on Helen Baggs aged 10 of Melksham who was killed by a Land Rover fitted with bull bars; believes that many deaths and serious injuries would have been avoided if the Government and the European Commission had swiftly acted to ban bull bar fashion accessories that concentrate and multiply the force of collisions at the level of a child's head.]

The Bristol coroner, Mr. Paul Forrest, has demanded a ban on bull bars. He was speaking the day before yesterday on the inquest on 10-year-old Helen Baggs, who was killed by a bull bar in July. Helen's mother said that the House moved very swiftly when there were a number of attacks on children by dangerous dogs. She is aware that the matter has been raised in the House on many occasions over the past two years by Members on both sides of the House and the Government have done nothing. She rightly asks how many more children must die before the Government act.

Mr. Newton: The Government share the concern of the Bristol coroner and that of the hon. Gentleman that aggressive bull bars are likely to compromise road safety. The hon. Gentleman should know, if he does not already, that my hon. Friend the Minister responsible for road safety recently met Commissioner Kinnock to agree a way forward. It was agreed that the only effective solution was an amendment to the external projections directive by the European Union. Commissioner Kinnock promised to

take that forward. The Government continue to discourage manufacturers from providing bull bars and vehicle owners from using them.

Mr. Gordon Prentice (Pendle): My hon. Friend the Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) mentioned job insecurity. Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that 129 people in Trawden in my constituency have been told that they will lose their jobs in January when Beartex, which supplies blue chip companies such as Marks and Spencer, closes down? Is there not a case for an urgent debate on the textile industry to ascertain what we can do to ensure a level playing field so that skilled and dedicated workers like the people in Trawden, who have much to contribute, are not thrown on the scrap heap?

Mr. Newton: With all Members, I regret any development of the sort to which the hon. Gentleman has referred in his constituency, as we would regret it in any of ours. As I am not familiar with the background in detail, I shall bring the hon. Gentleman's question to the attention of my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade.

Mr. Peter Hain (Neath): During Monday's debate on investment, the President of the Board of Trade should make a grovelling apology for his statement that job insecurity is a state of mind. Does the Leader of the House agree that the statement was an insult to millions of people who live in constant fear of losing their jobs as well as to the millions more who do not have a job? Surely it is time for such an apology to be made to the House.

Mr. Newton: I expect my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade, when he speaks on Monday, to repeat what I said to the hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen): that it is the Government's purpose further to strengthen Britain's economy by, for example, attracting overseas investment, as we have been doing extremely successfully, and thus address the concerns to which reference has been made.

Mr. Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): When a Law Commission Bill is referred to a Second Reading Committee, will the Leader of the House ensure that he draws attention to such a referral when making his business statement? Will he adopt the same practice when the Second Reading debates on consolidation Bills are moved forthwith? Does he understand that the recent changes to our Standing Orders will diminish the opportunities for Members to be aware that such proposed legislation is to pass through the House? Unless we want to reduce ourselves to rubber stamps, we need full notice that this business is to come before us.

Will the proposed divorce legislation come before us as a Law Commission Bill? If so, will it be considered by a Second Reading Committee?

Mr. Newton: The proposed divorce legislation will come before the House as a public Bill in the ordinary way and will be subject to the ordinary processes of such Bills. That has arisen precisely because a Bill that had been put through a procedure intended for non-controversial legislation transpired to be regarded by some as controversial. That is reasonably clear.

Not even my ambitions run to reducing the hon. Gentleman to a rubber stamp, but I shall bear in mind his suggestion.

Mr. John Marshall: On a point of order, Madam Speaker. May I seek your guidance? As my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Staffordshire (Mr. Fabricant) said, nine of the Members who signed a motion on trade union rights are trade union-sponsored. What can the House authorities do about this sleaze?

Madam Speaker: I can deal with the matter. I think that it was said that the Members concerned were members of trade unions, not sponsored. I shall examine the matter carefully. I think that the Leader of the House replied absolutely correctly. If there is any doubt, we have employed a parliamentary commissioner to deal with these matters instead of dealing with them by means of points of order.

BILLS PRESENTED

Hong Kong (Overseas Public Servants)

Mr. Secretary Rifkind, supported by Mr. William Waldegrave, Mr. Roger Freeman and Mr. Jeremy Hanley, presented a Bill to confer power to make provision for the making of payments to, and to permit early retirement by, certain Hong Kong overseas public servants; to authorise the provision of resettlement services to certain Hong Kong overseas public servants who retire early; and to confer power to make provision for the making in certain circumstances of payments to supplement pensions and gratuities paid to or in respect of retired overseas public servants in respect of service in Hong Kong: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time tomorrow and to be printed. [Bill 1.]

Chemical Weapons

Mr. Secretary Lang, supported by the Prime Minister, Mr. Secretary Rifkind, Secretary Sir Patrick Mayhew, Mr. Secretary Portillo, Mr. Secretary Forsyth, Mr. Secretary Hague and Mr. Phillip Oppenheim, presented a Bill to promote the control of chemical weapons and of certain toxic chemicals and precursors; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time tomorrow and to be printed. [Bill 2.]

Audit (Miscellaneous Provisions)

Mr. Secretary Gummer, supported by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mrs. Secretary Shephard, Mr. Secretary Dorrell, Mr. Secretary Forsyth, Mr. Secretary Hague and Sir Paul Beresford, presented a Bill to extend the functions of the Audit Commission for Local Authorities and the National Health Service in England and Wales; to alter the financial year of that Commission and of the Accounts Commission for Scotland; and to make provision about the manner of publication of certain information required to be published in pursuance of a direction of either Commission: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time tomorrow and to be printed. [Bill 3.]

Orders of the Day

Debate on the Address

[SECOND DAY]

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Question,

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, as follows:—

Most Gracious Sovereign,

We, Your Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Parliament assembled, beg leave to offer our humble thanks to Your Majesty for the Gracious Speech which Your Majesty has addressed to both Houses of Parliament.—*[Mr. Hurd.]*

Question again proposed.

Foreign Affairs and Defence

3.4 pm

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Malcolm Rifkind): The debate on the Loyal Address began yesterday with a contribution from my right hon. Friend the Member for Witney (Mr. Hurd), my predecessor as Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs. I should like to use this opportunity to place on record what I believe to be the very great debt that this country owes to my right hon. Friend, whom I believe was one of our great Foreign Secretaries and an international statesman of the highest repute. Now, sadly, he suffers the fate of all retired Foreign Ministers and ambassadors: when he gets into the back of his car, he finds that it does not go anywhere.

The debate yesterday on the Gracious Speech concentrated—quite properly—on the domestic issues that deeply divide the nation and the political parties. Traditionally, while bipartisan policies are pursued in many areas, in foreign policy, there is less fundamental disagreement. Whether Governments come or go, the interests of the country do not change, and that is reflected in many aspects of our foreign policy. Towards the end of my remarks this afternoon, I shall draw attention to what I believe are differences in that matter in three important respects: the extent to which, on all the great and fundamental issues that have divided the country on foreign policy, the Labour party, since the days of Ernest Bevin, has been wrong—by its own admission—*[Interruption.]* I said since the death of Ernest Bevin. I pay very great tribute to Ernest Bevin, who was a realist, a patriot and never ceased to fight for the interests of the country. I am afraid that that is more than can be said for many of his successors.

I also wish to draw attention to the clear unwillingness of hon. Members on the Opposition Front Bench to accept the need to fight for Britain's interests whenever that might mean that we stand alone, and I wish to draw attention to the growing divergences on certain fundamental aspects of European policy.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West) *rose—*

Mr. Rifkind: I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman later in my speech. Until then, he must wait in eager anticipation. In the meantime, I shall comment on a number of important issues on which I believe that there will be a substantial measure of agreement on both sides of the House.

I shall start with the situation in the middle east following the tragic assassination of Yitzhak Rabin. A week ago, His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and I, accompanied by the Leader of the Opposition and the leader of the Liberal Democrat party, represented this country at Mr. Rabin's funeral. There is a clear appreciation that he was a man of extraordinary ability and talent. I draw attention to particular aspects of his character that are of crucial significance to the future of the middle east. I believe that he was uniquely able to inspire trust, both from his own people in order that certain concessions be made and from the traditional enemies of his country, and that has enabled great progress to be made.

Mr. Rabin was also a man of great courage, not just physical courage—clearly he had that in abundant supply—but moral courage. Recognising, as he did, that the interests of peace meant that the traditional policies of his country towards the occupied territories had to be changed, he was prepared to make that change in his fundamental position, despite what he knew to be the intense unpopularity that it would evoke in many quarters of his country.

Following Mr. Rabin's death, the greatest interest has been in the consequences for the peace process. Having been in Israel and having visited the countries in the region, I have no doubt whatever that the peace process will continue. There is an overwhelming belief within Israel that his death should not be seen to have happened in vain. There is, however, no overstating the great sense of pain that exists within Israel as it comes to terms with the fact that fanaticism and extremism are not just qualities to be found in Arab countries, as many Israelis like to believe—it now has to be accepted as existing within Israel itself. The positive side of that coin is, of course, the growing common judgment, the common vision that the Israelis and Arab Governments in the region share of the need for the peace process to continue, and of its irreversibility.

If I had any doubts about that irreversibility, they were clearly answered in a number of ways during the course of last week, when I was able to fly non-stop from Damascus to Tel Aviv, a flight that would have been inconceivable a few years ago; when, after seeing Yasser Arafat in Gaza at lunchtime, later that day he drove to Tel Aviv to pay his condolences to Mrs. Leah Rabin; when we heard King Hussein, in an extraordinarily brave speech in Jerusalem, talk of Mr. Rabin not only as his friend but as his brother. Those are clear, symbolic but nevertheless highly relevant ways of demonstrating the fundamental change that is taking place.

As for Israel's relationship with Syria—one of the most difficult relationships of all—I believe that in Damascus as well as in Tel Aviv there is a willingness to get the negotiating process going again. It will be slow and difficult, but I believe that the will exists.

The key to that, and to the whole future of the middle east in regard to Israel's relationship with its neighbours, is the future of the Palestinians. Visiting Gaza for the first time, but comparing what I saw there with what I understand to have been the situation there a year ago, I could only be struck by the extraordinary economic

progress—the tremendous development of the social and economic welfare of the Palestinians in Gaza, and the degree to which that will be extended elsewhere.

The United Kingdom is very proud and privileged to be playing a part in that process, having contributed some £83 million over the past few years to assist the Palestinians. I announced a further project during my visit to Gaza. We are providing some of the observers for the election procedure in January, when the first direct elections take place; we are also assisting with the training of the Palestinian police force, and helping in a number of other ways.

I think that there is a great potential in the middle east, and that, if the peace process is brought to a satisfactory conclusion, the countries concerned will be able to bring together the unique economic assets that both Israel and its Arab neighbours possess, and introduce unprecedented prosperity and economic and social development to the region. Moreover, at a time when we know that a grave threat of terrorism still exists in a number of countries in the region, it will enable all the moderate, responsible Governments to work more effectively together.

Only a couple of days ago, an extremist atrocity occurred in Saudi Arabia, causing the deaths of a number of Americans and injuries to many people. We convey our deep condolences to those affected by that terrorist incident. The existence of terrorism in Saudi Arabia and in Israel emphasises the extent to which moderate, responsible Governments must work closely together as part of the international community to remove this scourge once and for all.

Let me now deal with Nigeria and the recent Commonwealth conference. There, too, we have seen events that, although tragic, have given rise to important new developments. The United Kingdom Government have made no secret of their condemnation of what we believe to have been the judicial murder of Ken Saro-Wiwa and the other eight Nigerians who were cruelly hanged by the Nigerian Government. It has been right and proper for the Commonwealth to respond in an unprecedented way. I believe that Nigeria's suspension from the Commonwealth, the action that we and others have taken in regard to the imposition of an arms embargo and the withdrawal of high commissioners, and the discussions that are taking place about whether further steps need to be taken at this time constitute a very appropriate response.

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): Does the Foreign Secretary believe that the best way in which to hit this brutal regime would be to freeze its bank accounts and foreign assets?

Mr. Rifkind: We need to examine all the options carefully. We certainly do not exclude any option at this stage, but we are primarily concerned to identify measures that would not harm the Nigerian people but would make the international condemnation of the Nigerian Government clear and unmistakable.

Mr. Chris Mullin (Sunderland, South): Does the Foreign Secretary think that this is the right moment for Shell to be launching its major new gas investment in Nigeria? If not, what is he doing about it?

Mr. Rifkind: In the first instance, that must be a matter for the company concerned. I understand that the company has said—it is for the company to explain its position—that the investment would not bring any revenues to the Nigerian Government until after the turn of the century. If that is true, we all hope that Nigeria will have a democratic Government long before then.

Ms Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate) *rose—*

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North) *rose—*

Mr. Rifkind: I want to make some progress, but I shall give way, for the last time, to the hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Ms Jackson).

Ms Jackson: Expatriate Nigerians who are living in my constituency as refugees and seeking asylum because their lives are in danger of being extinguished in their own country have made strong representations to me. They believe that the Government should whole-heartedly support President Mandela's call for sanctions to be exercised against Nigeria. They say that the circumstances of the ordinary people of Nigeria can in no wise be any worse than they are now under this corrupt, brutal and illegal regime.

Mr. Rifkind: I have no doubt that that may be the view of the people whom the hon. Lady has spoken to in London. However, it is important to reflect carefully on the implications for people in Nigeria if general economic sanctions were proposed.

In an important way, the Commonwealth has turned a significant corner. Quite serious accusations used to be made that the Commonwealth had double standards, that it was prepared to attack human rights abusers in the old Rhodesia or South Africa, but that it turned a blind eye to comparable abuses in other parts of the world and especially in the third world. What is significant on this occasion is that the Commonwealth, with President Mandela of South Africa as one of the leading forces, has been prepared to take action against a country that is guilty of grave human rights abuses. The Commonwealth as a whole is stronger for that and it shows that the Harare declaration, which was passed a few years ago, has considerable force. The creation of a group consisting of Commonwealth Foreign Ministers in which the United Kingdom will play a part, is an important step in monitoring policy in this crucial area.

Mr. Menzies Campbell (Fife, North-East): The Foreign Secretary is being extremely generous in giving way. He will appreciate that this issue has some immediacy and that it obviously concerns many hon. Members. In considering sanctions, will he take account of two factors? The first is that sanctions against Mr. Milosevic appear to have had some effect in making him change his mind. Secondly, will he bear it in mind that we continue to exercise sanctions in the name of the United Nations against Iraq and Saddam Hussein, no doubt because we believe that they are likely to be effective in persuading him to change his mind? In assessing the value of sanctions against Nigeria, are not both of those compelling examples?

Mr. Rifkind: We have been willing to see sanctions applied against Iraq and Serbian Montenegro essentially because of the international aggression for which the Governments of those two countries were deemed to be responsible. This is always a complex issue and, as I have said, the Government have not ruled out any course of

[Mr. Rifkind]

action. Any action would have to be international and at this time there does not appear to be in the Security Council or elsewhere the kind of international consensus that that would be the right way to go. It is early days and I would not want to exclude action of that kind.

There have been some major and beneficial developments over the past few weeks in the former Yugoslavia. In particular, I draw attention to the agreement that was reached on eastern Slavonia, an area in which there was the potential for the beginnings of a new war in the Balkans. The agreement between Croatia and Serbia is of great significance and, as I know the House will be aware, it will allow the reintegration of eastern Slavonia into Croatia. That ought to resolve the difficulty.

There has also been progress at the talks in Ohio and agreement has already been reached on certain issues. However, big issues still divide the parties and it looks increasingly unlikely that there will be the kind of comprehensive breakthrough that we ideally wish to see within the next few days. I am not too depressed about that because if the parties are unable to reach a comprehensive agreement in the next few days, the most likely outcome is a temporary suspension of the negotiations rather than a breakdown. There is still a high probability that in the relatively near future there will be agreement. That will be of great significance.

The progress that has been made owes its origins to three quite important developments over the past few months. First, the United States—very much on the recommendation of the European countries—has put its full weight behind the diplomatic process. Until a few months ago, the United States had shown some reluctance to enter into the diplomatic efforts with all the authority at its disposal. Fortunately, that policy was not pursued during that time and that has been an important contributor to the progress that has been achieved.

Secondly, as the House will recall, the London conference that was called by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister led to the creation of the rapid reaction force involving the United Kingdom, France and the Netherlands. That gave considerable additional authority to the United Nations forces in Bosnia-Herzegovina and was an important factor in creating stability, especially with regard to Sarajevo. Finally, one must also refer—it is of major significance—to the success of the contact group and of the international community in divorcing President Milosevic from the Bosnian Serbs, leading to a split in the Serb position and, ultimately, to President Milosevic being given plenipotentiary powers on behalf of the Bosnian Serbs, which has enabled much agreement to be reached in areas that previously were resisting progress of any significant sort.

Mr. Mike Gapes (Ilford, South): Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman clarify for us the Government's position with regard to the war crimes tribunals? Will he assure us that the British Government are working to get even-handedness in that process, including the large number of people responsible for atrocities in Krajina and representatives and military commanders in the Bosnian Government forces who have also carried out atrocities, that our position is impartial, unlike that of some other Governments, that we recognise that there can be no imposed solution that takes one side in the conflict, and that we shall get that message through to the United States of America as quickly as possible?

Mr. Rifkind: I agree with the hon. Gentleman. Sadly, atrocities have taken place, for which people in each of the communities concerned have been responsible, and it is for the tribunal to judge where the evidence to bring such charges exists, but I agree with him that there must be no assumption that charges can be levied only against persons from one particular community. If the evidence is there, the consequences should follow.

If and when there is agreement in the talks going on in Ohio, the next step would be a conference that the British Government have said they would host in London, which will be concerned with the matters that are the responsibility of the international community: for example, the need to develop a reconstruction package to assist the rebuilding of former Yugoslavia; the need to reach final agreement on the shape, composition and role of the implementation force likely to be led by the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation and that will replace the United Nations Protection Force in helping to monitor the settlement concerned; and the measures that will be needed to supervise elections and to help in the return of refugees and such matters.

Those will be important measures, but it is crucial that such a conference takes place fairly soon after the completion of the negotiations between the various Bosnian parties. We cannot tolerate any gap or vacuum that might emerge and that would give opportunities for the agreement to disintegrate. Therefore, we would hope to move quickly towards such a conference once the political breakthrough had been achieved.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): I welcome and agree with everything that my right hon. and learned Friend has just said, including his initial remarks, but will he nevertheless place it on record yet again that the vast majority of the appalling incidents that have so disfigured that part of Europe have been the responsibility of the Bosnian Serbs, and that it was the united, tough and cohesive action against them that did more than anything else to bring about the present better state of affairs?

Mr. Rifkind: We certainly believe that, on all the evidence that is available, more responsibility must be borne by the Bosnian Serbs for the atrocities that have taken place. I would be reluctant to ascribe particular percentages or to seek to be more detailed than that because atrocities have taken place to the detriment of each of the communities concerned, but certainly the Bosnian Serb leadership must bear the heavy burden that it has seemed to have been both the initiator of this behaviour and responsible for most of the incidents that are known about.

Mr. Robert N. Wareing (Liverpool, West Derby): Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Mr. Rifkind: No, I am sorry. I must make progress.

Recently, the United Nations celebrated its 50th anniversary. That was an historic occasion, and the UN has unfairly been subject to much criticism because it has not achieved everything to which its founders might have aspired. That is a wrong test. A more appropriate and relevant test is to compare what the UN has achieved with any previous attempts, the failure of the League of

Nations, and the fact that, before the league, there was no attempt at international action to deal with matters of a comparable sort.

Over the past 50 years, great progress has been made and we have seen, especially since the end of the cold war, how the Security Council has been able to act with a single voice and that the UN's level of peacekeeping has been of a high and unprecedented order.

Mr. Flynn *rose—*

Mr. Rifkind: If the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, I should like to continue.

Nevertheless, we cannot ignore the fact that, in its 50th year, the United Nations also faces an unprecedented crisis because of the weak and crumbling financial base on which all its operations depend. We have seen two developments: first there is a bloated bureaucracy—a bureaucracy that can be, and needs to be, reformed. It needs to be reduced so that the United Nations concentrates on that which is essential and does not see itself guilty of some of the extravagances that, sadly, can be identified now. It is also important that all members of the United Nations pay their debts and contributions because that is the single most important reason why there are large deficits now.

The United Kingdom, which I am happy to say is not among those who can be criticised in that respect, has been working with like-minded countries to bring forward ideas for reforms which would help to ensure that the United Nations is on a much sounder basis. I believe that the solution lies in both short-term and longer-term reform. For example, it is absurd that the United Nations has to pay interest on any money that it borrows when those who owe money are not charged interest. That is a situation which each one of us would be happy to enjoy in our personal life but, since it is not seen to be relevant to our personal circumstances, it is a little unreasonable to expect the UN to have to accept it.

We also have the foolishness of the present policy of cross-subsidising the regular budget with the peacekeeping budget. That means that when a crisis breaks suddenly, the UN may not be able to respond simply because of a lack of relevant funds. The United Kingdom, together with Sweden, has put forward proposals for a major, fundamental reform which would link more closely and in a more flexible way the contributions that each country could make to UN finances to its GNP. That would mean that, as a country became richer or poorer, its contributions could alter in a fair and acceptable way. We hope that the proposals will be accepted.

Mr. Flynn: Is it not a matter of national ignominy that, while we are celebrating unanimity among nations and seeking the coming together of international opinion, we stand virtually isolated in supporting the French nuclear tests? Not one of the other 51 Commonwealth nations supports our view. The Government's policy is not supported by 98 per cent. of British public opinion. The Foreign Secretary has argued that the Prime Minister is battling for Britain. On the French tests, his craven behaviour is not battling for Britain but surrendering to the far-right extremists on the Government Back Benches.

Mr. Rifkind: The Labour party spends most of its time trying to hide its past links with the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and to convince the public that it is now a strong defender of our defence requirements and our nuclear deterrent. The hon. Gentleman has disclosed the true face of the Labour party.

The reality is that it is no coincidence that the United Kingdom, as a west European nuclear power, should perhaps have greater understanding of why the French have found it necessary to carry out certain final tests before they, too, become a signatory of a comprehensive test ban treaty. If the hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friends do not understand that, it is because they remain as unreconstructed as ever with regard to those crucial matters.

Mr. Corbyn *rose—*

Mr. Rifkind: I am happy to give way to an hon. Member who is not ashamed of his party, of its past or of its previous commitments.

Mr. Corbyn: I should declare that I have been a member of CND since the age of 15 and will continue to be so. I should be grateful if the Foreign Secretary would give a serious response to my question. When the Prime Minister had lunch with President Chirac, they had a number of discussions about future nuclear co-operation. Strangely, there was no statement from the Prime Minister in the House on the following day or on the days after that about what agreement had been reached. I think that we need to know what the discussions were about and what future co-operation there is likely to be on nuclear matters. Is there some sharing of information from the French tests? Is that why there is this sort of sotto voce support for the French testing programme, or is it a desire on the part of the Government to do exactly what the French have done, the problem being that they have nowhere to undertake the tests?

Mr. Rifkind: I shall give the hon. Gentleman an unequivocal reply. There is no access to information from the French nuclear tests. We have not been offered such access and we do not wish to have such access. As far as we can tell, the information would not be relevant to our nuclear deterrent, so the hon. Gentleman can put his splendid conspiracy theory back into the box from which it came.

There is good co-operation between Britain and France on nuclear matters. A year or so ago, we set up, openly and publicly, a joint nuclear commission. It has done very good work in discussing attitudes towards nuclear weapons, their role and relevance in the post-cold war age and other matters. Those are important issues, and I thank the hon. Gentleman for allowing me to refer to them in response to his question.

Much of the work of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office is of course concerned with matters of diplomacy, but I should like on this occasion to stress the crucial contribution that the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and its staff make to the commercial, industrial and export interests of the country. It is not often appreciated that fully one third—or more than one third—of our diplomatic staff overseas have responsibilities for assisting industry and exports, attracting investment and undertaking a series of duties that are highly relevant to the immediate economic needs of this country. I believe that they can share some of the credit for the fact that the United Kingdom has, for example, become a great haven

[Mr. Rifkind]

for inward investment, most notably in the form of the recent announcement by Chunghwa, which will mean more than 3,000 jobs going to Lanarkshire.

We also need further improvements in our export market. In two of the most crucial areas—Asia and Latin America—important progress is being made. In south-east Asia alone, our exports have gone up 90 per cent. in the past three years. That is something of which we can be very proud.

I said that one of our major objectives for the future is the development of moves towards transatlantic free trade between Europe and north America. We have made that one of our top priorities for economic as well as political reasons—for economic reasons because, as a Government, we are committed to global liberalisation and moves towards global free trade, and we support strongly the work of the World Trade Organisation. We know that it cannot all be realised in the short term. Therefore, it is important to concentrate in the short and medium term on those aspects of the liberalisation of markets that could have important implications for our own economic future.

We have seen the great historic achievement of the single market in Europe and the development of the North American Free Trade Agreement. The Government want to work with our western European allies and our allies in north America to bring together those trading groups, not as an end in itself but as a further step towards the global liberalisation that should be our objective.

It is sometimes suggested that the United Kingdom has to make a choice between its Atlantic identity and its European identity and that moves towards transatlantic institutions or activities are somehow a means of escaping from our European identity. I do not recognise that choice as appropriate or relevant. The reality is that these islands, because of their geography and history, have an Atlantic and a European identity. To require us to choose is rather like asking the United States to choose between its Atlantic and Pacific dimensions. Both are important and both should be advanced. That is not an escape from reality but a recognition of the real interests of Europe as a whole and of the United Kingdom in particular.

Because of our language, history and culture, the United Kingdom can provide a particular initiative in bringing together the countries of Europe and north America, and I believe that sufficient common interests would be advanced by doing so to justify our making that an important priority.

Mr. Michael Connarty (Falkirk, East): I would not wish to take away from any of the efforts made on the trade side, but I am concerned that my constituents feel that they are not served well by our embassies and high commissions in cases of child abduction. For example, I have a case in my constituency in which the people have been told that they must deal with the Scottish courts administration and the police of the other country involved. My constituents do not feel that, although they are British citizens and have a child who is a British citizen, they are being well served. It seems that our embassies are pushing more for trade and becoming less involved in looking after the British citizen.

Mr. Rifkind: I think that the hon. Gentleman is being unfair. Our consular representatives do all in their power, but he must appreciate that legal disputes involving families and children are ultimately matters that the courts alone can determine. It is unreasonable to expect embassies or consular officials to do other than be as helpful as they possibly can when dealing with such problems.

I have made it clear that revitalising the transatlantic partnership is not a substitute for Britain playing her proper part in Europe. Britain's future prosperity and security do not command such an artificial choice. Few hon. Members doubt that the future of the United Kingdom lies in the European Union. In an increasingly competitive world, European countries must co-operate if their voice in world affairs is to be heard and their companies are to prosper and provide jobs. Beyond that basic premise lies the question of what sort of Europe we want—what sort of Europe is right for Britain. We shall be motivated by the interests of the United Kingdom. That is a matter not of blinkered self-interest but of the Government's inescapable obligation to their people, and it is a reflection of the principle that a voluntary association will not prosper unless it balances the interests of all its members.

We recognise the benefits that the European Union continues to bring to us, but we want to make it work better. That will be very relevant to next year's intergovernmental conference. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has made it clear that we shall support moves towards a Union which is fairer, more flexible and more relevant to ordinary people through more effective co-operation in areas such as foreign and security policy and the fight against crime.

Mr. Denis MacShane (Rotherham): Is the Foreign Secretary aware that the perception of Britain in Europe is of a Government no longer interested in participating fully? After that vile, xenophobic, chauvinistic, ranting speech from the right hon. Member for Enfield, Southgate (Mr. Portillo), the Secretary of State for Defence, which is well known and much commented on all over Europe, no British Government containing him in their ranks can be taken seriously on any European question.

Mr. Rifkind: Although I am sure that the hon. Gentleman feels better for having got that off his chest, it bears very little relevance to the issues before us. [HON. MEMBERS: "Yes it does."] No it does not. The issue at stake is whether a Conservative Government or a Labour Government would fight to protect British interests, and be prepared if necessary to be unpopular and to be isolated, if the protection of British interests required that. That is the crucial question that needs to be addressed.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr. Rifkind: I must make progress.

What we cannot and will not accept are proposals for a more centralised Union. The Prime Minister has made it clear that we shall oppose further extension of qualified majority voting. Unanimity has been retained in the treaty for a number of highly sensitive issues, such as treaty change, foreign policy, and new community resources, for which it would be quite inappropriate to take decisions by majority vote.

My hon. Friend the Member for Boothferry (Mr. Davis), the Minister of State, has put British views very firmly and clearly during meetings of the reflection group

in which he takes part. I believe that that is making an important contribution to a wider understanding of what is appropriate for the intergovernmental conference.

Mr. Phil Gallie (Ayr): Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that, in Europe, there is a feeling that, perhaps for Europeans across the board, there would be some advantage in having a Labour Government? Is it not a fact that they see the Labour party carrying the white flag on British interest in Europe?

Mr. Rifkind: I agree with my hon. Friend. There is undoubtedly a school of thought that some parts of Europe would like to wait until the next general election. Of course they would have to wait a lot longer than that if they were looking for a Labour Government who would roll over at the first appropriate moment.

Mr. Giles Radice (North Durham): Will the Foreign Secretary give way?

Mr. Rifkind: I must make progress. Many hon. Members wish to speak. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will be called at the appropriate time.

I should like to comment specifically on the proposals for the Western European Union. Of course we wish to see and have, indeed, taken the lead in promoting, specific proposals for closer co-operation between the WEU and the European Union on defence matters. However, we shall not support the subordination or integration of one treaty-based organisation with another treaty-based organisation which has different membership.

It is quite absurd to contemplate that the European Council, which includes four neutral countries—Sweden, Ireland, Finland and Austria—should take part in decisions involving the use of armed forces in respect of the WEU, of which they are not treaty members and when countries such as Norway and Turkey, which are associate members of the WEU, have no voice in the European Council. I appeal to our European colleagues who have aspirations for an integrated relationship with the European Council to realise that, while that might in theory be possible if the membership of the two organisations were identical, it does not make sense as long as we have neutral countries that do not participate in collective responsibility.

Mr. Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): I have sought clarification from Ministers on this matter before, but have not received answers. Are there circumstances in which a member state of the European Union could suffer external aggression and it not be deemed to be aggression against the whole Union? Does it not go to the heart of the treaty that, if one state were invaded, it would be considered an attack on the whole Union, particularly given that we now have citizenship of the whole European Union?

Mr. Rifkind: The European Union is not a defence and security organisation. It cannot defend the citizens of its member states. For that, we must look to both NATO and the WEU, especially NATO. That is the political reality and we would be foolish to ignore it.

Having considered a number of important issues, I shall now identify what I believe to be growing differences in a number of important respects between the Government and the Opposition with regard to the foreign policy needs of our country. The Opposition would have us believe that a Labour Government would give Britain new influence and leadership in the world. Well, the truth of the matter is that, since Bevin—I pay tribute to Ernest Bevin again—Labour has been wrong on all the major foreign policy issues. It was unilateralist and hostile to reinforcing NATO when we faced the nuclear might of the Soviet Union and the Warsaw pact. Crude anti-Americanism was the order of the day. The Leader of the Opposition, the shadow Foreign Secretary and the shadow Defence Secretary were unashamed members of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament under the leadership of Michael Foot. They were hostile to the proposed deployment of cruise and Pershing and, had their advice been accepted, the Soviet Union would have taken years longer to collapse.

Now that the cold war is over and Russia is a friend, Labour asks us to believe that it has become a sincere convert to Trident and Britain's position on nuclear weapons. It is a most extraordinary conversion, to be opposed to nuclear weapons during the cold war and in favour of them once it is behind us. It is symbolic of the cynical opportunism of the Labour party that it was against nuclear weapons at the height of the cold war and in favour of them once Conservative Governments in Britain and the United States had been successful in bringing the cold war to an end. I look forward to hearing the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) explain that extraordinary conversion. Perhaps he will have the humility to confess that he, the Leader of the Opposition and the shadow Defence Secretary were fundamentally wrong to argue for many years in favour of a policy which they now profess to disown and which they say is of disservice to the interests of this country.

Mr. Radice: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Rifkind: No, not at the moment.

The so-called "conversion" is, however, populist and skin deep. It is populist because the Labour party leaders realise that the British electorate will never vote for a unilateralist Labour party. That is the true reason for the change. It is skin deep because they showed their true anti-nuclear colours, as we heard a few moments ago, by joining the pack denouncing France for its final series of nuclear tests.

I said that the Labour party has been wrong on all the major foreign policy issues. Nowhere has that been more true than on Europe. Both the Leader of the Opposition and the hon. Member for Livingston were against our membership of the European Community. We recall how the Leader of the Opposition said, in 1983, that they would negotiate withdrawal from the EEC, which had drained our natural resources and destroyed jobs. A year later, the hon. Member for Livingston said that many Labour voters, including himself, were still unconvinced that it was a good idea to join the Common Market in the first place. They are now the leaders of a party that has changed its policy on the European Community no fewer than six times in the past 30 years.

Mr. MacShane: Is that all?

Mr. Rifkind: I can understand the hon. Gentleman's disappointment that it has not happened more often, but if he waits a few more years, he will no doubt find that they will change their minds again and again.

[Mr. Rifkind]

Now the Labour party leaders have all the zeal of a convert. Having tried to force us out of the European Union, they have lurched to the opposite extreme and support the elimination of the veto in regional, social, environmental and industrial policy. In each of those sectors, they are willing to see policies imposed on this country even if they, as a future British Government, were opposed to them. The Opposition are prepared to see themselves outvoted in those sectors, and to see measures imposed that could be harmful, in their own future estimate, to British jobs and British prosperity.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): The Foreign Secretary mentioned the Europe that the Opposition want. Is it not true that the Europe we have cannot change because of three treaties that his party signed without an electoral mandate? In respect of economic and monetary union, to which his Government have given allegiance in possible principle and in economic practice for the next few years on the formula, why is convergence related only to Government accounting and not to the economies of all the countries in all their facets? Why is it so limited in effect?

Mr. Rifkind: I do not have enough time to give the answer that that question clearly deserves. The hon. Gentleman refers to the economic convergence criteria relating to economic and monetary union. The Prime Minister and the British Government have said that we will not prejudge that matter. The interests of the United Kingdom will be the basis on which we shall come to a decision. That is right and proper.

Mr. Radice: Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Mr. Rifkind: I must give way to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Radice: Does the Foreign Secretary agree with the comment of the hon. Member for Aldershot (Sir J. Critchley) that the Conservatives are now an unattractive blend of nationalists, populists and little Englanders?

Mr. Rifkind: No, I do not.

Even worse, in terms of the Labour party's position, is its promise to roll over and to accept any European Union measure in respect of which we have a permanent opt-out. I refer the hon. Member for Livingston to his speech at the Labour party conference. He sought to reassure his hearers there, and the British public, that the Labour party would protect British interests. What he did not reveal were the contents of a document published on the same day by the Labour party. In that document, the Labour party said explicitly, "we reject permanent opt-outs". That is a significant statement to which not enough attention has been paid.

First, if the other countries of the Union knew that a Labour Government would eventually accept that Britain must participate in a proposal of integration, however damaging to British interests, that would gravely undermine the negotiating position of any future Labour Foreign Secretary. Secondly, the Labour policy document confirms that the only doubt about Labour and monetary union—or the Schengen proposals, the abolition of frontier controls and other such matters—is not whether a Labour Government would succumb to such a proposition, but when. If permanent opt-outs are forbidden, that is the only conclusion one can draw.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): When all the dust has settled on the question of the Common Market and the people out there have to make a decision based not on crystal ball gazing but on the facts, they will find that, in the 1970s, a Tory Government took us into the Common Market, and the Labour party opposed it; in the 1980s, it was Lady Thatcher who took us into the Single European Act with a guillotine that gagged Members of Parliament speaking against it; and in the 1990s, it was the present Government who signed the Maastricht treaty, and once again the Labour party opposed it. It was that lousy, rotten Government who got us more embedded into the Common Market and, whatever reservations there might be now, it was the Labour party that voted solidly against. Those are the facts.

Mr. Rifkind: The hon. Gentleman says that his party voted solidly against those proposals. He does not point out that the Labour party is very apologetic about that now, admits that it was wrong, and says that it wishes to take progress even further. If the hon. Gentleman wishes to be seen as the great man of principle that he normally presents himself as, surely he should be directing his criticism to his own Front Benchers. He should not continue the shameful habit of adopting the uncharacteristic pose of a Trappist monk until the election is over, and then, no doubt, resuming his criticisms of his own colleagues. It is an uncharacteristic pose for the hon. Gentleman and does not conform well to his self-image of a man of principle. He should realise that.

The Leader of the Opposition recently wrote an article in the *Evening Standard* under the title:

"How we would win back our friends around the world".

That symbolises Labour's attitude towards foreign policy. Its cardinal error in foreign policy is to confuse being liked with being successful—to believe that the purpose of foreign policy is to please other Governments. Sadly, it is not always possible to achieve both popularity and success, and a Conservative Government would give priority to the latter.

Britain should be grateful that the Leader of the Opposition was not in power for the past 16 years. We had to accept total isolation in the European Union in order to negotiate the rebate that my right hon. Friend Lady Thatcher obtained on behalf of the people of the United Kingdom. We are told that a Labour Government would not have been prepared to accept the unpopularity and isolation that was necessary to bring that about.

The pathetic attempts of the Leader of the Opposition to convince the Confederation of British Industry that the social chapter would be safe in Labour hands beggar belief. The Leader of the Opposition went to the CBI and sought to reassure its members. Let me conclude my remarks by quoting the Leader of the Opposition's words. He said to the CBI:

"The social chapter is not detailed legislation. It is a set of principles. The real fear"—*[Interruption.]*

wait a moment—

"is that by being part of it we may in future agree to the import of inefficient practices to Britain. A Labour government will not pursue such a course. Each piece of legislation will be judged on its merits. I have no intention whatever of agreeing to anything and everything that emerges from the European Union."

Those are fine words—I am sure that they were meant to sound a reassuring note—but for one thing. The Leader of the Opposition does not know, or omitted to inform the CBI, that once one accepts the social chapter, one is bound by the fact that most of the social chapter proposals are subject to qualified majority vote. It does not matter whether a Labour Government believe that the proposals would be right or wrong; they would be overruled by a majority of other countries.

If Opposition Members say to me, "Yes, but some parts of the social chapter do require unanimity," I agree; but the Labour party has committed itself to eliminating the veto in exactly those parts, because it has said that the veto will be removed from all aspects of social policy, so there is a basic dishonesty in what the Leader of the Opposition said to the CBI a couple of days ago.

I invite the hon. Member for Livingston to explain that discrepancy. How can the Leader of the Opposition say to the CBI that a Labour Government can guarantee that policies harmful to Britain in respect of the social chapter would not be implemented, when he knows perfectly well that a Labour Government might be outvoted by other members of the European Union? That is a typical example of the Leader of the Opposition making comforting noises to every audience that he speaks to when the Labour party has entered into policy commitments that fly in the face of those assurances.

I shall conclude my speech by saying a few words to the hon. Member for Livingston. He has a personal record of having been wrong on the policies of nuclear defence, on the crude anti-Americanism that characterised the Labour party for so many years and on his hostility to our membership of the European Union. I hope that, when he comes to the Dispatch Box, he will at least begin by acknowledging that he speaks from one of the weakest positions that a shadow Foreign Secretary could hope to occupy.

The hon. Gentleman might show at least some remorse that, if the policies that he and his hon. Friends proposed had been carried out during the past 15 years, the destiny, security and well-being of the country would have been very poor indeed. The hon. Gentleman owes that to the House and to the whole country.

3.53 pm

Mr. Robin Cook (Livingston): The Foreign Secretary is, by profession, an advocate. The conclusion to his speech demonstrated that pearl of advice to all practising advocates—"When you don't have a case, abuse the other side's advocate." I shall come back to some of the things that the hon. Gentleman said—I shall not call him the right hon. Gentleman in this context following his last remarks. I shall return to the hon. Member's references to me and my party and to the issues that divide us later, but I shall begin by recalling a more dignified Foreign Secretary, his predecessor, who yesterday made a characteristically graceful speech, in which he enjoined us to avoid

"empty noise and phoney warfare."—[*Official Report*, 15 November 1995; Vol. 267, c. 9.]

That part of the right hon. Gentleman's speech appears to have passed over the head of his successor.

In the spirit of this advice, however, let me begin with the issues that do not divide us and can unite us. In the light of the tragic assassination of Yitzhak Rabin, let me commence by expressing our support for the reference in the Gracious Speech to maintaining support for the middle east peace process. The whole House condemns the conspiracy that sought to achieve by the bullet political objectives that could not be achieved by the ballot. There is no doubt that those involved in the conspiracy may have calculated that such an event would give rise to chaos and confusion, and that in the ensuing political turmoil the peace process could be derailed. It is to the credit of the peoples of Israel and Palestine that they have responded to the outrage with dignity and restraint. The result may be to strengthen, not weaken, the peace process, because it has exposed those who are most opposed to peace as the end as the very people who are most prepared to use violence as the means.

The other peace process at a critical phase, also referred to in the Gracious Speech, turns on the negotiations in Dayton, Ohio on the former Yugoslavia. The whole House wants a successful conclusion to those talks. I have just spent a fortnight in Washington and New York. I regret the fact that the follow-up to the talks has already become a matter of partisan warfare between the Congress and Administration of the United States. I invite those in Congress who are already making statements about how they will behave after the conclusion of those talks to have some regard to how their words impact on the talks now.

I must tell the Foreign Secretary, despite his roundly abusing us, that the Government will have our full support for any measures that they feel appropriate for Britain to contribute to make the peace settlement work. We shall judge the outcome of the talks on the extent to which they provide for the restoration of multi-ethnic societies in the former Yugoslavia, and the restoration of pluralist political processes. Critical to that must be the preservation of Bosnia as a single state, rather than its partition into multiple ethnic statelets. Also critical are the right of refugees to return to their homes and the prosecution before the international tribunal of those who have been indicted for war crimes.

It is worrying that, this week, President Tudjman has chosen to promote an officer the day after he was indicted before the international war crimes tribunal. That raises the anxiety that those carrying out the negotiations do not yet understand that there can be no reconciliation in the former Yugoslavia unless there is no impunity for war criminals. The tragedy of the former Yugoslavia is that the nationalist leaders promised their peoples that they were going to take their countries into a post-communist Europe; yet the endless arguments in Dayton over every mile of border between the countries belong not to a post-communist Europe but to the pre-communist Europe of the turn of the century. If the leaders of these countries really want to take their people into modern Europe, they must recognise that modern Europe is based not on putting up new borders between nations but on bringing down barriers between communities.

Finally on the balance sheet of agreement, I assure the Foreign Secretary that we share fully the objectives set out in the Gracious Speech to ensure a smooth transition of Hong Kong to Chinese sovereignty in 1997. There are fewer than 600 days until the point of transfer and in that time frame we will judge the record of this Administration and of Governor Patten, not on how much more can be achieved in the last few months before the sands run out, but on how we can ensure that the reforms that have been introduced in Hong Kong are entrenched to survive our

[Mr. Robin Cook]

departure as a colonial power. Of particular importance is a smooth transition for the Legislative Council and for the Bill of Rights. Although 1997 will see Britain give up its sovereignty over Hong Kong, it must not see Britain give up its interest in Hong Kong.

The Gracious Speech has managed to carry us further in agreement than I anticipated. Before I turn to the various areas of controversy in the Gracious Speech, I shall deal with a curious omission from that speech and from the speech of the Foreign Secretary this afternoon. The omission is all the more curious as the Gracious Speech is supposed to set out the work of Parliament in the forthcoming year. I refer to an issue that I suspect will give rise to some of the most heated debates that we shall see in Parliament this Session.

Although it is not in the Gracious Speech, I very much hope that we can look forward to receiving the Scott report on arms to Iraq some time this Session. We have not received it in three parliamentary Sessions and I hope that a fourth Session will not pass without its release.

Dr. John Reid (Motherwell, North): There was no mention of it today.

Mr. Cook: As my hon. Friend says, the Foreign Secretary did not mention it today. Although the Gracious Speech omitted any reference to the Scott report, an even greater power in the land enlightened us about it at the weekend. On Sunday the First Secretary of State and Deputy Prime Minister—I think that I have all of his titles correct—told us that the Government have every right to reject the inquiry's findings. He said that the Government do not feel obliged to follow its recommendations.

That is a bit rich coming from a Deputy Prime Minister who, for the past three years, has followed me around every television studio in the land telling me to shut up and wait for the Scott report. His appeals to wait until we receive the report will look like so much self-serving humbug if the Government have no intention of abiding by the outcome of the inquiry.

Only last week, the judgment of the Lord Chief Justice in the Ordtech appeal laid bare how the Government first turned a "blind eye"—in the words of one of their ambassadors—to the export of arms to Saddam Hussein and then attempted to cover it up by suppressing evidence that was needed to ensure a fair trial. I did not think it possible that even this Government could make the scandal worse, but the Deputy Prime Minister has managed to do just that by saying that the Government may refuse to admit that they did anything wrong. The Government chose Sir Richard Scott as their judge: we will expect them to abide by his verdict and the nation will expect any Ministers who are censured by him to leave public office.

As to the remainder of the Gracious Speech, it may be appropriate to examine Government foreign policy by departing from it to consider the Government's own choice of the highest-profile measure: the asylum Bill. Throughout the world there are currently 40 million refugees and displaced persons. If that gives rise to a burden of asylum applications that is too heavy for Britain to bear, foreign policy has a part to play in finding a solution by removing the pressures that cause an increase in the number of refugees around the world.

We could put human rights at the centre of foreign policy, and we could begin with Nigeria. Since the election of 1993 was annulled by the military junta, Nigeria has provided the largest number of asylum seekers to Britain. I put it to the Foreign Secretary that, given all that we now know about the brutality of the regime, it is very difficult to understand why in the past 12 months, out of the 2,032 applications for asylum from Nigerians, one has been granted and 2,031 have been rejected. I challenge the Foreign Secretary. Can he put his hand on his conscience and tell us that 99.95 per cent. of those applications were bogus? If the Government want to cut the applications for asylum, in their own self-interest, they ought to use every available lever to restore democracy and human rights in Nigeria.

I welcome the fact that the Government have now proposed a comprehensive embargo on arms sales. It is all the more welcome as in the past year they granted 30 licences for defence equipment and refused only one. On 15 June, the head of the Nigeria section of the Foreign Office told the World Development Movement that the Department had just granted an export licence to Nigeria for CS gas and rubber bullets. I ask the Foreign Secretary whether that was right and if it was, does he in retrospect really consider that to give those tools of repression to such a brutal military regime was just? Can he give an assurance that, under the new terms of the embargo, it cannot happen again and that such equipment will never again be supplied to the military regime until it returns to democracy?

If we are serious about bringing home our revulsion to that regime, we need more than the measures so far outlined by the Government. The best way to bring home our revulsion is for the Government to go to the United Nations and ask for oil sanctions against Nigeria—not to wait and see what others do, but to take a lead in the world on the issue.

I am familiar with the dilemma that applying economic pressure to a regime can bring pain to its people, but perhaps we should remember that the whole point of Ken Saro-Wiwa's campaign was that the peoples of Nigeria saw too little of the oil revenue—too much of it was swallowed by the regime in high military spending and large bank balances in Europe. The way to show we are serious is to prove that we are prepared to cut the flow of oil and therefore, cut the flow of cash to the Nigerian Government.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): I fully support everything that my hon. Friend has said. He echoes the feelings of all Labour Members. Does he agree that the argument used by the Foreign Secretary earlier this afternoon—that we should take into consideration the effect of sanctions on the Nigerian people—is precisely the same argument that Tory Governments used repeatedly against sanctions against the apartheid regime? Our solidarity with the Nigerian people is our first objective and sanctions are absolutely necessary.

Mr. Cook: I find it hard to see how any other member of the Nigerian population will be hurt if we freeze the bank accounts of the Ministers and the Government. That would be a good practical first step.

Measures to impose once again on the Nigerian Government the importance of restoring democratic rights, an independent legal system and human rights

would be a far better way of reducing the number of people seeking asylum in Britain than anything proposed in the Queen's Speech.

As I understand it, the Government's concern is that most asylum seekers are economic migrants. If the Government are to be believed, all but one of the applications from Nigeria were economic migrants. If that is the Government's worry, surely another priority of our foreign policy ought to be sustainable development.

I was pleased to read in the Queen's Speech that

"A substantial aid programme will be maintained,"

although I would have been more pleased had the Foreign Secretary found one sentence in his long speech to make reference to it. I would also have been pleased if instead of being promised a "substantial aid programme", we had been promised that the aid programme would be maintained at its present level. The Foreign Secretary will recognise that it would be a grotesque deceit of the House were we to vote for the Gracious Speech containing that line and the week after be asked to support a Budget which, it is rumoured, will cut overseas aid by 6 per cent. I agree with the Foreign Secretary about reforms to the United Nations, but we cannot profess support for the United Nations while turning our backs on the United Nations' targets for development.

I would not be so foolish as to appeal to the compassion of Conservative Members—

Mr. Michael Fabricant (Mid-Staffordshire): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Cook: Well, let me try. I make that appeal.

Mr. Fabricant: The hon. Gentleman will know that I have done much work in Africa and south America and that I am well aware of the third world. He will be aware, as I am, of the time that it takes for economic aid to filter through. As it will be many years, sadly, before the third world, the developing world, can catch up with the first world, would it be his policy to throw open our doors to economic migrants and all?

Mr. Cook: I was obviously mistaken in appealing to the hon. Gentleman's compassion.

I agree with the hon. Gentleman that the catching-up process will take years. Surely that is precisely why we should start that process now and not cut the budget on which third-world countries depend.

Mr. Fabricant: Answer my question.

Mr. Cook: I shall respond to the hon. Gentleman in his own terms.

Let us forget for the moment what the cut would mean for people's standard of living, for the survival of their young children, for women's development and for development overall. Forget what it would mean for the peoples of Africa. If the hon. Gentleman wants to stop economic migrants coming to the United Kingdom masquerading as asylum seekers, why not help them achieve sustainable growth in their own countries?

Mr. Fabricant: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Cook: Not at this moment.

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Cook: I shall give way to my hon. Friend.

Mr. Cohen: I agree that it would be deplorable if there were to be cuts in the overseas aid budget. Does he agree that instead there should be an increase in that budget, bearing in mind the extensive problems that have come to light involving land mines in various countries throughout the world? Assistance is needed to clear them. Surely that means that we should increase the overseas aid budget. In addition, the Government should take strong action to prevent the production, trade and use of land mines throughout the world.

Mr. Cook: My hon. Friend is right to draw attention to the appalling environmental damage that is done by the 100 million land mines that are spread throughout the globe. It is a matter of acute regret that there was a failure to reach agreement on the issue at the recent United Nations conference.

I shall take up some of the Foreign Secretary's observations. I must compliment him on one thing—

Mr. Gallie: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Cook: No. I am dealing with bigger fish than the hon. Gentleman. I ask him to forgive me.

The Foreign Secretary expressed better than I could hope to do the difference in essence between the Government's foreign strategy and the Opposition's. As he said, in a way that I could not improve upon, the Government's aspiration is to stand alone while ours is to find partners. It is as well that the Government welcome isolation as a measure of their success. They have had plenty of experience of that over the past year. There was a spectacular example of splendid isolation on the highest-profile issue before the Commonwealth conference. Britain was a minority of one on French nuclear tests. The tests were condemned by the rest of the Commonwealth members. No doubt all of them are secret members of CND. The rest of the Commonwealth condemned the tests while we made a brave condemnation of the rest of the Commonwealth.

The Prime Minister described all the other Commonwealth leaders as factually incorrect, intellectually inconsistent and unbalanced. That is successful diplomacy in the Government's terms. It proved that they could stand alone. In fact, it demonstrated how isolated they were.

Those of us who care about the Commonwealth's future cannot fail to be alarmed by a British Prime Minister behaving not as the leader of the Commonwealth but as the odd one out. It was as if a Tory Back-Bench Member was heckling below the Gangway while the other members of the conference were making decisions.

In his Chatham house speech the Foreign Secretary described the Commonwealth as a priceless asset. He was right to do so. It is a valuable source of access and it is of great interest to Britain. It provides us with a partner in every continent. It brings together a third of the membership of the United Nations. But that will be an asset only so long as Britain treats it with respect and behaves as a leader, not a heckler. I say "Britain", but, of course, Britain was not really represented at the Commonwealth conference. What was represented there was the Conservative Government. They do not speak for the people of Britain on the issue of French nuclear tests. The last opinion poll found that 3 per cent. of the people of Britain agreed with the French nuclear tests—even less than the support for the Tory party. The other 97 per cent.

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cannot all be in CND. This is a Government who speak only for themselves but who damage international relations for the whole of the country.

Sir Patrick Cormack: Is the hon. Gentleman seriously suggesting to the House that the world would be a safer place and that Britain would have been better represented had the Labour party under Michael Foot won the 1983 general election, with him as a leading unilateral disarmer?

Mr. Cook: I have not the slightest hesitation in saying that both Britain and the world would be a better place if Labour had been in power since 1983 instead of that lot there.

There is another dimension to the Government's isolation on this issue; there is another dimension to the eccentric role that they have taken over French nuclear tests. Referring to the Pacific in his Chatham house speech, the Foreign Secretary said:

"We must pay far more attention to the region".

That is right. The centre of gravity of the world economy and of world trade is shifting to the Pacific. By the first quarter of the next century, six out of the 10 largest economies will be in the Pacific, not around the Atlantic. Yet despite that insight, the Foreign Secretary is presiding over foreign policy on French tests at odds with every nation of the south Pacific. Australia and New Zealand are important players in the Asia-Pacific Economic Co-operation. As that trade association grows in economic significance, Australia and New Zealand will grow in significance to us as allies. This is not the moment in history to tell their leaders that they lack knowledge, intellect and balance. Of course, I have to say, it is hardly surprising to the House that the Government find themselves isolated among the countries at the other end of the Pacific when they cannot even live with the countries on the other side of the channel.

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Michael Portillo) *rose—*

Mr. Cook: The right hon. Gentleman does not know how appropriate it is that he rises at this moment.

Mr. Portillo: The French President was advised by his experts and scientists that the French nuclear deterrent required to be tested. If the hon. Gentleman were in power and British scientists and experts advised him that the British nuclear deterrent required to be tested, would he be willing to test it or would he refuse to test it?

Mr. Cook: There is no contest here. I believe that the security of the world would be better served by a comprehensive test ban treaty than by each of the individual nuclear powers going around undermining it. The right hon. Gentleman sits in a Government who say that they are committed to a comprehensive test ban treaty. Will he tell us, if he were faced with that choice, what decision he would take? Is he telling us that they would rather carry out a test programme than go ahead with a comprehensive test ban treaty? If so, is that the view of his Foreign Secretary? That is something to which the House is entitled to have an answer. *[Interruption.]* The right hon. Gentleman has been asked a perfectly fair question: does he or does he not support a comprehensive test ban treaty, which is supposed to be the policy of his Cabinet? We know perfectly well that the right hon. Gentleman regards it as something different from collective discipline within the Cabinet, but we are entitled to know whether he believes in the commitment of his Government.

I must say to the right hon. Gentleman, since he has interrupted, that the Gracious Speech is likely to be rather less resonant on the continent than the exceedingly ungracious speech that he made to the party conference. It sounded depressing in its original English. It must have sounded frightful when translated into German. The Defence Secretary told his conference that he will

"not allow Brussels to control our defence policy".

For 30 years, the key decisions on defence policy for Britain have been taken in Brussels, at the NATO headquarters. The vulgar "we stand alone" isolation of the Defence Secretary is in flat opposition to the real security interests of Britain—interests that for five decades have been served by collective defence based on the principle of international solidarity: that an attack on one is an attack on all. In the same way that our prosperity is best guaranteed by international trading agreements, the survival of our environment is best provided for by international agreements to rescue a world climate. The Defence Secretary's jingoism had had its day a hundred years ago; it is a positive menace in the modern world.

Yet, the week after that speech, the Defence Secretary described himself and the Foreign Secretary as being at one. On the day of the speech, the Prime Minister led the applause—the same Prime Minister whom I seem to remember, two years ago, casting some doubt on the parentage of the Defence Secretary.

In early July, when we last debated Europe, a war was going on the Tory party over Europe. Let me tell Conservative Members that it is a consistent part of our foreign policy to welcome peace wherever it breaks out. I acknowledge that there is currently a truce in the Tory party—a truce brought about by the surrender of the Prime Minister to the rebels. As the hon. Member for Stafford (Mr. Cash) put it bluntly at the party conference, "We've won," or as the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, South-West (Mr. Budgen) said rather more colourfully,

"We are the storm-troopers of the new orthodoxy."

The Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary have bought unity in their own party, but once again at the expense of Britain's isolation. The scale of that isolation is recorded in the minutes of the reflection group's preparation for next year's intergovernmental conference. The Minister of State—who has just left us—has demonstrated in the reflection group not only that he is not afraid to be isolated, but that isolation is a habit with him. According to the recorded positions taken in the reflection group, Britain is in a minority of one in regard to one in three decisions—not just in a minority, but in a minority of one.

Mr. Gallie: Will the hon. Gentleman not acknowledge that the Prime Minister stood alone in Europe at Maastricht when he secured the opt-outs on the social chapter and European Union? That was before the so-called rebels had had any effect on the Conservative Benches. Surely it demonstrates—*[Interruption.]* Opposition Members laugh, but they would certainly sell out Britain's interests in Europe. That is something that

the Prime Minister is not prepared to do; nor is my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence. I suspect that the hon. Gentleman would do it, however.

Mr. Cook: I congratulate the hon. Gentleman. After I have been speaking for 28 minutes, he has grasped my central point. The Prime Minister does indeed stand alone in Europe, alongside his Cabinet; but the issues on which they have chosen to stand alone are mystifying.

One of the issues on which the Minister of State has recorded his position as being in a minority of one is the question of whether the treaty should be amended to provide for a commitment to combating racism. Britain has a larger ethnic minority population than any other country in Europe. Surely it should be in Britain's interests to have a common European commitment, so that when the members of those ethnic minorities from Britain travel in Europe they are free from discrimination on the ground of race.

Similarly, the group is in a minority of one over the question of any extension of co-decision in the European Parliament. I recognise the source of that. I remember the slogan of the rebels: "No more powers to the Parliament". This, however, is an odd power against which to take a lonely stand. Co-decision-making does not facilitate European legislation; it gives the European Parliament another hurdle to put in the place of legislation—to test that legislation, but this time through a democratic process. Increased use of the co-decision procedure will give the European Parliament a useful veto over unnecessary or undesirable European laws. Surely the hon. Member for Ayr (Mr. Gallie) would agree that that is common sense. I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman does not agree because the last sentence came from the leader of the Tory group in the European Parliament, and I agree with it.

The Foreign Secretary likes to accuse me, and presumably his leader of the Tory group, of having a federalist agenda. He persists with it however often I try to put him right, but I shall try once again. Labour does not support a federal European super-state. Labour is the party of devolution. We want to practise real subsidiarity and we want to hand power down to local people, not up to Brussels. Our vision is of independent member states coming together not to surrender national sovereignty, but to co-operate because they have common interests. We shall get a better deal for the people of Britain through co-operation than through competition.

Mr. Fabricant *rose—*

Mr. Cook: I give way for the last time.

Mr. Fabricant: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way to me for a second time. What experience does he have of negotiating outside his party? Does he not realise that one can negotiate only from strength? He will recall that he was prepared to roll over supinely in the 1980s on the deployment across Europe of the Soviet Union's SS20 missiles. Is not he rolling over supinely again when he says that he would give away our veto? What sort of sovereignty is that?

Mr. Cook: We are not giving away Britain's veto. The document from which the Foreign Secretary is fond of quoting specifically says that we will keep the veto on all major strategic issues. It arises naturally from the Foreign Secretary's speech that it was a Tory Government who took us in on the ground of qualified majority voting. Even more relevantly, it was this Tory Government who, by way of the single European market, introduced a massive extension of qualified majority voting. After that they can hardly accuse us of U-turns and pretend to be the people who support the veto.

On one issue the Government's criticisms of us are spot on, because we will indeed sign the social chapter. I concede to the Foreign Secretary that on that issue the Government are not absolutely isolated because the National Front in France agrees with their opposition to the social chapter. We shall sign up to it because we want the working people of Britain to have the same rights to information and consultation at work as working people on the continent, who often work for the same companies.

One of the familiar faces in our debates on foreign affairs which is sadly missing is that of Derek Enright. When we last debated Europe he observed that real sovereignty was about giving people power over their lives. That is why we are committed to the social chapter. May I offer the Foreign Secretary an invitation? I would welcome it if on every day from now until polling day he toured Britain telling the working people that Labour will sign the social chapter for the rights of working people and that the Government are determined to make sure that the working people of Britain get worse rights at work than those in any other country of the European Union. It would be even better if he coupled that advice to the electorate with the remarkable statement this week by the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry that job insecurity is all in the mind. That statement will help to convince millions who are fearful for their jobs that it is not they who are out of their minds but Ministers.

I opened my speech by seeking the common ground between us. I shall close by trying to find the redeeming feature in the Gracious Speech. Perhaps the kindest thing that one can say about the Gracious Speech is that it will be the last one introduced by the Government.

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Sir Nicholas Bonsor): No.

Mr. Cook: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman would enlighten us as to when we will have the opportunity of getting rid of him and his colleagues. The Gracious Speech is so slim on ideas, so thin on new initiatives and so irrelevant to the real problems of Britain that any further Gracious Speech from this Administration would set new standards for minimalist literature. The best feature of the debate is that when it is repeated we may be debating a Labour Queen's Speech. That speech will put Britain on the road towards a competitive economy, based not on exploitation of lower wages, but on investment in high skills, and towards a just society that will outlaw poverty pay, give the long-term unemployed the opportunity of work and put us on the path to an open democracy that gives back to local people the powers that these Ministers have taken to themselves and to the thousands of clones with whom they have peopled this country's quangos.

We will offer a foreign policy based on our recognition that, just as the individual needs a strong community to give opportunity to the talented and protection to the vulnerable, so too each nation needs a healthy international community to provide it with opportunity to

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trade and security against threat, and we will seek alliances and partnerships in that international community rather than condemn Britain to stand in isolation.

That is the Gracious Speech that the House may have after the next opening of Parliament. What stands in its way is a bankrupt, broken-backed Government who this week have comprehensively revealed that they have no useful project left to justify clinging to office for a further year, denying the wishes of an electorate who are weary with them and who, at some point in the coming year, will demand that they go.

4.31 pm

Mr. David Howell (Guildford): Before coming to the enjoyable parts, or some parts, of the speeches that we have heard this afternoon, including the latest version of the Labour party's foreign policy, which seemed to have changed a little even since yesterday, I should like to revert to a less agreeable set of comments made by the Leader of the Opposition yesterday about the Gracious Speech. At one stage, he observed that one-nation Toryism was "dead" and that it was all "finished". I felt a bit uncomfortable there because I do not feel dead at all and I am chairman of the One-Nation Tories. He and his colleagues should understand a little more carefully and analyse in a more modern way what the one-nation spirit is about, as it is in the Tory party and perhaps abroad and in the Labour party as well.

The point that is not understood is that the common ground on which all politics is moving today, not just in this country but round the world, has shifted away from the assumptions of the old one-nation view and of the moderate, less socialist wing of the Labour party that the answer to the nation's unity and security—the "one nationness"—was to be found through high welfare spending, universal social provision, high taxation and a heavy role by the Government to underpin it. Country after country and party after party have found that such collectivism is inefficient and, in the end, does not work. Where it was applied in extreme forms in the former communist countries, it collapsed under its own weight, as it has everywhere else.

If the Leader of the Opposition is to join the One Nation—he is welcome to do so if he wants—he should understand that the unifying forces of the modern nation are new, different and do not equate with the simplicities of just spending more of other people's money and of hanging on to the inefficiencies of a welfare state that has failed to provide security and strong family life, which exist in many modern states that do not have anything like the social security provision and extensive administration and bureaucracy behind them that we, in the past 40 or 50 years, have built up for good reasons, but in an increasingly inefficient way. It is time, therefore, for some new thinking from the Leader of the Opposition when he talks about one nation, and I would be glad to give him a tutorial if he would like to make the application.

The other sector that depressed me yesterday, although I was a little more cheered up by the speech of the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook), the shadow Foreign Secretary, involved all the talk about Britain's interests. There was much talk about that yesterday and today and many good and clear analytical observations were made today by my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary, but yesterday, as opposed to today, every time the Leader of the Opposition talked about interests, he seemed to have just one sector in mind: our interests in Europe. There has been a lot of talk about that again today. It is Britain's destiny to be in the European Union.

I do not disagree for one second with the vast importance of the single market. The much-criticised Tory Government of the 1980s spent a great deal of time taking the lead—not being anti-European—in creating that single market. We worked in Brussels, in various committees and engaged in endless negotiations and the same occurred in the 1970s. As I have said, I am not against parts of the great single market. I want to see it enlarged and completed, which it is far from being now.

But I ask the Leader of the Opposition and the shadow Foreign Secretary to stop and analyse a little more carefully the real interests of this country. Of course, there is the security interest and we have debated that today. However, the interests of British people in terms of welfare and jobs are to be found in two elements that have not been mentioned by the Leader of the Opposition or the shadow Foreign Secretary. First, there is the size of our gigantic owned capital assets—assets owned by this country around the world. One's interests are one's assets. That is common sense. Britain is a huge investor around the world. We are in the super league, second only to the United States.

Secondly, there is the amount of investment that others are prepared to make in Britain. Those are the primary interests. Trade follows not just from talking about things but from capital assets. Investment, direct and portfolio, goes in first and trade follows. If we want to see how interests are pursued, we should look at yesterday's *Financial Times* to see how the Japanese are redeveloping their interests by placing vast assets and direct investments around Asia and becoming involved successfully in the huge and booming markets of that area. We want to understand what our assets are and where they are.

I want to emphasise strongly that 80 per cent. of the vast ownership and assets of this nation are not in Europe. Half of them are in the United States and about a third are in countries of the Commonwealth and the emerging markets. The earnings that flow from them are colossal. In fact, our invisible earnings exceed our entire manufactured export earnings and are nearly as big as all our visible earnings put together. About four fifths of those earnings flow from outside the European Union and a little more than a third come from the countries that are currently members of the Commonwealth.

So is not it a little extraordinary that when we talk about interests, the suggestion is that it is all about getting our position straight with the rest of Europe? Of course that is important because Europe is moving rapidly. On a whole range of issues with which I shall deal later, what was isolation yesterday is not isolation today. I should have liked to hear more yesterday from the Leader of the Opposition about this country's real assets and how they are to be furthered. I was pleased that the shadow Foreign Secretary seemed to have moved a few notches back in that direction. He had a great deal to say about the Commonwealth generally and he even said a little about the Commonwealth as a useful network for the prosperity and interests of this country.

The Commonwealth has been hijacked by the headlines in recent weeks with the discussions about the French nuclear tests, about which the Leader of the Opposition had a great deal to say, and, more recently, the discussion about the horrific killing of Ken Saro-Wiwa and others in Nigeria. Despite that, the Commonwealth is an important part of furthering the future interests of this country. It is time that policymakers in all parties, certainly in Whitehall, spent a little more time understanding the interests of this country outside Europe as well as within it and how those interests can be furthered and strengthened by using the Commonwealth network as a resource.

The Commonwealth is not just a gathering of people with high-sounding rhetoric, which was exemplified at the Heads of Government meeting, but is a criss-cross network of a common working language—English—of business, trade, investment, culture and a variety of connections. It is trans-regional and is not another trade bloc. As other hon. Members have said, it contains a series of the world's fastest-growing markets and economies.

It is not the old Commonwealth of the begging bowl or even the Britain bashers. I concede that there was some Britain bashing over the French tests, but they were wrong and we were right. Nowadays, it is a Commonwealth that contains some of the most dynamic and fast-growing movements of internationally mobile capital, not only from Britain outwards or back to Britain but between, for example, Malaysia and Hong Kong, Malaysia and Australia, Australia and India and Australia and Africa. They are all areas where huge amounts of business are growing, where lively British businesses are getting involved and where we have vast interests to protect and encourage. Those interests are also worth a word or two when the shadow Foreign Secretary talks about the interests of this country.

It is not all that easy to get figures from politicians, and certainly not from Whitehall, about what our interests really are. In passing, it might amuse colleagues to know that when the Foreign Affairs Select Committee tried to examine the possibilities of the new Commonwealth as a resource, it sought to obtain specific briefing from officialdom, but we were told that officials were unable to obtain any Commonwealth-specific briefing in advance from the Foreign Office and that it would be provided by the post in each country.

It is time for all who take seriously this country's interests—I include the shadow Foreign Secretary, my right hon. and hon. Friends and high officials in Whitehall—to examine a little more carefully what is happening in the world of internationally mobile capital where our assets now are and from where our vast earnings now come, which enable us to deal with domestic spending or tax cuts or anything else. We shall no doubt be talking about that next week in the Budget debate.

The second point which I regret did not feature in the shadow Foreign Secretary's speech is why and how it all works. Much of the gigantic international capital movement, which is of such great interest to everyone in this country, is driven by the financial machine in the City of London. I must declare that I have a general interest in that sphere.

To listen to Opposition spokesmen, one would have thought—I suspect that we shall hear more of the same in the Budget debate next week—that the City of London's financial machine was on the whole an outfit to be constrained, criticised and regarded with suspicion, rather than one of the building bricks of this country's prosperity and earnings. The fact is that 23 per cent. of our national income comes from invisible earnings and from financial services-related earnings, and 48 per cent. of all our earnings comes from invisibles which, as I said, are well above our earnings from manufactured exports.

The truth that we never hear from Opposition politicians, although I hope that they will learn a little more about it, is that the much-criticised financial machine in the City of London has the largest market share of financial services across the globe, including Asia and the Commonwealth countries, including Africa. It has from 27 per cent. up to 81 per cent. of the market share of the various financial services. It ranges from selling Eurobonds, arranging mergers and acquisitions and managing the funds of the great savings nations of Asia. They are the ones that will call the tune. We manage their funds in London.

The City of London has 500 banks and it is the heart of Europe. It is the heart of the new global financial system. Some people claim that we are being marginalised and isolated, but the Leader of the Opposition does not have a clue about what has happened in the real financial world that drives our exports and imports. He does not seem to be aware that, far from being isolated, London is the very heart of the system. German banks are running to get office space in London, not in Frankfurt. Banks from every corner of the globe are doing the same because London is the heart of the system.

We have acquired, almost in a fit of absent-mindedness, a new empire of financial power and financial services that gives us a colossal global reach. While we are at the heart of Europe, we want to balance our position against our other interests round the world.

I do not deny for a moment that the European Union is important to us. We have to decide how we should handle it. The Opposition spokesman's witty speech about the dangers of isolation is all good fun, but it does not connect with where we stand and what our interests are. The problem with the European Union today is not that we shall be isolated in it, but that it will endanger the things which I have described and which are bringing to this country £108 billion a year in invisible earnings, enabling our exports to rush into some of the new and most exciting markets in the world, and linking us to India, Australasia, south-east Asia, the Pacific rim countries and even new countries that are not yet on the financial map. In this regard, Israel will emerge as a middle eastern tiger. They are the new areas where we shall make our money and help our people.

The danger is that we shall let the European Union, through over-ambition and too much unnecessary centralisation, dictate everything and undermine all that we have gained and are gaining in the new global environment. We should not let the European Union centralise our detailed social policy. The Opposition spokesman should realise that that is not a matter of sovereignty, at least not in my book, or chauvinism; it is a belief that social policy should be sensitive and focused as near the shop floor as possible.

[Mr. David Howell]

I urge on my colleagues one important message about the forthcoming intergovernmental conference. I hope that we shall not accept the view that if we lie low and do nothing, everyone else will disagree and there will a minimalist result. That would be a mistake and a lost opportunity. I am not saying what the federalists are saying—that it is a pity that there is so little agreement and that there cannot be a great leap towards a federalist and closed European system. That is anathema to me, but let us not imagine that the alternative is merely to do nothing. Doing nothing is quite dangerous and could easily lead to various developments that would undermine the true strength of our position, as I have tried to describe it to the House.

We need to be a good deal more than minimal and to put forward our own agenda to do two things. First, we need to preserve the European Union for which I have spent much of my life fighting, in the House and outside, and prevent it being divided by over-ambitious federalism. Secondly, we must ensure that it does not weaken the new global system, which will allow a place for trade blocs but which must not be dominated by trade blocism to the exclusion of world free trade.

Mr. Michael Colvin (Romsey and Waterside): If the Government's policy on Europe was not as positive as it is, surely this country would cease to attract some 40 per cent. of the inward investment in the European Union from the United States and Japan. Our economic climate, the fact that we speak English and the fact that we have such a good industrial relations record, which investors would not want to see reversed under Labour, are all good reasons why that investment has come here. In that context, it makes no difference whether we are in the exchange rate mechanism.

Mr. Howell: My hon. Friend has put my case far more eloquently than I have. We have done extremely well. We attract 40 per cent. of the total investment in Europe, much of it from the new Asian countries, incidentally. We have a gigantic global reach, and we are certainly the biggest European exporter of capital to places such as China. We do not want that upset by further attempts to corral us in an over-centralised European system.

Unlike some hon. Members, I like the Europe that we have had in the past. The single market was a great achievement, but it is threatened by the imminent explosion of the European Union's budget. If there is to be enlargement, which we have said that we favour, although I notice that Brussels is cooling over the idea—for very good reasons, from its point of view—and if we keep the existing common agricultural policy or anything like it and remain committed to the structural, cohesion and social funds and all the other things that Labour loves, one can confidently predict that we shall at least double the cost of Europe. By doubling it, we shall undermine it. We shall literally sink the European venture under the weight of excessive budget demands. That is one other thing that I hope that we can stop in the forthcoming intergovernmental conference; we should not just stand by and hope that it will not happen.

I would like to see—it is meant to be outside the remit of the IGC, but will come into it—more realism about the single currency. I cannot understand why people do not realise what a Europe-splitting, Europe-destroying project it is. Every day that goes by brings new evidence that even if the introduction of a single currency is attempted, even if the scheme gets a core of countries to go all the way, and even if the poor French are dragged to the edge of this European project for reasons deep in their own psychology—with which I half sympathise, but do not agree—it will do the most frightful damage to European unity. Indeed, it has already.

Already the feelings in Italy and Spain are much more hostile to the elements in Germany—which seem to be a small minority—and in France that want to push ahead. Already the arguments are for new barriers to be put up against those who have the impudence not to be part of the core hard currency. Already the dangers are visible on every side. There is the prospect of Mr. Waigel's stability pact imposing even tougher conditions—fines for countries' failures to conform with the fiscal requirements of this uniformity; this standardisation.

Such things are immensely dangerous and anti-European. They are destroying the kind of Europe that I favour. I cannot understand why the Labour party does not unravel the situation a little and look more carefully at the elements, instead of being gung-ho for Europe on every front. Such a point of view is dangerous. I do not think that the Labour party will become the party of government because we Conservatives will get in again. But supposing it did, for heaven's sake will it please prepare itself and look at such issues a little more sensibly and less generally than the Leader of the Opposition did yesterday?

The leader of the Labour party is getting very casual with his facts. He said that there was no mention of jobs in the Queen's Speech—there is. He said to the Confederation of British Industry that the social chapter would not impose on the Labour Government any measures that they did not want. It is bound to do so, by definition. The right hon. Gentleman must watch his facts more carefully and those who advise him must be more precise about what the Labour party's commitment to Europe really means. We should be checking the powers of the Commission and putting forward proposals to facilitate doing so. We should be working very hard to create democratic procedures rooted in the ancient, democratic nation states that we have always had.

In stepping—if I may—right out of line with regard to my right hon. and hon. Friends, I think that after the next IGC, whatever the outcome, we should have a referendum and settle for another 25 years the matter of what sort of Europe we want to be part of. Let us fight for the sort of Europe that I and many of us want—a single market—and let us have a referendum and see whether everyone else wants it as well. I suspect—others may disagree—that a very large majority of people would want a sensible, confederate Europe, with a confederate agenda, enlargement and a powerful single market stretching from the Russian border to the Atlantic and from Calabria to the Orkneys. I think that there would be very strong, sensible support for that in our sensible British nation.

But these are the tactics. The heart of the matter is strategic. Economic and political powers in the world are shifting, as the hon. Member for Livingston recognised, from the Rhine and the Ruhr to the capitals and rivers of Asia. The strategic central consideration is that, as I said,

80 per cent. of Britain's global assets, and about the same percentage of the nation's colossal earnings from those assets, arise outside Europe.

The new reality is that Britain's total earnings from outside the EU—all our overseas earnings in this huge trading nation—are some 50 per cent. higher than those from within the Union. Although we should not be anti-European, we should not go overboard in uncritical commitment to something that represents only a minority of our interests.

It so happens—this is perhaps the most important consideration of all for the future—that Britain is ideally positioned in the great new markets of Asia because of our past, and because of the way in which we succeeded, despite being an empire and a colonial power, in remaining very close friends with and attracting the continued admiration of all the countries concerned. Quite unlike—dare I say—other empires and metropolitan powers, we remain befriended and admired by those people. We have colossal advantages that we can exploit, because we are extremely well equipped to meet the new kinds of demand for services and skills, and for categories of product and sales that do not yet seem to come into the thinking of Opposition Members. I hope that they do so soon.

The sooner that those basic realities about our interests of today and tomorrow are embedded in the minds of, yes, the Labour party and, yes—possibly—Whitehall as well, the more prosperous, competitive and influential for the good we shall be in the modern world.

4.54 pm

Mr. John Fraser (Norwood): I shall speak on the issue of Nigeria, but before doing so I should like to raise the associated matter of asylum, which found its way into the Queen's Speech. To some extent, the Government's concern about asylum is a consequence of events in Nigeria, which have led many Nigerians to seek asylum in this country and which show that no country is immune from conditions in another country.

Political asylum should not be a party political issue. Indeed, it cannot be because we are all subject to an international convention on asylum, which applies equally irrespective of what party we belong to. We have been a party to the United Nations convention on refugees for almost 50 years. The only issue is how we deal fairly and effectively with applications: not allowing so much time for applicants to take advantage of the system, and not allowing so little time that justice is not done.

Asylum should be considered on its merits, not according to politics. I hope that even at this late stage the Government will accept the offer of the Leader of the Opposition to try to reach a sensible consensus. There can be no difference of opinion on our obligations under the international convention.

Mr. Nirj Joseph Deva (Brentford and Isleworth): I know that the hon. Gentleman is well versed in these matters—indeed, we had exchanges on the subject in a Committee that considered a related Bill. Surely one of the important aims is to deter bogus applications. Last year, 38,000 applications were submitted, of which only 1,700 were not bogus. How would he deter bogus applications?

Mr. Fraser: I do not like using the phrase "bogus applications". As a legal practitioner I have some experience of dealing with immigration and I know that bogus is not the right word to use. People are often under immense pressures—pressures of family, pressures of poverty and so on. I am not saying that many of the applications meet the terms of the international convention, but it is not the right approach to talk of deterring applications and of bogus applications. The right approach is to deal with applications relatively quickly, but not so quickly as to do an injustice. That is the answer.

If there is a lesson to be learned, we should look to the Asylum and Immigration Appeals Act 1993. I was a member of the Committee that considered the Bill, as was the hon. Member for Brentford and Isleworth (Mr. Deva). The Act has not worked. If it is to be revisited, we should try to reach a consensus on how we honour our international obligations instead of making it a purely political matter.

I shall devote the rest of my speech to Nigeria. I commend the Prime Minister's outspoken comments and condemnation of events in Nigeria at the Commonwealth conference and the outspoken way in which the Foreign Secretary has talked in the House today. It is very pleasant when the Government speak for the nation instead of for their party. I like that and it happens from time to time. Indeed, we should speak as a nation on many issues and not try to politicise them all.

If rainbow South Africa is the triumph of Afric[illegible], Nigeria is one of its tragedies. It became independent in 1960 and now has a population of more than 100 million. It has been blessed and cursed by its ethnic diversity, but following the civil war in Biafra a few people believed that its destiny lay other than in a multi-tribal, multi-lingual, multi-religious state. Despite all its problems and setbacks, Nigeria has evolved into a state where people pride themselves on its size, potential and generally tolerant diversity.

Nigeria's unity in diversity has been illustrated by the reaction of so many Nigerians from different tribes and regions to the judicial murder of Ken Saro-Wiwa and his compatriots from Ogoniland.

Nigeria's assets are legion: oil, gas, fertile land, strong family, cultural and artistic traditions, a thirst for education and achievement. So what has gone wrong with the country?

The symptoms are many. There was the civil war of secession over Biafra; the repression of the Ogoni people in River state in the cause of oil and profit, culminating in the brutal and sickening executions that shocked the world last week; and long years of military dictatorship in the 35 years since independence. In the short periods in which there has been democracy in Nigeria, democracy has not come out of it well. It has been besmirched by corruption, nepotism and tribalism, and it has provided an excuse for the military to take over and indulge in similar practices. The result is that Nigeria now has a per capita income equal to that of Haiti, one of the poorest countries in the world; abuse of human rights is growing; Nigeria's elected and past President is in prison; and there is growing hardship and isolation. Thus, a country that should have been a leader of Africa has become the laggard of Africa.

Those problems are our concern, too, because Britain has strong links with Nigeria. Many Nigerians have been educated here, mainly in further education, and many thousands of Nigerians live here temporarily or

[Mr. Fraser]

permanently, especially in south London. I am happy to be the sponsor of an organisation called the Nigerian Organisation for Democracy with Integrity, and I was happy to join in the vigil of outrage and protest outside the Nigerian high commission this weekend.

To help Nigeria, we must set ourselves two objectives. In the long run, the first objective depends on the second. First, we must use every practical means to bring democracy and human rights back to Nigeria. Secondly, we must help Nigeria to rid itself of corruption, whereby public office equals private enrichment. It is for Britain, the United States, the Commonwealth and the European Union to help Nigeria in that way. We must help Nigeria to bring integrity back into public administration and public life. Those two objectives add up to what we call good government.

On the first objective of bringing back democracy and respect for human rights, I commend the Government for joining in Nigeria's suspension from the Commonwealth. I do not want to see Nigeria expelled because that would have severe citizenship effects both on people who live in this country and on people who want to come to this country. To bring back democracy and respect for human rights, the United Kingdom and all countries that manufacture and export arms must apply an absolute prohibition. All kinds of military assistance must be banned. Such little aid as we give to Nigeria should be directed not to the Nigerian Government but to non-governmental organisations, and directed at the poorest in the community there.

We must hit Nigeria's corrupt dictators where it hurts most: by freezing their bank accounts and the huge amounts of money that have leaked out of that country. I hope that Britain will do so and urge other countries to follow. Much of the oil revenue goes directly into the pockets of the military. We must put pressure on oil companies such as Shell, although it is not the only oil company concerned, which have ravaged the environment and then provided the revenue to allow the military to ravage the country as a whole. Multinationals cannot be neutral in those matters. We must impose oil sanctions because they are the most effective way to bring home our disapproval of what has been happening in Nigeria and to try to bring about a change in the regime.

Other sanctions must be applied, including sanctions on sport. I know that it is unpleasant, but they would bring home to the Nigerians, as they did to the South Africans, the revulsion of the rest of the world. That is not an exhaustive list of what we should do but the most important measures are oil sanctions and the freezing of bank accounts.

On the second issue—corruption and integrity—nobody in the western world is entitled to be smug and complacent about corruption. Italy has been riddled with corruption, and is currently dealing with that. In the past couple of weeks, Britain has had to deal with the issue because of the interaction between corruption and the integrity of public life. However, in Nigeria, the corruption and plundering of state assets and revenues has reached monumental proportions and millions of ordinary Nigerians pay the price. I seek not to stigmatise Nigerians but to condemn the practice that impoverishes the country and so many ordinary people who live there. Corruption devalues democratic institutions. From time to time it provided an excuse for the military to step in. The military then plundered the revenues even more than the democratic institutions plundered them. Naturally, that provides a massive incentive not to return to democratic rule and accountability, which is why Babangida's regime never allowed the handing over of power to Abiola. That is one reason why the present announcement of a three-year progression to democracy is a farce, which is underlined further by the brutal executions that took place last week.

So extensive has been the scale of corruption in Nigeria that a whole scam industry has been built up on the expectation that corruption in some public offices is the order of the day. People receive letters almost every day of the week about off-quota oil cargoes, currency arrangements in which one must give bribes to obtain currency coming out of the country, and the procurement of arms.

The budgets of individual states have been filched and used for outrageous luxury expenditure by those involved outside Nigeria by salting the money out of the country. Rating and tax assessments have been distorted to gain political advantage. Public procurement has been grossly abused. Federal or individual states do not procure themselves; they procure through intermediaries, which take a cut. That cut in the price of the product is then left in other countries, in bank accounts in the names of private intermediaries. Enormous amounts of money have been siphoned off from federal revenue into private accounts.

Ordinary people pay for all that corruption, and democracy and justice are in danger of being snuffed out. People's lives are even being snuffed out. The fact that corruption has been widespread does not mean that everyone is corrupt—far from it. Most Nigerians want to free themselves from the yoke of corruption, which has corroded their judicial system and forms of government.

It is not for us to attempt to prescribe the detail of how Nigerian institutions should work or the detail of Nigerian law, but we must do whatever we can to help the restoration of democracy and give advice from our experience of those matters. We have great experience of public procurement and how to have public procurement that is free of graft and corruption. Although it does not always work, we must offer our experience in the context of a restoration of democracy. We have developed high standards of accountability for public funds and of audit, both nationally and locally. Let us offer all the help that we can on those matters. We reformed corruption in the civil service and the armed forces in the last century with the Trevelyan-Northcote reforms, by having a wholly independent appointment of civil servants. Let us offer advice and assistance on those matters as well as on remedies for administrative abuse. To their credit, the Government have developed those remedies not too badly through the citizens charter over the past few years. Let us try to ensure that power equals responsibility and accountability, and that power in Nigeria no longer means private enrichment. Some people say that we should not interfere with the affairs of other countries. In truth, we are all tied together, and we have common obligations under the convention on human rights and the conventions on refugees.

Nigeria's problems are our problems; our opportunities will be its opportunities. I hope that the Government will continue to be as outspoken as they have been, and to develop every detailed practical step to rid that country of corruption and to restore democracy and human rights.

5.9 pm

Mr. Michael Colvin (Romsey and Waterside): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Norwood (Mr. Fraser). I acknowledge his considerable knowledge of Nigeria and his call for sanctions, but the general experience is that sanctions rarely work unless they are universal, and they often fail unless backed up by blockades. One of the worries about Nigeria is that it is another country, along with the Sudan, where the fault line bisects the Muslim world and the Christian world. When we consider, at some future date, the question of the extension of NATO and its southern flank, that is one aspect of international security policy that we should approach carefully.

I endorse what was said earlier about the death of Mr. Rabin, a man who first fought for peace, then lived for peace and finally died for peace. I agree with the shadow Foreign Secretary that there is a very good chance that Mr. Rabin's death will strengthen rather than harm the peace process in the middle east.

The debate has concentrated on foreign affairs. I would like to shift the emphasis to the related subject of defence. It is proper that, traditionally, the priority in the Gracious Speech has been the defence of the realm. I welcome the opening sentence, which confirms that

"national security remains of the highest importance"

to the Government.

I wish to address a number of subjects mentioned in the Gracious Speech; the future of NATO; the Western European Union; reserve forces; peacekeeping operations; and transatlantic free trade. I will also take off my Select Committee on Defence hat for a moment to comment on defence procurement.

The future of NATO was the subject of the Defence Committee's 10th report in the previous Session, and we are currently studying the question of NATO's southern flank. We believe that NATO will enlarge gradually and cautiously, not only to the east, but to the north and the south, to embrace suitably qualified states as fully contributing members of the alliance, within the integrated military structure. That would permit the stationing and exercising of NATO forces in fulfilment of the terms of the preamble to the Washington treaty, subject to the willingness of existing member states to give the article 5 security guarantee. We would like more open discussion of approximate target dates for enlargement, assuming that it will probably start within the next decade.

The Committee welcomes the "Partnership for Peace" initiative, in particular, the participation of Russia. We have underlined the United Kingdom's continuing pivotal role in cementing the transatlantic alliance, not least by persuading our European partners of the importance of maintaining and strengthening that alliance, and of the dangers of embarking on fanciful chimeras that might weaken it beyond repair.

We wish to see progress on the plans for the combined joint task force.

The Committee has only just commenced its inquiry into aspects of the Western European Union, so I cannot anticipate the outcome. However, two principles seem to be emerging which could have general support: first, the Western European Union should not be integrated into the European Union; and, secondly, nations should not become members of the WEU without first becoming full members of NATO, and by full members, I mean integrated into the military structure.

I hope that the time will come when France and Spain will join the integrated military structure—IMS. I was interested to see a newspaper report today that the Spanish Foreign Minister, Mr. Solana, might be a candidate for the vacant position of Secretary-General of NATO. We should applaud the fact that Spain is already involved jointly with NATO countries in the former Yugoslavia, where it has sent 1,500 troops who are committed to operations there.

The House will welcome the Government's proposal to introduce a Reserve Forces Bill following extensive and intensive consultation. Defence Ministers normally rejoice in the fact that they have little legislation to worry about, but during this Session we will consider two defence Bills, the Reserve Forces Bill and the quinquennial Armed Forces Bill.

The Select Committee on Defence published a report on the reserve forces, its 12th report, last Thursday. We gave broad support to the reorganisation of the Territorial Army, and its new role as the general reserve for the regular Army. We expressed our concern, however, at the high rate of turnover, which is 29 per cent. for the TA as a whole, and which particularly affects those serving under three years. We thought that the selection process could be improved. We also want to see a higher quality and quantity of training, particularly for those units taking on new roles and using new equipment.

We advocated the measurement and monitoring of basic fitness and shooting standards, and called for a stronger commitment to integrate TA units with their regular counterparts.

We noted the increase in the numbers of regular and non-regular support staff in the TA. We urged the Ministry of Defence to civilianise those posts with no genuine military content, make full use of the commercial contracts available to the regular Army and reduce current levels of administrative support where possible.

The Select Committee recommended that the Royal Naval Reserve should be given more worthwhile training and experience at sea. We suggested that it should perhaps be given new roles, such as fisheries protection and environmental monitoring, which could help towards improving recruitment.

The Select Committee welcomed the fact that the RAF reservists are given trials in flying Wessex helicopters and Hercules aircraft. We also welcomed the concept of an active flying reserve.

Our report also considered the role of the regular reserves. We regretted the absence of any current training liability, and we would like the MOD to initiate training for those with specialist functions most likely to be required in operational services. We expressed our broad support for the principles set out in the draft Reserve Forces Bill, and the new categories of reserve—the sponsored and high-readiness reserves. There is no doubt that an increasing reliance on, and willingness to use,

[Mr. Michael Colvin]

reserve forces must be accompanied by an increased commitment to preserve their strength and improve their quality. Our reserve forces must be seen to be not just smaller but demonstrably better.

As for the peace implementation forces planned for Bosnia, I believe that out of a total force of between 50,000 and 60,000, the United Kingdom's contribution is assumed to be around 15,000. That would increase the proportion of our Army engaged in operational missions to more than half. In terms of overstretch, that will make it even harder for the Army to meet its stated objective of 24 months between deployments. It will also have a significant effect on training for high-intensity conflict. I would be interested to know what means of deployment we will use. Will troops go over land to Hungary or will they travel by air or sea? Will it be necessary this time to hitch a ride from the United States? With the welcome involvement of Russia in the operation, perhaps we can expect the Russians to provide heavy-lift air transport.

I presume that 24 Air Mobile Brigade will be part of that force, because although most of the troops are now back in the United Kingdom, their equipment remains in theatre. In the Minister's reply to the debate, perhaps we may be told whether the Army chiefs' advice to send a division-sized unit with tanks and artillery is accepted, and whether the MOD budget or the contingency reserve will bear the cost of that operation.

I read that my hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces has called for 350 volunteers from the Territorial Army to act as linguists, weathermen, intelligence officers and public relations officers for the peace implementation force. Our recent report on the reserve forces welcomed wider use of the TA and I very much hope that, even before the Reserve Forces Bill is enacted, employers will be sympathetic to the release of people who wish to volunteer for duty in Bosnia.

I have received a letter on the Board this afternoon from my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence, in which he tells me that the Reserve Forces Bill started its passage through Parliament in the other place this afternoon. He says in his letter:

"A business Compliance Cost Assessment has been prepared for the Bill. It estimates the average cost to business of the call-out for 9 months of a typical Reservist as £1,900. Payments to employers under the safeguards of the Bill are expected to reduce the average net cost to zero."

That is very welcome.

I should like to hear a Defence Minister's forecast of the limits of that mission. I was under the impression that the PIF would be deployed for between nine and 10 months. I acknowledge that there is a danger of what is called mission creep into a larger engagement, but I believe that that would be extremely serious.

The Gracious Speech also said that Her Majesty's Government would

"continue to pursue the objective of transatlantic free trade".

The Defence Select Committee is studying, jointly with the Trade and Industry Select Committee, aspects of defence procurement. I cannot anticipate the outcome of that inquiry; I hope that the report will be published quite soon. However, I am aware that access to the United States defence market might be a good deal freer. There has been shrinkage in the defence industrial base of the United States and the United Kingdom as a direct result of the so-called peace dividend. Less is now spent on defence, to such an extent that the viability of the UK defence industrial base is in question; that was the principal reason for that joint inquiry.

We have witnessed jobs in our defence industry shrink from about 200,000 to only 100,000 in the past 15 years. The collapse of the iron curtain and the economic difficulties of the former Soviet Union now mean that there is an increasing sale of high-quality military equipment on world markets to earn foreign currency.

We have also witnessed the growth of indigenous defence industries in developing countries such as Taiwan, South Korea, India and South Africa, where labour costs are a good deal less than they are in the United Kingdom.

Falls in turnover, in the volume of sales—especially exports—and in profits mean that less money is now spent on research and development. In that respect, a good case might be made for closer collaboration, both transatlantic and with our European partners, especially within the Western European Union, on research and development to preserve our technological lead and our competitiveness.

I shall comment on two procurement issues. I am aware that the Government are currently comparing the relative merits of leasing or buying American F16s with those of upgrading the Tornado F3s. There has been much public comment about that, but I feel that that proposal has much more to do with destabilising the Eurofighter than anything else.

I hope, therefore, that the Minister who replies to the debate will take the opportunity to describe as complete nonsense the *Observer* story on Sunday 12 November that Britain might consider the purchase of American F22s instead of proceeding with the Euro 2000 programme, which is now well into its flight development stage. Apart from anything else, the F22 is twice as expensive as Eurofighter, with little additional performance.

Mr. Keith Mans (Wyre): Does my hon. Friend agree that it is about time that national newspapers stopped simply publicising reports given to them by American aircraft companies without even considering the effect that that has on companies in Britain, and concentrated a little more on publicising the facts about what is going on in the aircraft industry in Britain?

Mr. Colvin: My hon. Friend, who has considerable experience of the Royal Air Force and the defence industry, made the argument extremely well.

I wish to mention a constituency issue. Many Vosper Thornycroft workers live in Romsey and Waterside and have a considerable interest in the outcome of the two-horse race between GEC Yarrow and Vosper Thornycroft for the orders for the final batch of three type 23 frigates. I am delighted to see my hon. Friend the Member for Southampton, Test (Mr. Hill) in the Chamber this evening. No doubt he will support what I say about that.

GEC already has a monopoly for submarines and a near-monopoly for service ships of more than 6,500 tonnes. Continued competition for the supply of frigates is essential. We are fortunate at present to have Vosper Thornycroft as a strong and capable alternative to GEC for the supply of frigates. Vosper has already

demonstrated its capability to build large steel surface ships for the Royal Navy. One of those, a stretched type 42 destroyer, HMS Gloucester, is 3,880 tonnes and 141 m long, which is bigger and heavier than a type 23 frigate, at 3,500 tonnes and 133 m long.

Vosper Thornycroft can therefore build steel ships up to and including 6,500 tonnes, which is the size of the common new generation Horizon frigate, which is now on the drawing board.

We must ensure that there are at least two British yards in the Horizon contest to maintain effective competition within the UK. That, in turn, has a considerable effect on exports.

If that contract were lost in its entirety to Yarrow, Vosper Thornycroft's 1,500 shipbuilding work force would be cut by one third in 1996. Were the orders won, 500 new jobs would be created. That order is therefore vital to Vosper Thornycroft, which can deliver on price, time and to the highest quality standards required by the Royal Navy, and will help secure more export orders for the United Kingdom.

I add a final footnote. The current world security scene is decidedly disorderly. The stability of the cold war has gone. As an international trading nation, with many remaining small dependent territories and worldwide interests, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Guildford (Mr. Howell) described, it is vital to identify and quantify worldwide risks. To do that, we and our allies need the edge in intelligence. That is costly, and co-operation is essential.

It is said, rightly, that time spent on reconnaissance is seldom wasted. I trust that Her Majesty's Government acknowledge that need as part of the priority that they have given to our national security in the Gracious Speech, which I endorse and applaud.

5.27 pm

Mr. Menzies Campbell (Fife, North-East): Although this day's debate on the Gracious Speech is assigned to foreign affairs and defence, one cannot escape the conclusion that that is something of a luxury, as only very recently we had the two-day debate on the defence White Paper. Therefore I propose to concentrate rather more on the foreign affairs aspects of the Gracious Speech.

However, I wish to comment about an issue that was mentioned in that debate as recently as two or three weeks ago, and which has just been mentioned by the hon. Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin). He is now the distinguished Chairman of the Defence Committee, under whose chairmanship I have the pleasure to serve as a member of that Committee. That issue is the proposal to lease F16 aircraft instead of proceeding with the mid-life update of the Tornado F3.

The issue was canvassed to some extent in the two-day debate on the defence estimates, but there have been more recent reports suggesting that the F22 might be offered as an incentive to lease the F16. The hon. Member for Romsey and Waterside acceded to the point made by his hon. Friend the Member for Wyre (Mr. Mans)—that these reports emanate from a mischievous manufacturer of aircraft in the United States. My information is rather different. I believe that some person or persons close to the Secretary of State for Defence has or have suggested some preliminary enthusiasm for the idea. We know, following a question that I asked last week, that our fleet of Royal Air Force tankers is not fitted in such a way as to be able to refuel F16 aircraft if we were to lease them. So the possible costs of a proposal of this kind clearly require further investigation than they have so far undergone.

I do not shrink from the conclusion that if we proceeded to lease F16 aircraft, no matter at what giveaway prices they might be offered, the result could only be deeply damaging to the UK aerospace industry and in particular to British Aerospace. Certainly, if we are offered the F16, it will not come in its more recent variants, the E and the F; we will be offered the A and B versions, currently parked in the deserts of Arizona and for which an alternative resting place is being anxiously sought by those responsible for them.

If we proceeded in this way and accepted some sort of arrangement involving the F22, how could the Eurofighter project possibly survive? How could the United Kingdom continue to have a capability in this area; and what hope would there be for the HALO project—the high-agility, low-observability aircraft that is already under consideration? We would become wholly dependent on the United States of America.

It is notable that when such issues of supply of aircraft have been raised in the past between the United States and other countries, the intervention of Congress has often proved an obstacle. Hon. Members may be aware that the Government of Pakistan purchased a number of aircraft from the United States, but because of the intervention of Congress the planes have never been delivered, although they have been paid for. When the Saudi Arabian Government were desirous of purchasing the F15E from the United States they were not allowed to have the aircraft, again because of the intervention of Congress, and had to settle for what came to be described as the F15XS—the same airframe but with less capability than the F15E which the Saudi Government had wanted in the first place.

The point is that the process makes a country depend entirely on the United States, both industrially and militarily, and on the political will of Congress at the moment such aircraft are due to be supplied.

Mr. Colvin: I am grateful for the hon. and learned Gentleman's earlier remarks. Does he recall that the former Secretary of State for Defence, my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Edinburgh, Pentlands (Mr. Rifkind), spent some time persuading the Italians not to lease F16s but to lease from Britain the F3 Tornado? Having persuaded the Italians to do that, the Government would look pretty stupid if they gave serious consideration to doing the precise opposite.

Mr. Campbell: The hon. Gentleman makes a powerful point. I can do no better than echo his description: it would indeed look pretty stupid. But when this point was made to Ministers in the course of the two-day debate on the defence estimates, hon. Members will recall that their response was to the effect that Her Majesty's Government would not be fulfilling their responsibility unless they gave careful consideration to a proposal of this kind. On the contrary; I say that the Government would be guilty of a grave breach of responsibility if they proceeded in this way.

[Mr. Campbell]

I am sorry that the Secretary of State is not here at the moment. There has always been a relationship between political and procurement issues—so much is undeniable—but it would be wholly unacceptable if some anti-Europeanism were to dictate a procurement decision of this type. An anxiety to cement the Atlantic relationship at the expense of the United Kingdom's capability in this area would be misplaced and would be a price not worth paying.

On the matter of the reserve forces, it is generally accepted that it is time for new legislation, to take account of the reductions in all three armed services and of the circumstances that obtain following the end of the cold war. I have no doubt that the measure will command, in principle at least, universal support in the House, although there may be some differences of opinion over its detailed provisions.

Likewise, I deduced a large body of support in the House for the Foreign Secretary's remarks about the middle east peace process. Indeed, he spoke for the whole House when he emphasised the desire of this country and this Parliament to ensure that that process is not stalled or disrupted by the assassination of Mr. Rabin. He spoke rightly of the confidence of the Palestinian people being an important component in the peace process, and referred in particular to his experience in Gaza. I suggest that we should not forget the need to inspire the confidence of the Palestinians in other parts of the territories that are part of the peace process. I think especially of Hebron, where the issue of civil rights is one of acute importance.

I hope therefore that the Government, accepting the will on the part of this House to support the implementation of the peace process, will not avoid any opportunity to make the point to the Israeli Government that the confidence of the Palestinian people, in Gaza and elsewhere, will be fundamental to the continuation of the peace process.

The Gracious Speech refers both to the Western European Union and to NATO, and it is right on an occasion such as this, when we are considering wider issues, to mention both. It is important to remind ourselves of precisely what the treaty of Maastricht said. It states that the European Union should

"assert its identity on the international scene, in particular through the implementation of a common foreign and security policy . . . including the eventual framing of a common defence".

That is rather tentative language; it hardly justifies the assertion made at a seaside town towards the end of the summer that Brussels would tell the United Kingdom how and when to fight. The treaty also says that the WEU should simultaneously be the agent for the European Union's defence identity and become the newly strengthened pillar of NATO. Other provisions in the treaty make it plain that nothing in the treaty is to be allowed to prejudice the obligations towards NATO which subscribers to the treaty have undertaken.

There is no doubt that we need to make the sort of contribution to our own defence envisaged by the Maastricht treaty. To be tackled effectively, it is self-evident that matters of security must be dealt with on a supranational or international level. Just as our economic success depends on a successful Europe, so I believe our security is better assured through a Europe in which security has a prominent part to play.

As I have said before in this House, I am firmly of the view that the reduction in defence budgets will drive forward joint procurement and force specialisation as the only ways in which to meet the costs of advancing technology and to continue to provide a range of capability sufficient to meet any requirements that may present themselves.

I have no doubt that Britain's long-term security will be best achieved through a continuing American interest in Europe. We have a unique—although perhaps not a special—relationship with the United States. Our most recent ambassador to the United States, Sir Robin Renwick, spent much of his time in Washington trying to discourage the use of the phrase "special relationship". However, the two countries have a unique relationship in some respects, particularly in relation to the transfer of missile technology. The United Kingdom is the only country to which the United States supplies the Trident weapons system and it is the only country to which the United States is willing to sell the Tomahawk cruise missile.

However, we must remember that opinion in the United States about such matters is not set in concrete, any more than our attitudes are. Undoubtedly, in the United States there is a greater degree of interest in the Pacific than there has been for a considerable time. That means that there is an expectation—I believe it is entirely justified—that Europe will undertake greater responsibility for our own defence than we have in recent times. I believe that that can be best achieved through a higher degree of integration, block by block and step by step, among the countries of the European Union.

In the matter of the enlargement of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, to which reference has been made, there would be very little point in enlarging it if the consequence was to weaken or to dilute NATO's collective defensive response, which the relevant article of the Washington treaty provides. It must be pointed out that that response involves nuclear means if necessary.

When people talk about a diminution of sovereignty if the United Kingdom accepts the social chapter, they should ask themselves what is a greater diminution of sovereignty: the acceptance of common standards in relation to maternity leave and things of that kind, or the acceptance of a treaty obligation that requires one to go to war in defence of any of 15 other countries, using nuclear means if necessary?

In the post-cold war environment I believe that a European defence policy is inevitable and is entirely consistent with NATO. However, we will not suddenly wake up and say, "Today is the dawning of the European defence policy." Such a policy will emerge on a case-by-case basis—block by block and step by step—and if at some stage any of the parties to that process wish to reverse it or to stand aside from it, they will be able to do so. NATO provides the transatlantic link between Europe and north America. The European defence policy is a recognition of Europe's obligation to assume greater responsibility for its defence.

I turn briefly to the issue of NATO and Russia. Russia is special and, as such, must have special arrangements. Any effort to expand NATO to the borders of Russia without putting special arrangements in place could prove extremely destabilising. With the approaching two elections in Russia—for the Parliament and, in due

course, for the presidency—we must recognise that a stable Russia, continuing on the path to reform and gradually adopting the kind of democratic institutions of which we would approve, is very much in our interests. We must be extremely careful about doing anything that might destabilise Russia or divert it from its path of reform.

On the matter of nuclear weapons, the Gracious Speech says that it is the intention of Her Majesty's Government to ensure that the

"Preventing of the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction remains a priority".

With the signing of the indefinite extension of the nuclear non-proliferation treaty in May this year, those with an interest in nuclear disarmament—whether multilateral or unilateral—might have enjoyed feelings of hope and of optimism. Much of that optimism has been blunted by the French nuclear testing in the south Pacific, and let us not forget also the nuclear testing by the Chinese Government.

I cannot help thinking that we would have been better able to criticise the Chinese Government's decision to embark upon a series of nuclear tests if we had adopted a similarly critical attitude toward the French Government. If we accept the tests that the French Government have embarked upon—and which our Government are unwilling to criticise—I do not believe that our Government can then be critical of the Chinese Government. If one reads the exchanges from the nuclear non-proliferation treaty negotiations, it becomes clear that many of what used to be called the "non-aligned" nations—particularly the group of countries led principally by Egypt and Mexico—would have been very reluctant to sign an indefinite extension of the treaty if they had been aware that two of the nuclear powers which are permanent members of the Security Council of the United Nations were intent upon embarking on a series of explosive nuclear tests soon after the treaty negotiations were completed.

Her Majesty's Government say that they will pursue negotiations on a comprehensive test ban treaty. I hope that all hon. Members support that course of action. However, we must remember that our ability to test at all is entirely dependent upon the good will of the United States. When President Bush announced a unilateral moratorium on nuclear testing, Her Majesty's Government did not accede to it, at least in theory, for some time—although they had no option but to do so in practice. I hope that the Government will pursue the matter with considerable vigour and enthusiasm. I believe that the signing of such a treaty would be an important milestone in long-term efforts to achieve a reduction in our reliance upon nuclear weapons for our defence.

I was interested to note that in the exchanges between the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs and the Opposition spokesman, the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook), there was some dispute about public opinion. It is not just public opinion in the United Kingdom that is opposed to the French programme of explosive nuclear testing; the majority of public opinion in France is opposed to the tests. I do not suggest that we should always follow public opinion, but if one is seeking to gauge where the political balance lies on the issue, it is surely relevant to take some account of domestic public opinion in the country that is carrying out the tests.

As to the chemical weapons convention, I believe that there is a sense of relief among those who have taken an interest in the matter that at last the Government are getting around to ratifying it, as is foreshadowed in the Gracious Speech. I certainly welcome the proposed legislation, but it must be examined carefully to ensure that it is sufficiently strong and that its terms are adequate to ensure that the United Kingdom complies with the provisions of the treaty and that we can demonstrate that fact to the rest of the world. I would like the United Kingdom to adopt best practice in its implementation of the treaty and to play a leading role in the international organisation that will be established to oversee the general health of the treaty.

The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs referred to the United Nations and he correctly drew our attention to the fact that it is much criticised and that many of its achievements are unsung. It is clear that the world is becoming more tribal: disputes are as likely to occur within states as they are to occur between states. That prompted the Secretary-General of the United Nations to produce a document some 18 months or two years ago entitled "Agenda for Peace". Apart from some initial attention, it has not received much scrutiny.

The Secretary-General said that the classic definition of sovereignty and the immunity from intervention that members of the United Nations enjoy under its charter may need to be reviewed. Internal instability—rather than instability between states—could have environmental, political or other consequences. It must surely be for consideration as to whether, in certain specific circumstances, the international community should have the right to intervene.

The United Nations has the opportunity to increase its responsibility, but it has more to be responsible for and in rather less clear cut circumstances than in the past. One thing is certain: deterrence is always cheaper than war. In 1988, the peacekeeping budget was $230.4 million. In 1994, it was $3,610 million. Over the same period, the number of military personal increased from 9,570 in 1988 to 73,393 in 1994. Between January 1992 and January 1995, 11 new peacekeeping operations were established, 82 per cent. of which involved internal conflicts.

The United Nations will not be able to operate unless all its members pay their dues on time. In that regard, we cannot ignore the fact that the United States has shown continuing reluctance to do so. That reluctance springs from doubt about the utility of the United Nations and we should bear that carefully in mind. If the United States ever took a similar view towards NATO, for example, it is possible to envisage circumstances in which dues might not be paid to that institution.

That reluctance to pay for peacekeeping, or the regular dues of membership, makes it necessary to reform the bureaucracy and the institutions of the United Nations so that it can better perform the responsibilities that we heap upon it. We need a United Nations agency for the prevention and suppression of conflict. We need to re-establish the United Nations military staff committee and we need a staff college so that those we send to carry out the difficult and dangerous activity of peacekeeping, shading as it sometimes does into peacemaking, are properly trained and understand just how different it is from high-intensity warfare.

[Mr. Campbell]

The United Nations may well need its own independent intelligence-gathering organisation and at some time in the future we must surely determine whether its interests are best served by a standing force or by assigned forces, which can move at much shorter notice than the time it takes those contributing nations that participate in peacekeeping operations to deploy their forces.

For the foreseeable future, the effectiveness of the United Nations will be related to the extent to which the United States is fully engaged politically, militarily and economically. We must ensure that the confidence of the United States in the United Nations is maintained, but we have also to ensure that the United Nations does not become the implement by which the policy of the State Department is carried out. There is a difficult balance to strike, but unless it is properly struck, the United Nations will lack the resources to do what we ask of it, or alternatively it will become no more than the handmaiden of United States policy.

In regard to Europe, I do not want to add very much to what my right hon. Friend the Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) said yesterday. I believe that four principles should direct the attitude of the United Kingdom at the forthcoming intergovernmental conference.

First, we should reaffirm the proposition of the Prime Minister that the United Kingdom should be at the heart of Europe. Secondly, we should declare our intention to join the single European currency, if one is created and if the financial criteria are met, and we should be part of the preparations for that. Thirdly, we should declare that we seek the rigorous application of the principle of subsidiarity and the reform and reduction of bureaucracy. Finally, more for our domestic consideration than for the consideration of those with whom we shall be in negotiation at the IGC, we should declare that any substantial change in the constitutional arrangements between the United Kingdom and the European Union should be the subject of a referendum, so that the people of the United Kingdom can pass their judgment on what is proposed.

I should like to say more, but I am well aware that others are waiting to speak. In regard to aid, I hope that the rumours in September that there is to be a 12 per cent. cut in the aid budget are unfounded. I suppose there is a danger that if something less than 12 per cent. is cut, we will regard it as a victory. A 12 per cent. cut in the budget would mean a 40 per cent. cut in our bilateral aid to the poorest countries.

I do not shrink from saying that we have a moral responsibility. It would be quite wrong for us to cut what we give at the moment. We should remember that at the Rio summit the Government said that they agreed to and were doing their best to work towards the UN target of 0.7 per cent. of GNP. The principal aim of the aid budget should be to assist the poor to achieve sustainable social, political and economic development. That cannot be achieved by cuts in the budget.

In conclusion, in foreign policy we must surely have the foresight and determination to exercise value judgments as to which countries benefit from relations with Britain. Those that permanently flout human rights with oppressive regimes should not benefit from such relations. We should not accept in any part of the world any departure from those high standards. We should be robust in our criticism of Nigeria, where there was deliberate provocative, calculated, cruel and inhuman behaviour constituting a gross violation of human rights.

Totalitarian behaviour is surely unacceptable in a Commonwealth of which Her Majesty remains the head. I hope that sanctions, to which I referred in an intervention and others mentioned in their speeches, will be given serious consideration. I return to the examples that I quoted. We still maintain sanctions against Iraq because we believe they help to drive Saddam Hussein to implement all the Security Council resolutions. We have maintained sanctions against Serbia and Montenegro because we believe—and some suggest that we have been successful in this—that it is one way to persuade Mr. Milosevic to take a less difficult and obdurate line. If sanctions operate in those circumstances, we must give serious consideration to whether they will operate in the circumstances of Nigeria.

President Clinton was elected on the slogan, "It's the economy, stupid" as the electorate of the United States punished President Bush for the amount of time that he spent on foreign affairs. Governments are often elected on domestic policies, but as President Clinton soon found out, foreign policies cannot be excluded from consideration. One might argue that foreign policies are more likely to be influential on the reputation of a Government than domestic policies.

I cannot predict the battleground on which the next general election will be fought, but I am certainly convinced that when it is over and a new Government are installed, they will of necessity require to pay as much attention to foreign policy as to domestic policy and I hope that they will do their best to ensure that the reputation of the United Kingdom is enhanced.

5.58 pm

Mr. James Hill (Southampton, Test): What a glorious year and a half we have had in the United Kingdom. We have celebrated the 50th anniversaries of the Normandy landings, VE day and VJ day. If any Members attended any of the parades, I am sure that they would have had great respect for the Old Contemptibles. They were still military in their mode; they were able to turn out in any weather—I remember getting drenched just viewing them at Portsmouth one morning. It was a glorious time for the old soldiers.

The Normandy landings thrilled me most of all. I have in mind the scaling of the cliffs. It could be said that the Americans had the worst part of the beaches. The men were tied down for many a long hour and there were considerable losses.

It is said now, unfortunately, that we have no rapport with the United States and there is no longer any special feeling. Surely that is wrong. We have had tremendous rapport with the United States over the past 100 years. Whatever we say in this place will not change that. Our people have tremendous affection for United States service men and they treasure everything that they did during that almost impossible time when we had our backs to the wall. The Normandy landings presented us with a wonderful vista of the true world. We were shown that people were prepared to give their lives for a cause.

We celebrated VE day, which was spectacular. There were various celebratory functions. When we reached VJ day, we were deeply in sorrow. We thought of the people on the Burma railway who were treated so abominably by the Japanese. There was a massive number of deaths as a result of fevers such as malaria and beriberi. Those people experienced all the dreadful illnesses that result from an inadequate diet.

A friend of mine in Southampton, Fred Gilley—he is dead now—contracted leukaemia during the building of the Burma railway. I have talked to the old boys who were with him and in other areas. It is clear that they carried on in spite of all their difficulties. I was shocked when they told me that they had been compensated by the Japanese Government to the tune of £74 for everything that they had suffered while in prisoner of war camps. Not many of them recovered from the experience. My friend, Fred, had leukaemia for the rest of his life. He had to go to hospital regularly to have a complete blood change.

If we are to be friendly with the Japanese, I hope that we can find a way of resurrecting the issue of compensation for those who were treated so badly in the Burma campaign. There cannot be many victims alive now. Cabinet Ministers and perhaps Back-Bench committees should raise the issue again. To be awarded £74 in full settlement is not good compensation.

In Southampton, at Marchwood, we have the Royal Fleet Auxiliary—in other words, supply ships. Hardly anyone ever hears of them. We see aircraft carriers and battle cruisers, which small and underarmed ships must follow to refuel or restock, or even to provide with NAAFI stores. By and large, they are stationed at Marchwood.

Mr. Colvin: In my constituency.

Mr. Hill: Indeed, but more facilities must be provided. There is the quaint idea that we cannot build a port at Marchwood Wood because the vergers of the New Forest may not agree. We are stifled when it comes to expanding Marchwood.

Mr. Colvin: The Marchwood military port has been substantially enlarged. It is probably the most comprehensive and modern military port in the world, and certainly in Europe. The problem is that a short distance along the coast at Dibden bay—an area that has been formed from the dredgings of the Solent over the years to enable vessels to sail to and from my hon. Friend's constituency—dredgings have been dumped and 700 to 800 acres of wasteland have been created. Controversy now rages. Should the port of Southampton, which following the abolition of the national dock labour scheme is becoming an outstanding financial success, extend to the other side of the Solent?

Mr. Hill: That is illuminating. My hon. Friend is talking about a commercial project. I do not associate Marchwood or the Royal Fleet Auxiliary with anything that is commercial. It is—*[Interruption.]* My hon. Friend has outlined a battle that must be fought between the various local councils. As he says, the port of Southampton is doing extremely well. It can handle the largest container ships in the world. We know—*[Interruption.]* Of course, dredging must take place if those vessels are to reach container ports. Without being fanciful, I believe that the area could become a mini-Hong Kong in handling container traffic.

I am talking about Marchwood and not the port of Southampton. We know that the Royal Fleet Auxiliary has grown and must grow—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. The conversation between the hon. Members for Southampton, Test (Mr. Hill) and for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin) has continued for too long. It is interesting, but we are talking about foreign affairs and defence.

Mr. Hill: I apologise on behalf of my hon. Friend for his interruptions. The stage was reached when I had to give way.

I shall return immediately to our forces. I do not know whether anyone in the Chamber remembers that there used to be a Hampshire regiment. It became the regiment of the Princess of Wales. We are all aware of the difficulty in that area. I think that there is a roving role for the Princess of Wales as an ambassador. This might give my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary something to think about. A job must be found for her. After all, she has a wonderful personality. She would be invaluable in terms of trade with the eastern world.

Sir Patrick Cormack: Does my hon. Friend agree that the Princess of Wales might enhance her chances of being given such a role if she decided not to go forward with a certain programme on Monday next week?

Mr. Hill *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Member for Southampton, Test would be wise not to respond to that question.

Mr. Hill: I would merely say that no one has seen the programme to which my hon. Friend the Member for South Staffordshire (Sir P. Cormack) refers.

We should return to the debate. I often say that in Committee. I support the impassioned plea of my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin) on behalf of Vosper Thornycroft. Some of its employees who live in his constituency may become unemployed. That, too, would be the position in my constituency. We need a type 23 contract. Vosper Thornycroft is geared up for it. Possibly it did not win as many contracts as it should have in the past, but it is now highly specialised. I have been around the shipyard several times, and there is not a better yard for building naval vessels in the whole of the European Union. It is waiting anxiously for a contract from the Ministry of Defence.

Mr. Colvin: I am most grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way, and I promise, Mr. Deputy Speaker, not to start indulging in a corner conversation this time.

Does my hon. Friend not believe that, in a debate on a matter that is so crucial to the area that we both represent, the hon. Members for Southampton, Itchen (Mr. Denham) and for Eastleigh (Mr. Chidgey), who are not here, should be present in the Chamber, as this is the last opportunity that the House will have to debate the matter, and we are told that the Ministry of Defence is likely to reach a decision on the contract before Christmas?

Mr. Hill: I shall be guided by you again, Mr. Deputy Speaker. You will obviously say that it would not be proper to say anything at this stage. The hon. Members

[Mr. Hill]

concerned obviously have extremely important engagements somewhere, but it is a missed opportunity for both of them—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I always wonder what use such points are in a debate. Sometimes they are of very little use.

Mr. Hill: One of the little jobs that I have done in the House of Commons for many years is to be a member of the Council of Europe and the Western European Union. It was only a few weeks ago that Herr Kohl came to Strasbourg to make a speech, in which, to my amazement, he said that whereas five years ago there were only 24 member states of the Council of Europe, there are now 42. It is getting a bit out of hand. Everyone wants to join—the functionaries of the Council of Europe want them to join—but I wonder whether the facilities are there for such a number.

The WEU is heading precisely the same way. There will be many more applications to become members, as more and more people join the Council of Europe as the first step, but then wish to come to the WEU. The highlight of the WEU was when it put forward a defence plan in the Persian gulf—as I still call it—with minesweepers and finance before the war with Iraq took place. There was almost a perfect plan for co-operation among the nine members. I heard earlier that France may have to be excluded from the WEU if it does not join NATO. That is a very strong statement, because France, for years, has said that it would not join NATO. Indeed, to my knowledge it still has not done so. But it is there, probably in an advisory capacity.

At a working level, we have had a very able president of the WEU for the past two years. The WEU is sometimes overlooked in the House. It seems as if no papers over here report anything. No hon. Members seem to come back and push the word around. We do not all succeed in alerting our fellow colleagues to the importance of the WEU. I am pleased to see that, at long last, the Government are beginning to observe.

I heard earlier that it is hoped that there will be a smooth transfer of power in Hong Kong. We all hope that. Are the signs good? They seem to vary from day to day. The whole House should do its best to ensure that, in Hong Kong, and in our relations with China, we do not make ridiculously strong statements that could affect the Chinese. There is some good will to work on that. It really is up to the Government to promote a smooth transition in 1997.

6.14 pm

Mr. Ernie Ross (Dundee, West): I shall concentrate solely on the middle east and on the part of the Gracious Speech that referred to the determination of not only Her Majesty's Government but everyone in all parts of the House to pursue the middle east peace process.

I had the good fortune to meet Yitzhak Rabin in March this year, although I knew of his actions and his activities, when he attended the socialist international middle east committee, which met in Tel Aviv. He spoke passionately of his determination to achieve peace and security. He impressed everyone, even those who, perhaps, had disagreed with him in the past over the way in which, when he was the military commander of the west bank, he introduced his policy of breaking bones in an effort to break the intifada—the uprising by the Palestinian community on the west bank. From a man of war, he turned into a man determined to work for peace and security in that area, and he impressed everyone who listened to him at that time.

Yitzhak Rabin was very clear in his determination to pursue that peace process, despite the opposition against him and despite the narrow majority that he had in the Knesset. He made it quite clear to all of us who were present that, as long as he had a majority, even if it was a majority of only one, he would pursue peace. We now know that he paid for peace with his life. To that extent, we all owe him a great debt of gratitude. It is the responsibility of those of us who have been involved in that process for many years to continue that work and ensure that the middle east comes to peace.

It is difficult to say that any good can come out of anyone's death, but just occasionally when someone dies something happens as a result that helps to ease the pain. I have been very impressed to hear people who have recently returned from the region speak of the role that has been adopted by Yitzhak Rabin's widow, Leah Rabin. It would appear that she has become the conscience of the state. She is an extremely forceful presenter of her husband's agenda and is determined to see its implementation. There seems to be a new mood among the Israeli public. Visitors who have just returned from the region speak of a deep soul searching going on within Israeli society as a result of the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin.

Much more importantly for all of us who are involved in the middle east is an opinion poll, which has been published in the past few days in Israel, that indicates a dramatic upsurge in support for the peace process—up from the low 50s to 74 per cent. We have been gratified by the fact that the new Prime Minister, Shimon Peres, is just as committed in his determination to press ahead with the peace process. In particular, we welcome his decision to bring forward the withdrawal of Israeli troops from Jenin. It was a bold and very reassuring move, welcomed by all in the middle east, and it is certainly one that needs support. It is important that that withdrawal continues to move ahead, because, as the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Campbell) said, there are areas of concern other than Gaza and Jericho. The Israeli forces have now withdrawn from Jenin. They are due to withdraw from Tulkarm by 19 November; from Nablus and Kalkia by 26 November; from Bethlehem by 3 December; from Ramallah by 10 December; and, as the hon. and learned Gentleman said, from Hebron. No specific timetable is attached to that withdrawal.

We know that there are specific problems associated with Hebron, and we must allow the Palestinians and the Israelis to work them through. We should, however, be concerned about one area of Hebron, which has been mentioned in the House before—certainly I have raised it on a number of occasions, most recently in correspondence with the Minister of State. On 16 October, I asked him about the new Oslo B agreement relating to the new temporary international presence that is intended to help the withdrawal in Hebron.

Replying to my letter, the Minister wrote:

"This is a timely moment to examine the lessons of the last TIPH in May-August 1994."

I readily agree with that comment, but I should like to know whether the European Union and Israel have drawn the correct conclusions from the mission to ensure that the structural inadequacies and operational shortcomings that featured in the 1994 operation do not occur again. As I have said in the House before, the last international presence in Hebron ended up being protected by the local population, rather than the other way around.

We know that Norway has been asked to lead the operation, and that two other European states will be involved. We have a responsibility to ensure that, if a new temporary international presence is introduced, we get it right this time.

In the last few days, the Centre for International Human Rights Enforcement has published a report on the subject. Not only does it review the last TIPH but, more specifically, it sets out guidelines that I suggest the Government should use in their dialogue with our European partners. According to the report, the following questions need to be addressed:

"a) area of operation and access within that area for TIPH personnel;

b) the human rights and humanitarian law standards to be applied by the mission;

c) the transparency of the mission and its ability to build confidence among the Palestinian population of Hebron; and

d) the related requirement of regular reporting on the activities and efforts of the mission in a manner available to the Palestinian public, as well as to the constituencies of the participating states."

We have a unique opportunity to get it right—and it is essential that we do get it right. If the withdrawal of Israeli troops does not go ahead, the Palestinian elections cannot take place either.

Those Palestinian elections are one of the principal objectives of those of us who have been involved in the middle east peace process over many years. We all know that what is needed is a democratically elected Palestinian authority that can not only take control of the west bank and Gaza, but sit down as an equal partner with an elected Israeli Government to pursue the process to a successful conclusion.

Let me compliment the Foreign Secretary on his first visit to meet the chairman of the Palestine National Authority, Yasser Arafat: I know from my contacts that it was well received. Announcements of further aid will undoubtedly go a long way towards helping the peace process.

After a very shaky start, the Palestine National Authority is now settling down to its task. The collection of taxes has greatly improved the position, helping to ease the financial difficulties confronting the authority; the signing of the Oslo B interim agreement has also eased the concerns of donor countries. Much remains to be done, however, and I urge the Secretary of State to continue the assistance that the British Government have given so far and to ensure that it reaches those who need it—the Palestinian population on the west bank and in Gaza—as soon as possible.

We now know that the European Union unit that will oversee the Palestinian elections on 20 January 1996 has been established. The advance guard has been set up on the west bank, and we look forward to the good work that it will do in helping the Palestinians to move towards democracy through democratic elections. Those elections are essential—and I was very pleased to see Andrew Sackur's report on last night's "Channel 4 News", which included the registration of Palestinians for the elections by the electoral authority. We wish them every success.

Even in that area, however, we can do more. Earlier this year, through its Westminster foundation management committee, the Labour party launched a project to involve Palestinian women in the elections in a positive and practical way. The project was launched in April 1995; 139 Palestinian women from all over the west bank and Gaza, representing the different political parties—including the opposition—attended the course. According to a report from Palestinians to the Westminster foundation,

"The project was very successful both in terms of content and organisation. It will be remembered for having offered a combination of comprehensive, well balanced and much needed skills, techniques and information that satisfied the participating women's needs and encouraged a number of them to participate in the elections as candidates."

One of those women said:

"To become a candidate is no longer a mystery . . . My fears and concerns have disappeared, not because I think it is an easy job, but because now I know what my weaknesses are and I know what to do about them."

The project was carried out over a two-week period in five different locations: Hebron, Tulkarm, Nablus, Ramallah and Gaza. As I have said, local organisations firmly believe that, if there are women who are likely to participate in the elections, it is more probable that they will come from the group that participated in that project.

If we are committed to the peace process, we must also welcome the possibility of a dialogue between the Palestine National Authority and Hamas. That also reflects a growing confidence among the Palestinians in their ability to move forward, as one, to the elections. In the House, there has been a good deal of concern about what are regarded as fundamentalist groups—and, where the Palestinian community is concerned, Hamas is certainly regarded by some as one of those groups.

We should, as I have said, welcome the forthcoming dialogue, which was first hinted at when a member of the Knesset, Talib al-Sani, visited Shaykh Ahmad Yasin, the leader of Hamas, who is currently in an Israeli prison. At that meeting, the leader of Hamas committed himself to the agreement signed by the Palestine National Authority and Israel indicating that Hamas

"adheres to the regulations banning possession of unlicensed weapons, the supremacy of law . . . and the right of everyone to take part in the Palestine National Authority."

Since that announcement, there has been an unofficial dialogue—which will shortly become official—between the Palestine National Authority and Hamas. I welcome the most recent report that I have read, which came from the BBC's monitoring service and which suggested that Dr. Mahmud al-Zahhar, the official spokesman for Hamas in Gaza, had said that it had been agreed that a dialogue should be held in Cairo, rather than Khartoum. He emphasised that the choice of Cairo had positive practical significance for Hamas and its political progress, and said that the early announcement of the formation of a political party for Hamas supporters within a broad Islamic front was intended—along the lines of the Islamic action movement in Jordan. He said that the front would have no interest in military concerns and added that it would operate democratically and that its members would have the right to decide whether to participate in elections.

[Mr. Ernie Ross]

Those of us who are committed to the peace process welcome the current dialogue between the Palestine National Authority and Hamas as a further sign of the success of the peace process. If that process is to be successful it must be comprehensive, and Syria and Lebanon must play their part. That is why I welcome the Foreign Secretary's visit to Damascus. He was able to liaise between the Government in Damascus and the Israeli Government. I commend his activities and encourage him and other hon. Members to do all that they can to encourage the Syrian and Lebanese Governments to work closely for a more comprehensive peace in the area.

For the first time, a joint middle east councils delegation from the House visited Egypt, Syria and Lebanon in July. We were particularly impressed by the commitment to a comprehensive peace in the middle east based on international law and on Security Council resolutions 242, 338 and 425. That was set out in great detail by all the Syrian officials whom we met and also by Syria's Foreign Secretary, its Vice-President and its Prime Minister.

We were deeply impressed by the Lebanese commitment to the principled stand of peace based on international law and Security Council resolutions. The President spoke to us about Hizbollah, an Islamic group that concerns everybody who is involved in the middle east peace process. He made it clear that the members of Hizbollah were Lebanese citizens and that they had the right to participate in Lebanese democracy. The only conditions that they could be asked to accept would be loyalty to Lebanon and a refusal to act on instructions from any other country.

The Foreign Minister assured the delegation that when Israel committed itself to full withdrawal from southern Lebanon, the Lebanese Government would send their army to stop the resistance and restore democracy. When the Lebanese Government have full control of all Lebanese territory, there will be no cause for Hizbollah to launch attacks on Israel. He welcomed Israel's positive statement that it had no further claims on Lebanese territory or resources, but he wondered when Israel would back that statement with movement on the ground. He insisted that Hizbollah was a political rather than a military problem and said that the day that Israel commits itself to withdrawal from southern Lebanon, Hizbollah will lose 60 per cent. of its raison d'être. He also assured us that a full security programme for southern Lebanon could be achieved only within the framework of Security Council resolution 425.

While we were in the area we raised the question of the Palestinian refugees, and everyone, including the President, the Prime Minister and the Foreign Minister made it clear to us that it was an international problem and had to be dealt with by the international community. Although Lebanon could be asked to absorb perhaps a small number of the Palestinian refugees, 400,000 Palestinians could not be left in Lebanon as a continuing focus of resentment and resistance.

The middle east peace process faces outstanding difficulties. There are refugees not only in southern Lebanon but in other parts of the Arab world. Other problems are Jerusalem, the right to return, settlers, boundaries and sovereignty, and the Palestinians and Israelis will have to find solutions. We must also be involved where we can. The international community must be involved with the Palestinian refugees.

The delegation was struck by the principled position of Syria and Lebanon on the bilateral peace negotiations. We were convinced that it was not just a negotiating tactic but rather that the insistence on a peace agreement that was based firmly on the principles of humanitarian law and Security Council resolutions 242, 338 and 425 was sincerely felt and that a practical stand offered the best chance of a comprehensive and sustainable peace in the region. We are close to achieving peace in that area, but it requires the whole House to be committed to the peace process. I commend the actions so far of the Foreign Secretary in the short time that he has been in his job.

6.35 pm

Mr. Phil Gallie (Ayr): I start by apologising to my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary and to the hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) because I hope that I shall not be here for the winding-up speeches. I hope to return to my constituency.

Like the hon. Member for Dundee, West (Mr. Ross), I had the privilege of meeting Prime Minister Rabin about two and a half years ago. He told us of his vision of peace in the middle east. I respected Mr. Rabin, but I felt that his was a vision too far. However, it is now a reality and that speaks volumes for Prime Minister Rabin.

I welcome the Gracious Speech and the large amounts that are spent on defence. That is as it should be because for the Government defence has always been a priority. I welcome the maintenance of the United Kingdom's minimum nuclear deterrent commitment. Currently there are difficulties with the Polaris fleet. A Trident submarine is at sea and another is about to be commissioned. The Government showed great vision on that matter. There was a long period of opposition but now Opposition Members seem to have recognised the wisdom of moving along the Trident line. The Gracious Speech shows the Government's intention on the nuclear deterrent.

I welcome the commitment to encourage a co-operative relationship between NATO and Russia and the offer of further help to countries in central and eastern Europe. Just this week my constituency had visitors from the Ukraine. They were a sign of the Government's commitment to spreading the democratic message. The visitors were from the Rukh party in Ukraine and they came to learn about our democracy and the ways of political parties. No doubt people from such parts of Europe will visit the constituencies of Opposition Members, and that is how it should be. We should try to extend our democracy because it is precious.

I especially welcome the moves to create flexibility for the reserve forces. I recently welcomed the establishment of a new approach in Scotland—the Lowland brigade—as well as the establishment of A squadron of the Scottish Yeomanry, which places on record the great service that the Ayrshire Yeomanry has given to this country over many years. Also based in my constituency is B company of the 3rd battalion of the Royal Highland Fusiliers. It has a long tradition. The Government's proposals will give those divisions and people who give their time to the Territorial Army much to value and much to do. They have much to give to the country in future.

I welcome the Government's commitment to signing on to the prevention of the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. I recognise the concerns in recent times over France's tests in the Pacific. I too registered some concerns, but the stance taken by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister is commendable in many ways. It would have been easy for him to sign on to what would have been seen as a populist stance; he did not do so. He stood behind what he believed to be correct and that says a lot about him.

Perhaps my right hon. Friend was looking to the longer term. Perhaps it would not have been wise to isolate France on that issue. Perhaps there will be benefits. It will be of great value if the signing of a nuclear non-proliferation treaty in the south Pacific comes about because of this. If we end up with a wider test ban, my right hon. Friend's actions will be seen to have been full and ripe for commendation.

On the statement on the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation and Britain's intention to promote wider security interests by contributing to the maintenance of international peace and stability, it is right that Britain commits itself to and stays in Europe and that that commitment to wider security interests is followed. The words are full of merit, but there is a limitation that follows from the peace dividend that everyone in this country expects following the collapse of the Berlin wall.

We have had "Options for Change" and now we aim at "Front Line First". They put great constrictions on our military forces' capabilities to enter into spheres. We cannot become the policemen for the world: the British taxpayer would not allow it. We have commitments in Bosnia, the Falklands, Kurdistan, the middle east, Rwanda in relation to military medical aid, the Caribbean and Northern Ireland. Who can say what will happen in Northern Ireland? Sinn Fein and the IRA have not shown the commitment to the Downing street talks that we would like to believe they gave some years ago. When they start to lay down their arms, it will put us in a much more reliable position to consider Britain's commitment on the military front and may allow us to play a wider role in other regions, but the military is now under great pressure. I recognise that the Reserve Forces Bill may play a part in lessening the effects of reducing personnel in our armed services.

I am especially privileged to be part of the armed forces parliamentary scheme. I have spent almost 12 months with the Royal Air Force. Sadly, that is coming to an end, but it has been time especially well spent. I have made 16 visits to strike command stations and bases both in the United Kingdom and beyond. I have spent time at 13 logistics and personnel establishments throughout the UK. The time spent in the air has been exciting, instructional and awe inspiring. Those were tremendous experiences for someone who has just come into Parliament at a late stage in his life and who never believed that he would be flying in fast jets, but that has been opened up to hon. Members.

More important than that, however, is the fact that ordinary Members of Parliament have been able to get to grips with the armed forces' problems in today's world: the problems of equipment and of the capabilities that that equipment offers. It is just as important for hon. Members to get into contact with personnel at all ranks, and not just with the personnel who serve in the forces, but with their wives and families, an important part of the service ethos.

There is great trepidation in the RAF. There has been a major reduction in the number of blue suiters, as they call themselves. In 1989, there were 89,000 blue suiters in the RAF. By 1994, that was reduced to about 75,000. By 1999, it will be down to 52,200. That is a tremendous challenge for the individuals who serve in the RAF. It is a major change. Change always creates anxiety in whatever walk of life it affects and it is certainly doing so for service men and service women.

Across the board, however, those individuals recognise that there must be limitations on budgets and the need for reduction. They want better high-cost equipment and they recognise that one way of attaining it is to have a correlation with manpower reductions. They feel, however, that, rather than hit what appears to be a relatively inflexible service manpower target, financial targets could be better suited to the current position and that perhaps there should be some change in current dependency on fixed manpower figures for the future. I recognise that the Reserve Forces Bill will do something to deal with those problems, but they will not respond in all aspects.

I do not have time to discuss in detail every aspect of my findings in the scheme, but I shall list the key matters of concern that have been expressed to me and to my colleague and partner from the Opposition, the hon. Member for Feltham and Heston (Mr. Keen). On the negative side, there is disappointment and resentment among people who have served for some 10 years, who have not had any promotions and who inevitably will be out on their ear in a year or two. Many of those individuals may not have been suited to the promotional structure, but they are highly skilled technicians and it will be a loss.

Difficulties will also accrue with the secondary duties that every service man must undertake. It will be almost impossible to maintain those and there are particular concerns with respect to voluntary aspects such as the role of the mountain rescue teams. There may have to be changes in relation to the involvement of civilians who will fulfil the blue suiter role to an extent, coming in to pick up on voluntary duties.

Sports activities are often a major feature of the services. Many stations cannot release personnel to fulfil their weekly football and rugby commitments. That is unfortunate. On a more serious side, more and more frequently, as service men pick up on the amount of detachments that come up, there is an adverse affect on families and pressure on marriages. At the same time, among the junior ranks, the number of service marriage breakdowns is reaching crisis point.

Earlier I referred to changes; this is another feature that we should rethink. There are pressures on the medical provision for service families and pressures in relation to housing. Perhaps there is too much change at this time, when we are asking service men to pick up ever-increasing numbers of detachments. A review would be justified in this sector, and I ask my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence to consider that.

Without doubt, there is an overall loss of flexibility and, believe it or not, at a time when we are looking at redundancies, a fall-off in the recruitment that is needed for expertise in the future. Perhaps that could be attributed to the loss of town centre recruitment facilities which has

[Mr. Phil Gallie]

come about because of budgetary pressures. The employment agencies now fill that role, but I suspect that that is not quite the same as the old recruitment facilities.

I believe that young people entering the RAF now have a lot to gain for the future. They will gain from the excellent training that they will receive and from the service ethos that still exists. I would encourage young people to consider the RAF and the other military organisations as a positive way of developing their careers.

I must mention some of the positive things that we have found as we have visited the stations. There is a recognition of the need for change. There is also great pride in the skills that have been achieved within the military. Individuals recognise that they have a valuable role to play in civvy street and valuable skills to take to that role. I hope that one result of the Government's Reserve Forces Bill will be that many of those who leave the services in the next few years will come back in as reservists.

A determination to succeed still remains within the RAF and will ensure its excellent reputation in the years to come. The new recruits like the detachments. They recognise that they are not looking at the same length of service contracts as those who went before. Some of the current difficulties and the loss of morale may dissipate when the new entrants come to terms with the RAF as it is today rather than as it was before the collapse of the Berlin wall.

There is stability within the service. "Front Line First" said that we should go so far and no further and I believe that the Government have given a commitment on that. I am slightly worried by the words of Opposition Members when they talk about a defence review. In my experience, whenever we have a defence review, we inevitably end up with downward financial pressures. We should not inflict that upon the military. It is far better to concentrate on the "Front Line First" options. I believe that a daily analysis is made of the pressures and the requirements, and that is how it should be.

We should review the civilianisation programme within the services, perhaps looking at the financial targets rather than the stringent and inflexible manpower targets. I believe that we should be looking at detachments and at the pressures on family welfare within the services, particularly with respect to health and housing. We should look at establishing precisely our ceiling on commitments for those who serve in the Foreign Office and the Ministry of Defence. Extending the services beyond their capabilities will do nothing for this country or for those outside it.

I repeat my welcome for the Gracious Speech and I welcome the Government's commitment now, as in the past, to the defence of the realm.

6.53 pm

Mr. Keith Hill (Streatham): My hon. Friend the Member for Norwood (Mr. Fraser) spoke with great eloquence and wisdom on the subject of Nigeria. We both represent constituencies in the London borough of Lambeth which has the largest number of Nigerian residents of any borough. We are both in constant touch with our Nigerian constituents and we know the shame and anguish that recent events in that country have caused them.

At business questions on 2 November, two days after the death sentences imposed on Ken Saro-Wiwa and his eight colleagues, I called for a statement on Nigeria by the Foreign Secretary and urged a new and tougher sanctions regime by the Commonwealth. Thus, I became the last hon. Member to raise the tragic case of Ken Saro-Wiwa on the Floor of the House before the hangings were carried out. I claim no special virtue for that; scores of hon. Members had already expressed concern about the death sentences in support of early-day motion 1556 and I know that the concern was shared more widely on both sides of the House.

In the aftermath of what the Prime Minister has termed the "judicial murder" of Saro-Wiwa and the other Ogoni leaders, concern has turned to outrage here in Parliament, in the country at large and in virtually the entire international community. It is essential that that moral outrage should be translated into effective international action to force the generals out of power. History and the importance of our commercial relationship with Nigeria place special responsibilities on Britain in that initiative.

If we mean what we say about the nature of the Nigerian regime and its international pariah status, it has implications for not only the conduct of foreign policy but domestic policy and, in particular, the Home Office's treatment of Nigerian political asylum seekers. Those are the issues on which I wish to concentrate.

Last week the Government had an opportunity to come to the House to announce that Britain was taking the lead in forging a serious sanctions package against Nigeria in advance of the Commonwealth summit. Would that have stopped the execution of Ken Saro-Wiwa? Who knows—there were no guarantees. We do know that precious time was lost in prevarication, pious utterances and affirmations of faith in quiet diplomacy in which not only this country but those who should know better were inculpated. Ken Saro-Wiwa's defence counsel, Olisa Agbakoba, wrote to President Mandela saying:

"Were quiet diplomacy pursued in South Africa . . . I doubt you would be alive today."

Is it any surprise that the generals considered themselves to be immune from effective international action? After all, it is now 12 years since the military seized power in Nigeria. During that time Britain has supplied Nigeria with a wide range of weaponry, including Lynx helicopters, Lightning F53 aircraft and some 200 Vickers tanks. Most of the sales were made under Export Credits Guarantee Department cover or other loans financed by the British taxpayer. Nigeria currently owes Britain a colossal £2.3 billion, virtually all of it as a result of arms purchases.

The annulled presidential elections of 1993 should have been the final writing on the wall for the military regime in Nigeria. I was present for those elections as a member of the international observation team together with three other hon. Members, including my hon. Friend the Member for Neath (Mr. Hain), who is in his place. That international team of observers was united in its conviction that the elections were free and fair and that M. K. O. Abiola had won them fair and square based on a clear majority across all tribes, faiths and regions of the country. Above all, in those elections Nigerians were

expressing their complete and utter rejection of military rule. Within a month, as is well known, the then head of the provisional ruling council, Babangida, had cynically overturned the elections. Within a year his successor, the yet more ruthless Sani Abacha, incarcerated the elected president, M. K. O. Abiola.

The response of Britain and the European Union to those events was feeble—some limited visa restriction on military personnel, some limited cuts in aid and a promise to review new defence export licences on a case-by-case basis with a so-called "presumption of denial". Critically, because the Vickers contract had been signed before this qualified embargo came into effect, the junta continued to take delivery of the Victor tanks. Eighteen of those tanks were delivered last year to the Nigerian armoured regiments, which are the backbone of the army and the guarantor of military power.

Moreover, despite the presumption of denial, we now know that no fewer than 30 export licences were granted for defence exports to Nigeria in the past two years. According to the Government, those licences were for "non-lethal" military equipment, but I have to point out that the Government had exactly the same rule for defence exports to Iraq. That allowed anything from tank and military helicopter spare parts to mortar-locating radar and military communications equipment to be shipped to that country. I do not mind making the presumption that the follow-on parts for Vickers tanks have been included in the defence sales to Nigeria over the past two years.

Despite constant probing by Labour Members, the Government have consistently refused to disclose details of the sales on the ground of commercial confidentiality. In a written answer, the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the hon. Member for Boothferry (Mr. Davis), explained that it was Government practice not to reveal such details

"unless requirements of confidentiality are outweighed by the public interest."—[*Official Report*, 21 June 1995; Vol. 262, c. *302.*]

The cat is now well and truly out of the bag about Nigeria. The murder of Ken Saro-Wiwa and his colleagues has brought home the nature of the regime with a vengeance.

I believe that certain principles are more sacrosanct than the confidentiality of commercial contracts, and not colluding with a bunch of vicious military despots is one such principle. The public need to be reassured that the defence licences to date have not served to sustain these thugs in power, that the arms ban announced by the Prime Minister in Auckland means what it says, that all such contracts will cease to have effect forthwith and that there is absolutely no question of further supplies of defence materials being sent to Nigeria. I call on the Government to disclose details of the defence sales and to offer an absolute guarantee that no more British military equipment will reach Nigeria until the junta is overthrown.

An embargo on arms sales would strike at the heart of the military regime in Nigeria. It is a matter of urgent necessity that Britain should use all its influence through the United Nations and the European Union to make that embargo stick. However, if military might is the heart of the military regime, its life blood is oil. Indeed, 90 per cent. of Nigeria's state revenues comes from oil sales. Much of that money goes straight to line the pockets of the military kleptocrats who rule that country.

It is estimated that, during the eight years of the Babangida regime, £9 billion was siphoned off from the oil revenues into the bank accounts of the generals. The Prime Minister was quoted as warning in Auckland that

"a comprehensive oil embargo would harm the Nigerian people more than it would the ruling military junta".

He is quite wrong. Has the Prime Minister got any idea of how the vast majority of Nigerians live?

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. David Davis): Yes, he worked there.

Mr. Hill: He worked there 30 years ago in a bank for eight months. I am not aware that he has been back in the intervening period. If so, he would have discovered that—*[Interruption.]* If the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office wants to challenge me on that point, I shall give way. He asks from a sedentary position how long I was there. Does he want to defend the present state of affairs in Nigeria? Does he deny the atrocious conditions in which most Nigerians live and which I am about to outline? Does he want to challenge me on that?

Mr. Corbyn: It is interesting to note that the Minister of State for the Armed Forces has been laughing and giggling all the way through my hon. Friend's comments about Nigeria's appalling human rights record. The Minister is in a position to know what defence equipment was sold to Nigeria and to stop any more going the same way. The very least that the House can expect is an intervention from the Minister to say what he is going to do to restore human rights in Nigeria.

Mr. Hill: The Minister declines to take the opportunity to do so.

Dr. Reid: So does the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

Mr. Hill: That reinforces our anxiety about the fact that, although the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs said that all the options would be examined and that the possibility of sanctions would be kept under review, there is thus, to date, very little solid commitment to effective international action against Nigeria. That is the point of our appeals this evening for effective action.

I am sure that the Minister of State for the Armed Forces will be interested to learn that most of the schools in Nigeria are closed most of the time, that the university system has broken down, that there is little or no health provision, that crime is rampant and that the economic system is on the point of collapse. The truth is that the oil revenues have not gone and are not going to the Nigerian people, many of whom face the daily prospect of starvation. The revenues from oil sales have been looted by the generals and their civilian collaborators, who have stashed the money in western banks or squandered it.

Half of Nigeria's oil goes to Britain and the United States and most of the rest of it goes to Europe as a whole. In other words, an oil embargo agreed by the United States and the European Union would have an immediate and immensely damaging effect on the junta's finances and would seriously weaken its position.

The Government should take firm action to halt Shell's planned £3 billion natural gas project at Bonny in Ogoniland. Shell is responsible for half the oil extraction in Nigeria. No other company has been more heavily involved in sustaining the generals in power. In Ogoniland

[Mr. Hill]

people say that the fires of Shell are the fires of hell, and it was the rape of Ogoniland in pursuit of oil which led to the creation of Ken Saro-Wiwa's Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People and thus to his murder by the regime.

It is wholly misleading for Shell to claim that because the project will not come on stream until the turn of the century, it will not assist the current ruling clique. The condition for any such deal will be huge upfront back-handers to the generals. That is why the Shell project should be stopped, and that is why Labour is right to call for the generals' personal assets in the European banks to be frozen. The Government should take the lead in arguing for the necessary Security Council resolution to that effect. I am told that during the Falklands war the assets of the Argentine junta were frozen. That is a clear precedent, and similar action ought to be taken against the Nigerian junta.

The truth is that the Government and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office have pussy-footed around for too long in their treatment of the Nigerian junta. In August this year, the Commonwealth human rights initiative reported:

"By almost every human rights criterion, Nigerians are excluded from the guarantees which any Commonwealth country should expect."

At the same time, however, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office was compiling a country report on Nigeria for use by Home Office immigration officials. That report denied extensive human rights abuse in Nigeria, and that guidance has led to the scandalous record of only four grants of political asylum being made to more than 2,000 Nigerians who have applied for that status since the annulment of the election in 1993. If the Government are sincere in their condemnation of the Nigerian regime, they must draw the appropriate conclusions for their treatment of Nigerian political asylum seekers in Britain.

Ken Saro-Wiwa once said:

"Nigeria is a great country made small by little leaders".

What is now required is the imposition of an effective sanctions regime by Britain and the international community, which will fatally weaken the generals and pave the way to a return to democracy and civilised government in that potentially great country.

7.9 pm

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): I shall not follow the comments of the hon. Member for Streatham (Mr. Hill) save to say that there can be no hon. Member who has not been deeply shocked and, indeed, appalled by the events in Nigeria in recent weeks. My only slight note of criticism of what the hon. Gentleman said, in a very eloquent speech, is that I do not think that he should cast any aspersion on the total commitment of the Prime Minister. What the Prime Minister said in Auckland carried with it the support of the overwhelming majority of people in this country, regardless of party or any sort of affiliation.

It was right that Nigeria was suspended from the Commonwealth. Many of us thought that—perhaps—Nigeria should have been expelled from the Commonwealth, but the judgment that was exercised was a fine one. Perhaps a degree of influence can be exercised in suspending rather than expelling Nigeria. I am content to rely on the total commitment and judgment of the Prime Minister. What was decided last week was entirely appropriate. It is right that the hon. Member for Streatham referred to the matter. It is right that he condemned in the roundest and most explicit terms the activities of what is obviously an abominable regime. I join him in hoping that its days are numbered.

I listened to the opening speeches and originally decided not to take part. I had thought that the House would be full for foreign affairs. From a personal point of view, I am glad to have the opportunity to speak, but I am sure that I would carry with me hon. Members in all parties in saying that it is a pity that, on this the second day of debating the Queen's Speech, more hon. Members are not taking part in what is in many ways the week's central debate. None the less, I welcomed much of what was mentioned concerning foreign affairs in the Gracious Speech and I shall refer to a few of the commitments given.

First, I shall deal with the Government's commitment

"to encourage a co-operative relationship between NATO and Russia,"

and to

"offer further help to countries in Central and Eastern Europe to consolidate democratic reforms and build stability and prosperity in the region."

The events over the past seven or eight years have been as dramatic and cataclysmic as any we have seen in Europe this century. There can be nobody in the House who did not experience a sense of real relief and a thrill when the Berlin wall came down and when those countries that had suffered that long, dark winter of the cold war emerged into a sort of hesitant freedom.

I do not know what other hon. Members present think, but I feel that, perhaps, we could have done more to encourage and to assist. I think back especially to a conversation that I had when I took a delegation to Czechoslovakia—as it then was—some four years ago. We were received by the Speaker of the Parliament, Alexander Dubcek—one of the most remarkable men whom I have ever met. About 15 Members of both Houses were present and we had two hours of conversations with him.

Mr. Dubcek talked most movingly of his own career, of the appalling privations of his people and of the way in which he looked particularly towards Britain. As we were about to leave, I said to him, "Mr. President," for that was his title as Speaker of the Parliament, "what would be the message that you would like to give and what message should I take back to Britain?" He said, "It is very simple really. Of all the investment in my country, 85 per cent. at the moment is from Germany. Of the other 15 per cent., very little is from Britain. That is the message you should take back."

I did indeed take back that message. I saw my right hon. Friend the Member for Witney (Mr. Hurd), then Foreign Secretary, and we discussed the matter. Of course he understood and shared the desire to see greater British investment. I do not know the precise figures, and of course Czechoslovakia has split into its constituent parts—the Slovak Republic and the Czech Republic—but I felt then and feel now that there was not throughout the

west, perhaps with the exception of Germany, a sufficiently vibrant response to the coming down of the wall and the ending of the cold war. So I greatly welcome the commitment in the Gracious Speech to which I referred.

That commitment ties up inevitably with another in the Queen's Speech. Over the page, we read of the forthcoming intergovernmental conference and the desire to

"contribute to preparing the Union for further enlargement."

I believe passionately that if we are to have a peaceful, prosperous and secure Europe through the next century, it is very important that the European Union is enlarged to include the Czech Republic, one hopes Slovakia, certainly Hungary, Poland, later Romania and the Baltic states. My right hon. Friend the Member for Guildford (Mr. Howell) spoke earlier of a Europe stretching from the coast of Brittany to the Urals and I would welcome that. Indeed, I believe that very few hon. Members would not welcome it.

Of course, such an enlarged Europe would be very different from the current European Union. It is impossible to think of sustaining the structural funds in their present form—not to mention the common agricultural policy in its present form—if it becomes that enlarged Europe. The very institutions will have to change too. One could not necessarily have Commissioners from every single country, especially if the Union takes in Malta and Cyprus, which are already on the list. We could not have Commissioners from everywhere. We certainly could not have a European Parliament that made any sort of sense if it had 1,000 members. That is what we are looking at if we enlarge the Union.

So there has to be much careful and deep thought at the intergovernmental conference next year and in the discussions leading up to it. I very much hope that that will happen because I would like to see that wider, enlarged Europe. In coming together, there is the greatest guarantee of security.

There is an analogy in the words of an American friend, to whom I spoke not so long ago and who was in Hawaii. He was walking with a British friend who commented on the number of Japanese premises and the amount of Japanese investment that he could see. The American turned round and said, "Well, if there had been that amount of Japanese investment previously, there would not have been Pearl harbour." The greater the commitment—financial and otherwise—the lesser the chance of conflict. The greater the contact between people, the greater the understanding and the lesser the chance of conflict.

So, an enlarged Europe, including the countries that I have mentioned, would be the best possible guarantee of a secure, prosperous and peaceful Europe for our children and our grandchildren. Beside that goal, the narrow interpretations of sovereignty—I am not a federalist but a confederalist—pale into insignificance. What matters to individuals above all else is their security. They want to grow up in peace and have a degree of prosperity. Those are old words and slogans but they still ring true and have validity. So I welcome enormously the mention of enlargement in the Gracious Speech.

I am pleased that the Government are to work for the continued implementation of the principle of subsidiarity, although it is a pretty awful word. Obviously, I welcome the efforts to combat fraud, although I sometimes think that we get that out of perspective. Of course it is reprehensible and should be rooted out but, set in the scale of the achievement of the European Union to date, it is a minor problem.

My hon. Friend the Member for Southampton, Test (Mr. Hill) talked of VE and VJ day. I am not among those who claim that the European Community, the Common Market and now the European Union alone was responsible for maintaining peace in Europe, but it is absolutely clear that, at its core, the alliance between France and Germany has done more to banish the prospect of war from western Europe than any other single factor. We should recognise that fact. Although I greatly welcome what appears to be a new and deeper accord—a new expression of the entente cordiale between Britain and France—when people have returned from meetings of the Council of Ministers in recent years, they have tended to talk of other members of the European Union as if there were a quasi-enmity between us. They are our partners and allies. They are nations with which we must work in ever closer accord if peace, prosperity and stability are to be achieved. I greatly welcome that section of the Gracious Speech.

I recently spent some time with colleagues in Finland, one of the new members of the European Union. It is an impressive country of remarkable reliability, efficiency, warmth and friendship, which has achieved an enormous amount since the war. Finland has been independent for only 77 or 78 years, emerging from a long, difficult period when it was part of the then Russian empire. Within a matter of 20 or 21 years, there came the period of the "winter war" and then, technically, Finland was on the other side from Britain, although Churchill and Mannerheim maintained a mutual respect. Churchill always regarded Finland as perhaps a co-belligerent of Germany but never an enemy of Britain. Strong ties exist between us. When I was there, it was apparent that Britain was held in the highest possible regard. That was also apparent when the Finnish President came here on a state visit a few weeks ago.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Guildford said that Britain was held in high esteem around the world. That is true. I am not being egocentric when I say that other countries around the world regard Britain as a special country. They greatly admire the fact that we are a permanent member of the Security Council, a member of the Group of Seven, a founder and leading member of NATO, as well as an important member of the European Union. They look to our long democratic tradition and the evolution of this place with affection and envy. I was certainly conscious of that in Finland. I visited the fine Parliament of that very democratic country, but the Finnish Government had to walk an extraordinary tightrope, maintaining Finland's freedom and democracy when the cold war was at its height, despite the fact that it had a 1,300 mile long boundary with the Soviet Union.

Given the regard in which this place is held, we must be careful not to damage it and talk it down. In some of our debates in recent weeks, even hon. Members tended to denigrate this institution. We must also remember that Finland, which is now the easternmost member of the European Union, forms the European Union's border with Russia. It is therefore particularly concerned about some of the issues to which I referred earlier, such as enlargement. It wants the Baltic states and Poland to

[Sir Patrick Cormack]

become part of the European Union. It believes that it has a pivotal position—no one can deny that—but it also believes that, given the strength of our democracy, we have a contribution to make in bringing that about. We must not fail the expectations of friends and allies like Finland within the European Union.

The Gracious Speech also says:

"A substantial aid programme will be maintained, focused on the poorest countries, to promote sustainable development and good government, including respect for human rights."

I was particularly glad to see that commitment in the Gracious Speech. This country has an aid record of which we can be proud, without being complacent, but many people are perturbed by recent suggestions that our aid programme will be cut in the forthcoming Budget. I am delighted to see my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence on the Front Bench. I hope that he will convey to the Chancellor, as I have already done in writing, my earnest hope that our aid programme will not be cut. Although we have every right to be proud of our programme, we are a great country and we have all the responsibilities consequent upon membership of the organisations that I mentioned a few moments ago. We have a pivotal position in the European Union and it would be shortsighted and unfortunate, to put it mildly, if there were a cut. I do not think that it will be cut in view of the bold and realistic commitment in the Gracious Speech, which I welcome enormously.

I suppose that I have some of the prejudices—we all have prejudices—of the old paternalistic Tory, but I take pride in the fact that this country built a great empire in the last century and took a degree of civilisation around the world. I never feel apologetic about our imperial past. Of course, we would rather that some episodes in it had not happened. That is inevitable in any human organisation, but the balance sheet is overwhelmingly on the credit side.

I hold the Commonwealth very dear. I believe that we have a responsibility, and a moral one, to many of the poorer nations. I suppose the poorest one I visited in my capacity as a Member of the House was the Solomon Islands, way down in the South Pacific. People may think, "How wonderful and romantic." Yes, it is beautiful and the people are friendly and delightful, but they live in grinding poverty and their life expectancy is half that of our own. It is therefore most important that such countries should be given every possible help.

I visited the Solomon Islands in 1988 for the state opening of Parliament. The temperature was 110 deg, the band played "God save the Queen", the Speaker wore his wig and robes and everyone else wore three-piece suits. It was an absolutely marvellous, splendid occasion.

Mr. Mackinlay: Did the hon. Gentleman wear that pullover?

Sir Patrick Cormack: No.

The Solomon Islands is yet another country that looks to us, and has adopted the Westminster model of democracy. Its people talked with great affection about the Houses of Parliament. They talked with gratitude of the aid that they had received from this country. I would never like to think that we let such people down. I am therefore glad that the Gracious Speech contains such an explicit—one might say starkly explicit—commitment to aid.

The Gracious Speech also refers to the reform of the United Nations and efforts to enhance its effectiveness in peacekeeping operations. It also refers to the Government's commitment to promote a negotiated settlement in the former Yugoslavia. Some Members present would not be surprised if, during the course of any speech on foreign affairs, I talked at some length about the former Yugoslavia in general and Bosnia in particular.

I would like to say to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence, and through him to my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary, that I admire enormously what they have done in the past few months. I believe that the sad catalogue of Bosnia's history from April 1992 has been a dark, dark chapter in post-cold war history. As we have moved towards a new world order, there has not been any other episode that we will look back on with greater regret than the bloodletting of Bosnia, the destruction of so many towns and villages and the wholesale slaughter, maiming and rape of so many. We have spoken about that in the House before.

In earlier exchanges today, the hon. Member for Ilford, South (Mr. Gapes) intervened on the Foreign Secretary and said that no one side in the conflict is immune from accusations of committing atrocities. He is right, of course. I have never sought to suggest otherwise, but I have always said that the largest share of responsibility for starting the conflict and perpetrating atrocities lies with Serbia and the Bosnian Serbs. I repeated that assertion again this afternoon and the Foreign Secretary accepted it.

I am extremely glad to note that in recent months, President Milosevic, doubtless continually reminded of how precarious his own economy is by the effect of sanctions, has taken a more constructive part in seeking to bring about a peaceful settlement. I will never be persuaded, however, that he has entirely changed his character, but we must live with such facts.

I am sad that we must live with the knowledge of a quarter of a million people dead. I believe that had we taken more cohesive, resolute and determined action earlier, that would not have happened. I am delighted that, at long last, real punitive action was taken during the summer. I believe that the exemplary manner in which our forces have behaved brings enormous credit to them. We would not be having talks in Dayton, Ohio or anywhere else had that action not been taken. It was a painful but necessary ingredient in the peace process. I just regret that firmer action was not taken and more united resolve shown earlier on in the conflict. In saying that, I do not cast any aspersions upon our troops, who had to cope for a long time with a fairly hopeless mandate; nor am I singling out for criticism any particular person. I am glad that that action was taken, and I believe that there is now a chance for peace.

When peace is finally agreed, it is crucial that Bosnia's identity is preserved. It is a nation state, it has been recognised as such and it has its seat at the United Nations. Some people may say that it should never have been given such recognition, but that happened, and we cannot allow a nation state to be snuffed out. If we did, the message that went out for the rest of this century and the century beyond would be dire. We have talked about that before.

Bosnia must have its territorial integrity respected. Any settlement reached must be a proper one. It must be agreed by all the parties concerned and then it must be internationally guaranteed. The former Foreign Secretary, my right hon. Friend the Member for Witney, made it plain several times in the House that we were fully committed to such an international guarantee. His successor and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence have confirmed that on numerous occasions in recent months, which is good.

Britain will play a full part in guaranteeing any settlement, and will do so with the full support of Members from all parts of the House, because if ever there was a need for a bipartisan approach in foreign policy, the former Yugoslavia is it. All the crucial decisions on foreign policy should have bipartisan support.

The settlement must be a proper peace and it must be monitored. An enormous amount of aid will have to be given to Bosnia and, to a lesser degree, to Croatia—one thinks of Vukovar razed to the ground. Massive international effort will be required to ensure the restabilising, if I can use that word, of the Balkans. If we do not grasp the current opportunity, I am afraid that everything could collapse again into chaos. The spectre of a Balkans war has been suspended—it has not been removed. It is still possible that there could be a Balkans war involving Bulgaria, Turkey and Greece—two NATO countries—and the whole cauldron of the Balkans could erupt.

There is now a real chance that that will not happen, and we must hope and pray that it does not. I wish Ministers every possible success in ensuring that that does not happen—and I even wish my talkative hon. Friend the Whip success in supporting the Government in that effort.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence must accept that we cannot and must not turn back in any way. We have created an opportunity for a real negotiated settlement, but nothing must be done to make those who perpetrated some of the horrors feel that they can get away with them. I am glad that that subject is mentioned in the Gracious Speech, and I have no hesitation in commending very warmly those sections of the Gracious Speech.

I know that, in the debate on the Gracious Speech, it is possible to move on to other topics, but I do not intend to do so. I am delighted that this parliamentary day has been devoted to foreign affairs. I wish Ministers every success in difficult negotiations at the intergovernmental conference and in all the other aspects that I spoke of during the coming Session of Parliament.

7.39 pm

Mr. Robert N. Wareing (Liverpool, West Derby): Three weeks ago from yesterday, I returned from a visit to Australia and New Zealand with a section of the Foreign Affairs Select Committee. My colleagues on that visit were three Conservative members of the Committee, including the Chairman, the right hon. Member for Guildford (Mr. Howell).

I came away from the visit convinced of several things. One of them was that, in the next 10 years, not only Australia but New Zealand will have become a republic. Incidentally, the discussions that I participated in showed that that had nothing to do with any animosity towards the royal family. Instead, the people I spoke to felt that their sovereignty was sometimes questioned by other states when they were represented at international conferences only by a governor-general.

However, those people also emphasised the importance of the Commonwealth. They regard the Commonwealth largely as their window to the outside world. If one considers that a small country such as New Zealand, with 3.4 million people, is able to have some influence in southern Africa and can influence events in Asia, one understands why, from the New Zealand perspective, the Commonwealth is regarded as more important than Members of the House often consider it to be.

People were very worried about the French nuclear tests in the Pacific. I believe that my Conservative colleagues on the Select Committee will agree that we had a preview of what the Prime Minister was to meet a few weeks later. I regret very much the fact that Britain, under the present Government, is the odd man out in Europe and has become the odd man out in the Commonwealth.

I hope that, in the discussions in the Commonwealth on what to do about Nigeria, we shall not be the odd man out concerning sanctions against Nigeria, including oil sanctions, as we were during the entire struggle against apartheid in South Africa. The Commonwealth will continue, I am sure, even though there is a recalcitrant member of it.

The Foreign Secretary said that, on foreign affairs, there is much bipartisanship between the political parties. He was correct in saying that there was agreement about many of the issues that he mentioned. However, my main criticism of British foreign policy is that it is all too often reactive rather than proactive. We should be proactive, but we are reactive to many of the troubles in the world.

The hon. Member for South Staffordshire (Sir P. Cormack) spoke about Yugoslavia, a subject to which I shall return. He and I may disagree about what has happened in Yugoslavia, but he will probably agree that we were reactive to events rather than proactive. In my opinion, the territorial integrity of Yugoslavia should have been upheld and maintained long ago, and more interest should have been taken in that part of the world.

We are also reactive, not proactive, in the face of militant Islamic fundamentalism. We should consider now the problems that will confront us in the not-too-distant future. Islamic fundamentalism of the militant type is one of the greatest potential dangers in the world today. All the way from the border of China to the border of Algeria and Morocco, it is a potential danger and a cause of much trouble, as Iran has often tried to export its Islamic revolution.

I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Dundee, West (Mr. Ross) is right that Hamas will now take the democratic road in Gaza, but Hamas has been influenced by the fundamentalists in Iran. They are probably behind the recent explosion at the American base in Saudi Arabia. Even British and German tourists have met Islamic fundamentalism on their holidays in Egypt.

The answer lies, as it did in the case of the countries of eastern Europe, in the promotion of good government in that part of the world. Saudi Arabia can hardly be held up as a totem pole of democracy, and that lack of democracy will destabilise countries in that part of the world.

[Mr. Robert N. Wareing]

The second answer that is required, so to speak, is massive economic assistance to the poorer middle eastern countries. Obviously, I do not mean Saudi Arabia. In Egypt, 30,000 people live—day after day, night after night—in a large cemetery in Cairo. Obviously, that is the seed bed for the Islamic fundamentalists. In my book, if we are considering giving overseas aid, we should give a very high priority to countries in that part of the world, such as Egypt.

The hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Campbell) mentioned the future expansion of NATO. I agreed with his cautionary note; probably, I would more than agree with his cautionary note, because I believe that the expansion of NATO—not the European Union, which is a different consideration—eastward to the borders of the territories of the former Soviet Union would be a potential source of instability in Russia.

It may be considered unorthodox to say so, but unless we take into account the need to secure the boundaries of Russia and of the other territories of the former Soviet Union, perhaps, one day, people will examine the past and say that the demise of the Soviet Union was one of the most tragic events of the last 10 years of the 20th century—not the end of Stalinism, not the end of the tyranny, but the end of the Soviet Union as an entity.

I agreed with the former Foreign Secretary, the right hon. Member for Witney (Mr. Hurd), when he said that we were now in a world not of the new order, but of the new disorder. If someone had asked me 10 years ago, "Will your nephew"—the nephew had yet to be born—"ever be involved in warfare?" I should have replied, "Almost certainly not," because of the balance between the two super-powers. If I were asked the same question today, unfortunately, I could not answer so positively because of the nationalisms that have been thrown up as a result of the end of the Soviet Union. That is why it is essential to think again about NATO. We need to envisage a new security structure that embraces Russia, the Ukraine and other east European territories beyond the Vistula.

One fatal aspect of NATO is the dominance of the United States. Many have said that they welcome American participation in Europe, but we should be wary of such domination. The problem is well illustrated by the current arguments about the future Secretary-General of the organisation. The fact that someone such as Ruud Lubbers is not considered fit to be Secretary-General—

Mr. Mackinlay: Perhaps the CIA has something on him.

Mr. Wareing: Possibly, but the *Independent* of a few days ago reported that someone in the State Department had said that Mr. Lubbers is "not up to speed" on Bosnia. We should not be willing to go along with the American idea of what should happen in that part of the world.

Although the United States is powerful, economically and militarily, the men in the Pentagon and the State Department lack the sagacity necessary for world leadership. I refer, for instance, to the arguments in Washington about a possible US contribution to a peace force in Bosnia. No one can be sure that the President will get his way, because Congress has its hand on the tiller. That is why the United Kingdom must play a much more positive role in Europe. I do not wish to offend the Secretary of State for Defence in the aftermath of his dreadful speech—euphoric chauvinism—to the Conservative party conference, but I believe that there will need to be a common foreign and security policy in Europe.

I want now to refer to Yugoslavia and the conference in Dayton, Ohio. The hon. Member for South Staffordshire said that the peace has come about—we all hope for peace—simply because "punitive action" has been taken, by which he meant the bombing of the Bosnian Serbs. The fact is, however, that ordinary civilians suffered and died; collateral damage is just another name for the murder of ordinary people. If an imposed peace comes out of Dayton, it can never be a permanent peace. If, as a result of Dayton, Bosnia becomes an occupied country, with the possibility of conflict between the occupying armies and the local population, there will be no peace.

Nor can there be peace if the Serbs in the Republic of Srbska, now recognised as one of the two Bosnian entities, never have the right of secession. If it is right for the Muslim and Croatian populations in Bosnia to be able to join in a confederation, and if it was right for the Croats and Slovenes to leave Yugoslavia, why is it wrong for Serbs living in Krajina, Croatia or the Srbska republic to demand self-determination too?

Recently, the United States has definitely encouraged the arming of Croatia. The NATO air attacks in Bosnia—it is too much of a coincidence to believe otherwise—were part and parcel of the action that led to the occupation of Krajina by the Croats. People are fond of referring to the Krajina Serbs as rebel Serbs, even in eastern Slavonia. But the rebels are the Croats: it is they who broke up the former Yugoslavia, not the Serbs living in Bosnia.

The Americans seem quite prepared—I hope that we shall not follow their example—to ignore 200,000 ethnically cleansed Serbs from Krajina. No one suggests for one moment that the Serbs are guiltless—of course they are not, least of all the Bosnian Serbs. But one would have to go a long way to find 200,000 Muslims or Croats who have been dealt with as badly as the Krajina Serbs.

I hope that the Secretary of State for Defence will comment on all this. When we talk about war criminals, where does Franjo Tudjman figure? Security Council resolution 752 states that Bosnia should be cleared of regular Croat troops. What has been done about that? What are the Government doing to ensure that the resolution is implemented? Croatia is probably now the most ethnically pure state in the whole of the former Yugoslavia. The most multi-ethnic state is Serbia itself, with its Hungarians, Croats, Albanians—the Albanians not always as well treated as they should be—and Muslims living together.

The Serbs in Croatia have been treated deplorably; I am afraid that the outside world is turning a blind eye to that. Elderly folk left behind when the younger people fled have been murdered in their villages, despite assurances from Tudjman that they would be quite safe. The young people fled because they knew what was going to happen, and indeed it did happen to the old people who were left behind.

The situation was well summed up in a *Financial Times* editorial of Tuesday 14 November:

"The Serbs in Croatia are perceived as the guilty party, because of the acts committed on their behalf by the Yugoslav army in 1991. But the fact is they found themselves in an independent Croatia

without having any say in the matter. The last time that happened, during the second world war, many thousands of them were massacred. President Tudjman made no serious attempt to allay their fears that this might happen again. Instead he adopted the same flag and currency as the wartime fascist state, and named streets after some of its less savoury leaders."

We ignore those events at our peril. As I said earlier, an imposed peace can never be a permanent peace. Those who are interested can read about what happened following the signing of the treaty of Versailles; there is plenty of literature on the subject. Any solution in the Balkans must be based on an even-handed approach to all the nationalities in the region.

I also ask the Secretary of State to address the issue of Guatemala. Many people are concerned about what is happening in that country. After 7 December, Alfonso Portillo—I trust that he is no relation of the Secretary of State—may be installed in government. He is regarded as the stooge of Rios Montt, who is a previous dictator of that country.

My hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) and I have visited Belize, and a few years ago the right hon. Member for Watford (Mr. Garel-Jones) asked us what we thought of his idea of withdrawing British defence forces in order to save £9 million. We both replied that we thought that it was a ludicrous proposition. Although the situation in Guatemala looked peaceful at that time and Belize had been scrubbed from Guatemalan maps, the country was basically unstable.

The British forces engaged in valuable jungle training in south America—one of the few areas of the world where that is possible—and they also performed a useful role on the drug trail from Colombia. My hon. Friend and I witnessed them in action and were present when they discovered some drugs. I hope that the Secretary of State will reconsider the situation, which led to the defeat of the then Prime Minister of Belize at the last election.

Finally, I repeat my plea to the Secretary of State: for goodness' sake, let Britain have a proactive and not a reactive foreign policy.

8.1 pm

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough): I hope that I will not ruin the reselection chances of the hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Mr. Wareing)—

Mr. Wareing: I have already been reselected.

Mr. Garnier: I am delighted to hear it. I have always had a particular fondness for the hon. Gentleman; I have kept that to myself, but I shall reveal it this evening. He spoke immediately after me when I made my maiden speech in May 1992 and he remarked very kindly about my slight contribution to the Second Reading debate on Maastricht. It was about 12.30 in the morning and he was one of the few hon. Members present in the Chamber to hear me. I was glad that he was there and I was very grateful for his kind comments.

Hon. Members will be used to hearing references to the "thin red line" in defence debates, but at present I feel as though I am the sole blue dot in this debate. As my hon. Friend the Member for South Staffordshire (Sir P. Cormack) said, it is regrettable—although understandable—that few hon. Members are present to debate two of the things that the Conservatives are rather good at: defence and foreign affairs. However, every cloud has a silver lining, and I shall be able to speak for more than five minutes before 9.15 pm.

I shall not try to compete with the travel experiences to which right hon. and hon. Members have referred tonight. The hon. Member for West Derby has been all over the world in the pursuit of knowledge, and he has led many other hon. Members who have travelled to countries such as Nigeria, if not Guatemala. The hon. Member for Streatham (Mr. Hill) has visited Nigeria, and tonight he spoke most eloquently and passionately of his concerns about the state of affairs in that country.

I must confess that my only connection with Nigeria—although it is not a recent one—involves weapons. It concerns my grandfather, who was injured by a poisoned spear during a colonial skirmish before the first world war. I still have the spear, although it is no longer poisoned. I appreciate the distress of the hon. Gentleman and those who share his views about the export of arms to Nigeria. However, arms sanctions would not have assisted my grandfather in 1910 or 1911 when he served with the 5th Fusiliers as a young subaltern, as I do not believe that we exported spears in those days.

I shall deal now with the substance of the Gracious Speech and the issues of defence and foreign affairs. Like other Conservative Members, I am delighted to see a reference to the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation in the early paragraphs of the Gracious Speech. Her Majesty said:

"My Government will encourage a co-operative relationship between NATO and Russia, and will offer further help to countries in Central and Eastern Europe to consolidate democratic reforms".

We must be careful not to promise more than we can deliver at this stage, and we must be careful not to raise expectations that cannot be fulfilled. Nevertheless, the general principle behind the words in the Gracious Speech should be applauded, and I do so.

I refer my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to a question that I asked of the Prime Minister during Prime Minister's questions on 2 February this year. I asked my right hon. Friend to confirm the Government's commitment to preserving the front-line strength of our armed forces. I also asked him to contrast the Government's policy with the Opposition's only defence policy, which is to cut and cut again. I am pleased to say that the Prime Minister answered in very forthright terms. He said:

"We are committed to stability for the armed forces".

He went on to say that he had given that promise during a recent visit to the Camberley staff college. He continued:

"I made it clear that the big upheavals in the armed forces are over. The level of front-line manpower has been set and we do not intend to reduce it".

He told me that I could be reassured about the matter. He went on:

"Nor do we intend to adopt Labour's policy of scrapping nuclear defence, or a fresh defence review bringing uncertainty to each and every area of the defence services".—[*Official Report*, 2 February 1995; Vol. 253, c. 1215.]

Those words were a source of great encouragement to me and I trust that all hon. Members will remember them for many years. I am sure that they brought comfort to members of the armed forces.

[Mr. Garnier]

Like my hon. Friend the Member for Ayr (Mr. Gallie), I have enjoyed my service with the parliamentary armed forces scheme. It is a valuable scheme and I commend it to those hon. Members who have not yet experienced it. It provides hon. Members who have no direct military experience with an insight into the way in which our modern armed forces operate. It is instructive for those of us who live and work in the somewhat febrile atmosphere of politics to see that the qualities of loyalty, stability and certainty survive within the armed forces, although we do not often see them elsewhere.

I can tell you how to make a regimental sergeant major blanch, Madam Deputy Speaker—I have seen a Labour Member of Parliament do just that. When asked what Labour's defence policy will be in government, Labour Members will reply, "We will have a fundamental defence review." Upon hearing that, all the colour will immediately drain from the face of a regimental sergeant major, because the one thing that our armed forces do not want is yet another review that will cause further instability. I hope that my right hon. Friend will confirm in his winding-up speech that the promise of stability given to the House by the Prime Minister on 2 February will be made again and again.

May I also echo my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary, who praised the work of the Foreign Office and our diplomats overseas. They are often the subject of ill-informed abuse, which is unfair and ignorant. The work of our embassy and diplomatic staff at home and abroad, in conjunction with the work of seconded staff to the Foreign Office such as those from the Department of Trade and Industry, is much admired, and there is much to be admired. I recommend that hon. Members who have a chance to go abroad—

Mr. Menzies Campbell: Should do so.

Mr. Garnier: Indeed, they should do so. Some have done so already. I hope that they made a point of calling on our embassies and high commissioners to see the calibre of the staff. Despite the abuse from those who are less informed, they do a marvellous job. As others have mentioned, their work to encourage investment into Britain is second to none and requires frequent praise.

The United Kingdom has traditionally taken a somewhat detached view of European affairs, intervening directly only when her vital interests were affected by some threat to the balance of power. In general terms—I stress the word "general"—from the 17th century onwards our trading links have been predominantly with the world beyond Europe where we have left the old great powers of Russia, Prussia, the Austrian empire and France to work things out among themselves.

That detached attitude towards Europe is best encapsulated by the words of the Marquess of Salisbury, Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary in the last years of the 19th century:

> "English policy is to float lazily downstream, occasionally putting out a diplomatic boat-hook to avoid collisions."

In uttering those words, Lord Salisbury was guilty of no more than typical English understatement, but perhaps the style as much as the substance of British policy in Europe has led to some of the misunderstandings of what the United Kingdom does and intends.

The history of Europe is one of conflict. Since the first Roman invasion of Britain by Julius Caesar, we British have been inextricably linked to the European political and diplomatic scene, nearly always acting in concert with allies, though sometimes alone, in the furtherance or protection of our national interests. I use the words "allies" and "interests" advisedly, remembering the words of another great 19th century Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary, Lord Palmerston, who remarked that Britain had no eternal allies, but only eternal interests.

In the past, we have fought alongside certain European powers against others and then alongside our former foes against our former allies, but always with one goal in mind: the restoration and maintenance of a balance of power in Europe because it is through peace and stability that our interests are best served. Some would say "perfide Albion". I prefer "Britannia pragmatica".

So where does that lead us in considering British policy towards current common foreign and security policy? It is the third pillar of the European Union. Article B of the treaty on European Union states that the objective of the Union is to

> "assert its identity on the international scene, in particular through the implementation of a Common Foreign and Security Policy, including the eventual framing of a Common Defence Policy, which might in time lead to a Common Defence."

It is important to make a distinction between a common European security policy, which formally came into existence in November 1993 and which perhaps emerged de facto during the 1980s, and a common European defence. The common provisions of the treaty speak of the

> "implementation of a Common Foreign and Security Policy"

but the framing of a common defence policy is seen only as "eventual"—something that might in time lead to a common defence. There is an awful lot of work to be done before we come anywhere near that.

Discussion of the effectiveness of the CFSP generally centres on Bosnia. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Witney (Mr. Hurd) wrote in an article in *International Affairs* in 1994:

> "Bosnia has been regarded widely as a test for CFSP. Indeed, it is sometimes argued the CFSP has been found to be futile because we have not been able to stop the war."

The failure may be even more damning since the European Community's early involvement in the crisis was heralded as such a success. After the Brioni accords of June 1991, which ended the confrontation between the Federal Yugoslav Government and Slovenia, Jacques Poos, the Luxembourg Foreign Minister and President exclaimed:

> "This is the hour of Europe."

Within a year, however, much of eastern Croatia had been devastated by war and a new conflict was waged in Bosnia that, to a greater or lesser degree, continued until very recently.

Numerous reasons have been put forward for that failure. Above all, a peace settlement is dependent on the consent of the warring parties and the failure of independent European action has been shared by the limited success of other institutions such as NATO, the United Nations and the conference on security and co-operation in Europe, although with the more active intervention of the United States through NATO, together

with the deployment of additional United Kingdom and French troops on the ground, there has been considerable movement towards a settlement of the conflict in former Yugoslavia. We all hope that the discussions currently taking place in Dayton, Ohio will lead to a permanent peace. There have been suggestions that I am wrong to be too hopeful, but expressing hope is worthy of repetition. If we remain pessimistic, we may as well give up and go home.

Those factors do not disguise the persistent problem, which was always visible in European foreign policy making under European political co-operation, and which remains under the CFSP: deep-seated national differences in foreign and economic policy often undermine common European Union action.

In the former Yugoslavia, for example, European Union policy making has been hindered by the differing historical and geographical perspectives of individual members. For example, traditional German sympathies for Croatia and Greek attachments to Serbia have cut across common positions. Even as war began, Britain, France and Germany were pushing in opposite directions. While London and Paris wished to preserve a unitary Yugoslav state, Germany did not, resulting in much acrimony before the European Union decided to recognise Slovenia and Croatia in January 1992.

In June 1993, Chancellor Kohl supported President Clinton's policy of lifting the arms embargo on the Muslims in direct opposition to the then policy of Britain and France. At the same time, despite clarifying its constitutional position on the use of force, for political reasons Germany was not able to send troops to join UNPROFOR.

Others have blamed the European Union's limited impact on Bosnia on institutional weakness and, in particular, on a lack of political will. Certainly, as with the European political co-operation, the CFSP has tended to be reactive, and that refers back to the point made by the hon. Member for West Derby. That may in part be caused by the limited size of CFSP institutions and the bureaucratic consequences of intergovernmentalism. CFSP mechanisms may work well when there is a prepared and long-standing agenda, as for example with the European stability pact, but may prove less effective in producing policies in response to rapidly occurring crises.

Building consensus among numerous national Governments is often time consuming. Moreover, the fact that the CFSP lacks any significant contingency funding may prove a major disincentive to rapid actions. A further weakness of the CFSP is that it has often depended on the diplomatic resources of the country holding the presidency, although to a large extent the creation of the Troika has overcome that weakness.

Mr. Mackinlay: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I am very interested in what the hon. and learned Gentleman is saying, but I seek your guidance because my understanding—I hope to be corrected—is that he is the parliamentary private secretary to the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the hon. Member for Boothferry (Mr. Davis). *[Interruption.]* I am sorry to learn that he is no longer the parliamentary private secretary to the Minister, but he is a PPS and it seems unusual and unprecedented that a PPS should be brought in to bat because there is nobody else on the Conservative Benches to speak.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): That is not a matter for the Chair.

Mr. Garnier: It is a matter for me, Madam Deputy Speaker, to reply to an offensive remark from an ignorant Member. I am no longer the PPS to the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office. I am now delighted to be the PPS to the Law Officers. I have not been brought into the Chamber. I have followed Foreign Office and defence affairs consistently since I became a Member of Parliament. I was elected as secretary of the Back-Bench foreign affairs committee within days of being elected a Member. I have made a point of following foreign affairs since then.

I hope that I may be allowed to continue. My contribution may not interest the hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay) but I am surprised that he is offended by it. On other occasions, I have found him to be a rather more reasonable fellow. It may be that, as we come nearer to the election, the gloves must come off. He may have to think of reasons for interrupting and making a nuisance of himself.

I was about to make a general point before the minor disturbance on the Opposition Benches below the Gangway. It may be easy for national Governments to blame European Union institutions for their indecision. European leaders, fearful of a lack of public support for the number of casualties in Bosnia that might be consequent on large-scale military European action in former Yugoslavia, have shown themselves hesitant to intervene. Perhaps more significantly, with member states faced with budgetary deficits and a desire to capitalise on the peace dividend resulting from the end of the cold war, European Treasuries have been reluctant to finance the cost of intervention. Despite the changes brought by the CFSP, European foreign and defence policies are faced with a large discrepancy between declaration and reality.

The question is whether the CFSP and European defence co-operation can become more effective or whether *The Guardian*, which I suspect the hon. Member for Thurrock reads more often than me, was right to suggest in June 1993—

Mr. Mackinlay: I read *The Daily Telegraph*.

Mr. Garnier:—that the very notion of a common foreign and security policy was always a utopian chimera.

Britain, which has throughout been influential in European foreign policy, has said that it favours limited changes to CFSP structures and improved mechanisms for intergovernmental and interinstitutional co-operation. In his article, to which I have referred, my right hon. Friend the Member for Witney considered the future of the CFSP. He wrote:

> "The danger is that we allow ourselves to be side-tracked from the real business of foreign policy co-operation by becoming embroiled in bureaucratic wrangles over minutiae: process not policy. There is the danger too, that CFSP will develop into a complex and cumbersome system bogged down by bureaucracy and doctrine".

He added that Britain favours development of the CFSP

> "by consent, not by coercion, and with the flexibility to act and react quickly and imaginatively without the legal and procedural constraints of Community practice."

[Mr. Garnier]

A strengthened CFSP secretariat, my right hon. Friend said, should include a small forward-planning unit that might, for example, provide contingencies for the council to consider in reaction to a particular event. That would contribute to

"a flexibility which allows ministers to respond to fast-moving events . . . CFSP should lead from common analyses through common policy to common actions."

There is no doubt that defence and security will be important issues at the intergovernmental conference. The review at the IGC should take account of the overriding and continuing importance of NATO; of developments in western Europe since the signing of the treaty on European union that affect the shared interests and common security of member states; of progress in the implementation of economic and political reforms in the countries of central and eastern Europe, including the development of new partnerships with western institutions and the perspective of their enlargement; and of the future potential for instability that might lead to challenges to European interests and to conflict and suffering that European states will wish to prevent or relieve.

The United Kingdom is irrevocably part of the European Union. We wish to see a Europe that is outward looking rather than introspective, pulling its full weight internationally and acting as a power for good in the world. We want a Europe that encourages and allows flexibility, recognising the diversity of its members rather than trying to impose undue conformity. Its development must be realistic, attainable and supported by its peoples.

As for defence and security, I hope that we shall carry into the debate a firm view that European nations should develop arrangements for the future that will ensure that, consistent with our NATO obligations, Europe collectively is able to shoulder more effectively its share of the burden of promoting security and stability on the continent, on its periphery and beyond. We shall also want to see arrangements put in place that ensure that the burden is shared equitably among European nations.

The Western European Union has an important and growing role to play in the development of a European security and defence identity. There is a close relationship between the WEU and the security guarantee contained in the Brussels treaty and NATO with the security guarantee that is contained in the Washington treaty. We have worked over the past decade since the reactivation of the WEU to develop its ability to contribute to the European pillar of NATO, which is the means of enhancing the European contribution to NATO's actions and of taking our fair share, with our north American allies, of the burden of ensuring our common security. The consequence of the decisions taken at Maastricht is that the WEU is now being developed into having a dual capacity, not only as a means of contributing to the European pillar of NATO but as the defence component of the European Union.

Definition of the European defence policy should start with a proper assessment of what Europeans can realistically expect to do together. Surely it would be wasteful to develop separate and wholly European military structures. Europe should capitalise on the foundation that has been built in NATO so that it is able to continue to provide the basis of our common defence and security and we are able to preserve and further develop a basis for bringing together coalitions of European and north American forces for major combat operations as, for example, we saw in the Gulf.

In that context, the WEU's role should be to act as a more effective European pillar of the alliance. In the new strategic environment, however, military forces are more likely to be used for lesser crisis-management tasks; for peace support operations and in support of those working for the United Nations or the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe.

NATO structures and capabilities are being adapted to allow the WEU to undertake the new tasks to which I have referred. It would be unreasonable, however, to expect the United States and Canada to participate in every such mission in future. There must be genuine burden sharing. Although we do not doubt the commitment of our north American allies to our common defence, we should not overstrain that commitment by expecting them to intervene in all European security operations. It would be wrong to act on the basis that they will always be here just when we need them.

The United Kingdom has world-class, highly experienced armed forces, both regulars and reserves. I was glad to read the reference in the Gracious Speech to the Reserve Forces Bill. I think that that measure will underscore the valuable role that the reserves play. When I was with the armed forces parliamentary scheme, I was fortunate to get to the Falklands, where there was a company of territorial soldiers. That company was taking its part in the roulement—the deployment of a military company in that far-flung theatre. I hope that the Reserve Forces Bill, which we shall debate later in the Session, will yet further reinforce the view that the Government and the public find that the reserves carry out a valuable role that is much appreciated.

The main vehicle through which Europe should work together is the WEU, acting either on its own behalf or, if it wished, in response to a request from the European Union. I am delighted that, at the beginning of next year, the UK will assume the presidency of the WEU. I have no doubt that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence will attend its discussions regularly and reinforce the British point of view on the defence of Europe. There is no point in pretending that we can cut ourselves off in political, diplomatic or trade terms from the continent of Europe. It is important, however, that we do not allow ourselves to be subsumed into some wonderful wish-tank in which all difficult and problematical issues can be solved by saying, "Let us all fold the WEU into the European Union and assume that the WEU will provide the European army." Life is not like that. I strongly urge my right hon. Friend, when at the WEU or when discussing European defence matters elsewhere, to ensure that our position is firmly made clear.

European defence and security will be one of the key issues at the IGC. It is vital. European defence and security is our defence and our security. We must play a leading role in the debate up to, and at, the conference to secure the arrangements that we believe should be put into place for the future—arrangements that are realistic, flexible and command popular consent. If my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence continues, as I hope that he will, to ignore the abuse that is being spilled at him from across the Chamber, and continues with his

sensible course of managing the affairs of our armed forces; if he ensures that they are allowed to remain in a state of stability, that they are allowed to be maintained in a state of high morale and that they have the best possible equipment; he will ensure not only that he is held in the highest esteem but that our armed forces, which have been the envy of our allies for centuries, will themselves remain in the highest esteem.

I am very pleased to have been able to contribute in some small way to the debate this evening. I trust that the Gracious Speech will be as warmly welcomed by others in the Chamber as it has been by me.

8.30 pm

Mr. Bill Etherington (Sunderland, North): Last year in the debate on the Queen's Speech, on 29 November, because there was a shortage of hon. Members who wished to speak, I spoke for 32 minutes. On that occasion I was able to pay tribute to certain constructive policies that were being proposed by the Government. It represented some 15 per cent. of what I had to say, but it was 15 per cent. more than I am able to make reference to tonight, because the Gracious Speech is bland in many respects and quite dangerous in others.

I enjoyed the speech by my hon. Friend the Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook), the shadow Secretary of State. I wish that I shared his confidence that this will be the last Queen's Speech that I will debate in opposition. I fear that that will not be so because the Government will go the full term. I do not think that an opportunity will arise where they can go to the country and hope to win an election, and that pleases me immensely. That did not seem quite so clear last year, but it does now.

One of the great pleasures of the debate on the Queen's Speech is that a Back Bencher can speak on any subject providing that he does not stray away from the Queen's speech, or what he thinks should be in it. I have always been grateful for that, because, unfortunately, since the Jopling reforms Back Benchers have not had quite the same opportunities to be free of their party, whichever party that happens to be, to say what they really think and to allow for some fresh ideas on occasions.

I was a little concerned when I read through the Gracious Speech to read one or two terms. I know that it is easy to be accused of picking out words and putting one's own interpretation on them, and I trust that the House will accept that I am not trying to do that, but there are certain phrases that mean different things to different people, and I have to try to interpret what they mean to me. The term "minimum nuclear deterrent" has been used, as part of the policy of the Government, as has "preventing the proliferation of weapons" and "test ban treaty".

I am sorry to tread over ground that has already been extremely well trodden in the debate, but I do not see where those particular aspirations fit in with the quite reprehensible attitude that the Government have shown towards the French nuclear tests. No consideration has been given to what our Commonwealth partners in New Zealand and Australia feel about them, or to the people who live in the area. I make the point to the Government that it seems to me that if only two countries were in favour of the tests—every other country appears to be either against them or neutral, but mostly against them—perhaps it is time that we revisited the matter and decided that we may well have been wrong. I think that we are wrong, and I hope that as time goes on the Government will appreciate that. We will not move towards getting an effective test ban treaty by taking the attitude that we have over the French tests. It has caused tremendous dissatisfaction among the public, and I hope that that will be reflected when we have a general election.

Reference is made to the role of NATO and its relationship with Russia. The term "to consolidate democratic reforms" is used. I do not imagine that anyone would argue about that, but I hope that the Government are talking about consolidating democratic reforms and not just about what is pragmatic for commerce, because at the moment in Russia the regime that this Government are supporting and propping up does not seem to have the whole-hearted support of the Russian people. If we really believed in democracy, we would respect what its people are asking for. I am afraid that at the moment that is not happening.

The Gracious Speech also says:

"A substantial aid programme will be maintained".

I have always understood that the word "substantial" means anything above nil. So if one presents somebody with one penny, one is providing them with something substantial. But that is not the way in which most people will read such a phrase. Most people would assume from reading it that we were giving out tremendous amounts of foreign aid and that that will be maintained. In effect, since 1979, year on year we have seen a reduction in the real value of what this country is paying out in foreign aid. We heard many fine words, not least from the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, about the United Nations. If we really had respect for the UN, we would uphold what we had agreed to do within that body. We would also perhaps consider taking a little more notice of some of the International Labour Organisation conventions, on which the Government have an appalling record.

Mention was made today of the problem of Nigeria. The term used in the Gracious Speech is

"to strengthen the ties between members of the Commonwealth."

If the Commonwealth is to mean anything at all and if it is to reflect the sort of life, the ethos, the principles that an advanced democratic nation expounds, there is no place in it for a military dictatorship. There is no place for totalitarian states within the Commonwealth. The question should be whether sanctions will be considered. Another word of warning on that issue. Nelson Mandela states that something serious and substantial needs to be done about the situation in Nigeria. I hope that the Government will take more notice of him than they did when he was in exile, when through the African National Congress he was begging this country to put sanctions on South Africa. I have no doubt that South Africa might have been reformed a lot more quickly had it not been for the support of Baroness Thatcher and her ilk when it really mattered. I hope that we shall see some change in the Pontius Pilate-type approach: waiting to see which way the wind is blowing, before we decide what we are going to do. Human rights are more important than pragmatic considerations of commerce. The Government do not have a very good record on that, but I always live in hope that we can look to better things.

Northern Ireland is mentioned in the Gracious Speech. The Government say that they

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"will continue to build on the present peace."

I sincerely hope that the present peace continues, so that it can be built on. Once again, I make a plea to the Government, as I have done on previous occasions, to be prepared to enter into meaningful negotiations with any organisation that is not proscribed by law. If an organisation is considered fit by the Government to stand in elections and to represent people in local government, and, indeed, in the Chamber, should that be the case, it should be recognised and negotiated with. Sinn Fein has every bit as much right to be negotiated with as any of the Unionist factions. I hope that the Government will do something about that, because if the peace process flounders, we will go back not to where we were, but to something that I believe could be considerably worse, and I am fearful of that. I sincerely hope that that will not happen.

I cannot help but note that small businesses get a mention in the Gracious Speech. I am afraid that they do not do too well out of the market forces that are so beloved of the Government. The reality is that many small businesses rely on their revenue from large businesses, which are often in quite a monopolistic position. It is all very well saying that market forces will prevail, but if one is a small business and wants the bills to be paid, and the people who owe money also keep one in business, one is in an extremely weak position. I hope that the Chancellor, in the Budget, does something about that so that small businesses can deal with the debt that they often face. Banks are not very kind to small businesses; I hope that they will receive a better response from larger businesses.

I was pleased to learn that the Government are fully committed to the channel tunnel rail link. I have been a member of the Committee considering the Channel Tunnel Rail Link Bill since February last year, and do not see the Committee stage ending before February next year; the news gave me some consolation. If such business is not to be dealt with in the Chamber—I fully accept that that is not unreasonable—I hope that the Government are whole-heartedly behind the Bill in its entirety.

Mention has been made of easing the restrictions on broadcasting ownership. I hope that the Government will not go down that road. Monopoly holdings already exist in the press and other media—which the Government themselves have suffered for on numerous occasions, if they could but see it—and I hope that they will not allow the position to worsen.

The education proposals are probably the worst aspect of the Queen's Speech. The Government say that they intend to expand nursery education. When the Conservatives were in charge of one or two local authorities, including some counties—they are not in charge of many now—their record was abysmal. The expansion of which the Government speak will not happen when Labour councils that have provided nursery education for four-year-olds are now threatened with a loss of the revenue that would allow that provision to continue.

I hope that the Government have learnt the lesson of the poll tax, because the nursery education voucher scheme is the poll tax in reverse. It gives out regardless of circumstances rather than taking in regardless of circumstances, as the poll tax did. People will be subsidised when they are prepared to pay for private nursery education; others will be subsidised when they may have other arrangements. The net result will be the inability of local authorities to provide such education—I understand that 87 per cent. of it is currently provided by local authorities. The system may bring about a negation of what the Government claim to believe in.

I am also intrigued by the borrowing powers for grant-maintained schools. The coupling of those powers with selective school admissions will mean the disestablishment of state education.

The Government say that they will make better provision in the housing sector. If a return to private landlords and people living with intimidation and threats represents better provision, yes—we are on the way to that. Housing provision will improve only if the Government start to take note of those involved, and make some £1,000 million per annum available for the creation of 30,000 jobs in the sector and to enable us to escape from the current continuing decline in housing. That would also help the homeless.

I note that the Government intend to abolish councils' responsibility for the homeless. We now know that, according to Government policy, the homeless are responsible for their own plight—not unlike the unemployed.

An important element that is missing from the Gracious Speech is the Family Homes and Domestic Violence Bill. I was appalled to discover recently from an organised publicity campaign by the Body Shop that one in five women suffer from domestic violence at some time in their lives. That is appalling in a civilised society, and we must find a way of legislating against such bestial behaviour.

I have spoken for 13 minutes. I have not tried to drag my speech out as others have, but I shall sit down to allow two of my hon. Friends the opportunity to speak.

8.43 pm

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): I shall speak for 10 minutes about foreign and security policy. Incidentally, I think that a time limit should be imposed on speeches in debates such as this, so that all hon. Members can make a proper contribution.

The theme of human rights is very current, in view of what has happened in Nigeria and many other places. In that context, we must consider the ability of world institutions to keep the peace and ensure justice. That is clearly not being done at present. The British Government have demonstrated their priorities by spending nearly £24 billion a year on defence and arms: that has brought about an enormous growth in weaponry, and a heavy promotion of arms sales. An increasingly large proportion of British manufacturing industry is dedicated to such sales—and anyone who looks carefully at what happens to the arms that are sold will find that they end up in the hands of oppressive and repressive regimes, and are used internally for repressive purposes.

I have before me an excellent document produced by the World Development Movement, entitled "Gunrunners' Gold: how the public's money finances arms sales". I suggest that the Secretary of State for Defence reads it carefully, and takes note of the relationship between overseas development expenditure

and the expenditure of arms companies in promoting and propping up appalling regimes. Indonesia is just one example of the way in which British arms have been used to pursue a policy of genocide against the people of a country.

We have heard strong rumours that Britain's aid budget is to be cut substantially. That is on top of a stated Government strategy of pursuing a trade policy—with the assistance of the general agreement on tariffs and trade and the World Trade Organisation—that specifically takes from the poorest in the world and redistributes the money to the banking systems of the richest nations.

Quite simply, the Government are very much part of a globalisation of the economy designed to reduce the poverty of the poorest to penurious levels—as is currently the case—and to increase the wealth that exists in the richest parts of the world. A quarter of the world's population lives in absolute poverty. Many people do not live to even half the age that we would expect in this country, and millions of children around the world do not live to the age of five. Millions more receive no education.

It is not as if the situation were improving. In country after country—in sub-Saharan Africa, parts of Asia and parts of Latin America—such is the burden of foreign debt and export-led growth that education and health services have been closed down, and life expectancy is falling as a result. We cannot be complacent in a world in which such appalling things are happening. The real problem is the imposition of a global economy that has led to corruption and support for repressive regimes, provided that they continue with the economic strategies that are imposed on them.

In the 19th century, colonialism came from British, German and French gunboats arriving on the coast to impose a particular kind of law and order—a Pax Britannica, or Pax Europa. The same principle applies now; the only difference is that a sharp-suited gentleman from the World bank or the International Monetary Fund now arrives to impose policies that will lead to equivalent levels of poverty.

Many hon. Members have spoken movingly about the situation in Nigeria—in particular, my hon. Friends the Members for Norwood (Mr. Fraser) and for Streatham (Mr. Hill). I shall speak briefly on the subject. I must draw attention to the hypocrisy of the British Government: they knew full well of the abuses of human rights that were continuing in Nigeria, and the danger to Ken Saro-Wiwa's life, but they did very little about it.

There is a direct link between arms sales and Nigeria's economic and human rights crises. Over the past 15 years, the massive arms sales programme of Britain and other European Governments has pushed up Nigeria's foreigh debt to more than $30 billion. Nigeria used to be a middle-income country, but since 1981 gross national product per capita has fallen by two thirds. Eleven out of every 100 babies die before their first birthday—the same figure as 30 years ago.

What has Britain sold over the past 15 years? It has sold 118 Vickers main battle tanks. I am not sure where the external threat to Nigeria is, but I am sure that those tanks will be used on the streets of Lagos and other cities to control people who are trying to demonstrate in favour of human rights and democracy in that country. Britain has also sold Saladin armoured cars, British Aerospace Jaguar ground attack aircraft and Saxon armoured personnel carriers.

The Government claim that they are not selling any lethal equipment that could be used for purposes of internal repression. Since January 1995, however, they have admitted to more than 30 export licences for non-lethal military equipment for Nigeria. They relate to ammunition, large-calibre weapons, bombs, torpedoes, missiles, mines, vehicles, toxicological agents, riot control agents, military explosives and propellants, combatant vessels, aircraft and training equipment.

We have heard that sorry tale before, in the case of Iraq. Export credit guarantee support for Iraq went up in the year of the 1988 Halabjah massacre. I hope for a total cessation of all arms sales and a halt to all arms traffic to Nigeria. I hope that that will be followed by strong economic sanctions, including a refusal to buy oil because that is the only kind of language that that military regime will understand.

In many ways the questions about Nigeria relate to many other places. The Ogoni people, of whom Ken Saro-Wiwa was the best known although many others laid down their lives for them, were attempting to protect their communities, their ecology, environment and land, against the oil industry. Massive demonstrations have taken place in that country and, as a result, people have been gunned down. There have also been demonstrations around the world. The oil companies try to wash their hands and say, "It has nothing to do with us: we are merely looking after our own interests." But they must look at where their profits come from and at the damage that they are doing to people in those countries.

I could say much about human rights throughout the world but I shall briefly mention two cases. A few days ago I met a group of Makuxi indians from Roraima province in the north of Brazil. They were assured by the Group of Seven industrial countries that the rights of indigenous people in Brazil would be protected and that money would be made available to ensure that. They told me tales about gold mining, pollution, the destruction of their environment, alcoholism, crime, corruption and robbery that are happening to them because they are standing up for an environmentally sustainable life style and system that is contrary to the wishes of international corporations and mining companies. They are suffering as a result.

Those people came here and they are travelling to other European capitals to plead with people to raise the issue in their Parliaments. I am pleased to be able to do that here and I have tabled some parliamentary questions on the issue. Those people seek environmental sustainability but the World bank model for Brazil, as for many other countries, is to dam the rivers, exploit the ground as rapidly as possible, introduce western farming techniques and then be concerned about the environmental impact of such policies. We must look seriously at what we are doing to the environment of poor people in the poorest parts of the world. I could give other examples but I want to be brief.

Over the past 30 to 40 years the conflict in central America has been essentially between rich and poor. The richest people own the majority of the land and the oligarchies in every central American country have always been propped up by powerful armies. In Guatemala, the powerful army has been sustained by arms sales from all over western Europe and the United States. The peace that has come to Guatemala is not a happy peace. Human rights abuses continue and people still

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disappear. Anyone who speaks out against human rights abuses is subjected to interest by the police and death has resulted.

At the moment we are training Guatemalan army officers, and training a few officers is giving no message other than that we support the pre-eminent, powerful position of the Guatemalan army. We should support independent institutions that could do something to bring justice and human rights to that poor country, and as an example of what is happening in other parts of central America.

All over the world it is not the thirst for market forces, for free market enterprise, that people necessarily seek. They are looking at the environmental consequences of that policy. Everyone has environmental concerns because we all live on the same planet. I have an interesting document produced by the Just World Trust, which is based in Penang in Malaysia. In a book called "Dominance of the West over the Rest" there is an article called "The Metamorphosis of Colonialism" by Jeremy Seabrook. In a part about India it states:

"The Chilka Bachao Andolan (Save Chilika Movement) for example, comprises two hundred thousand people living around the magnificent . . . water lake in Orissa, who are defending their way of life against export demand for industrially cultivated prawns."

Their life style is being destroyed and they are another example of victims of globalisation of the economy and what goes with it.

Tomorrow the President of Guyana, Cheddi Jagan, will visit the House and speak to members of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association in a Room downstairs. Last November, shortly after becoming President, he produced a paper and on the issue of globalisation he stated:

"In the North, the consequence of these disparities has been unemployment, homelessness, urban disorder, increase in crime . . . the rise of ultra-right movements, strident nationalism and fragmentation accompanied by racism and ethnic tensions.

In the South, the consequence of these divisions has been the increase in crime and disease, hopelessness, emigration, environmental degradation, the illegal traffic and use of narcotic drugs . . .

More alarming, however, is the incidence of increasing poverty across the globe. Poverty atrophies the vigour and initiative of the individual and deprives the society of incalculable human resources at a critical time."

We cannot go on allowing the world to be impoverished of its resources, consigning a quarter of the population to short lives and terrible poverty and not making anybody very happy in the process. We have to turn our backs on the principle of the free market economy and start to look at global concerns and the rights of people to a humane life, housing, education, jobs and health. They must share in the technological and wealth achievements which ought to be for the benefit of all.

8.55 pm

Mr. Mike Gapes (Ilford, South): In the time that is available to me I cannot cover all the points that I wanted to raise. I welcome a number of issues in the Gracious Speech. I welcome the belated decision on legislation to ratify the chemical weapons convention. I had an Adjournment debate on 24 April and it was clear at that time that the obstacle was not in the Ministry of Defence or the Foreign and Commonwealth Office but in the Department of Trade and Industry. It was a lack of concern, vitality and interest by the then President of the Board of Trade. Now that he has moved to 10A the legislation is to be introduced and I welcome that.

It is important to welcome at least some of the references in the Gracious Speech to nuclear weapons. I am speaking about the reference to the comprehensive test ban treaty. However, the other parts cannot be welcomed. The Gracious Speech contains an interesting phrase about the Commonwealth. It states:

"My Government will continue working to strengthen ties between members of the Commonwealth."

Can the Secretary of State explain how antagonising 50 member countries of the Commonwealth contributes to strengthening ties and how becoming Mr. Chirac's poodle on defence policy in any way contributes to the integrity and co-operation of this country with other nations?

The French Government's nuclear test programme in the south Pacific has nothing to do with technical needs. The former President, Mr. Mitterrand, was told by his military advisers that it was not necessary to have further nuclear tests and the socialist Government introduced a moratorium on them. As part of his election campaign Mr. Chirac, in a Portilloesque style, launched a tirade calling for further nuclear tests by his country. When he won the election he presumably felt obliged to carry out such tests although they were not necessary and the advice given to the former Government was that they were unnecessary. He went ahead, although the tests began directly after the non-proliferation treaty negotiations, which had been agreed with some difficulty, to extend indefinitely the life of the treaty on the assumption by many countries that there would be no further nuclear weapons tests. It could therefore be perceived by many people worldwide that the French had acted in bad faith. Unfortunately, our Prime Minister and Government, despite the overwhelming wishes of this country's people and the majority of public opinion in France, have chosen to align themselves with that policy and bad faith towards the non-proliferation treaty.

Many points have been made about other aspects of the Commonwealth conference, which I shall not go into now, but another matter has not been mentioned: the fact that, for the past few years, the Government have been giving co-operation not just to the military in Nigeria, but with regard to police equipment and policing. I hope that serious attention will be given to that because, clearly, in a repressive society, what a country does with its police force can be as offensive, oppressive and brutal as what it does with its military. We need to consider closely not just the military contracts and assistance to the military in Nigeria, but other aspects of the power of that corrupt kleptocracy and evil regime.

I wanted to comment on some of the points made about the position in former Yugoslavia, but unfortunately I do not have time. I shall, however, make just one point. If we must choose between an ideal solution based on preservation of the integrity of a state, and a peaceful solution based on recognition that, in elections in that state, 85 per cent. of the people voted for ethnically or religiously based parties rather than unitary parties, and if

we are realistic, we will have to come to terms with the fact that some form of de facto internal partition will be necessary. If that is what comes out of the negotiations in the United States of America, I hope that hon. Members on both sides of House will recognise that that is the best that is available at this time, accept it and work, manfully, womanfully, all of us together, to ensure that there will be support on all sides for the peace agreement.

Having seen the United States media and heard some of the comments made by members of Congress in the past few days, I believe that it is highly doubtful that President Clinton will be able to get his 25,000 troops. If that is so, the United States, having sabotaged previous negotiations in the past, will, in this one, have the rug pulled from under its President at the last minute to sabotage the agreement. I hope that it will not come to that, but I am sceptical, given what Mr. Dole and Mr. Gingrich are up to.

In the past few days, President Clinton has made a positive statement in relation to another sector. I could say that the Government have taken up the words that I pressed on them with regard to chemical weapons in the Adjournment debate in April, but, regrettably, I cannot do so in relation to my Adjournment debate on 31 October, when I called on the Government to rejoin the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation. Despite President Clinton's remarks in the past few days that he wishes the United States to go back into UNESCO, our Government have clearly set their face against doing so.

I regret that, in the 50th anniversary month of the establishment of UNESCO in London, the Queen's Speech does not refer to our country playing its part again in that organisation. That is part and parcel of the overall approach that seems to have come out of the Prime Minister's speech at the United Nations and of its press coverage, which hinted that, somehow, he wanted to sweep away and undermine a number of international organisations. It does not look good for this country's future credibility, status and standing in the world if we begin to work to undermine international organisations such as the Commonwealth, the United Nations and of course that nasty organisation based in Brussels, the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, the European Union, the Western European Union, whichever it is.

Another region has not, I think, been mentioned. Two hundred thousand refugees were created in Krajina when Mr. Tudjman took advantage of air strikes to launch a military attack, which has led to enormous suffering. Four hundred thousand refugees have been created in northern Sri Lanka as a result of a military offensive of the past few days. I have constituents who have told me that they have relatives whom they cannot contact, that there is no communication, and that they are worried about humanitarian relief from British organisations not being able to get through.

What is our Government doing as a matter of urgency to deal with that humanitarian crisis and the problems that will be created? That is a far bigger humanitarian crisis than anything that we have seen anywhere this year. Four hundred thousand people are moving across water and through jungle, fleeing an awful conflict and I hope that our Government will do something urgently to assist.

It is important that we recognise that many people from Sri Lanka and Nigeria will seek refuge in this country. It will be deplorable if those countries are on a white list of safe countries and people are refused asylum simply because they have the wrong colour skin.

9.4 pm

Dr. David Clark (South Shields): We have had a longer than usual debate because there was no Question Time. Fourteen right hon. and hon. Members have expressed their point of view in a wide-ranging survey of the world. I should like to take up some of those points. It is appropriate that we should spend the first full day's debate on the Gracious Speech discussing foreign affairs and defence. It is right that we debate those topics at the same time because they are related. If one tries to have a foreign policy without a proper security policy, there are difficulties and vice versa.

My only regret about a debate of this nature is that, on occasion, some aspects of foreign affairs are neglected. I am thinking particularly about the third world and the aid programme. I am conscious of the fact that this an appropriate time to mention that, because all Opposition Members and, I suspect, many Conservative Members are concerned about the reports that there could be cuts in the aid budget. We hope that that does not occur in Budget week. We shall be watching that. I hope that those on the Government Front Bench will have heard the views of Opposition Members about how we would resent strongly any decision to cut the aid budget. It has been reduced too much.

We are also conscious of the fact that this is an important year, because the intergovernmental conference will be taking place, in which European and foreign identity and defence and security aspects will be playing dominant roles. We wish the Government well in their presidency of the Western European Union. I believe that on this issue we are at one with the Government. We believe that the WEU should develop into the European arm of NATO, not as an alternative to NATO. We have made it clear that we believe that any European defence identity must be at Government level and must not be part of the European Union or the European Commission per se.

Mr. Portillo: I appreciate the hon. Gentleman's support in this matter, but I should warn him that, from the evidence of the WEU meeting in Madrid, there is a danger that he would be isolated in Europe by taking that stance. I thought that it was the Labour party's policy not to be isolated.

Dr. Clark: I was trying to begin my speech in a consensual manner and I am sorry that the Secretary of State made that point.

We have already heard the statement of positions by the various Governments for the IGC. We know that there is a wide range of positions, from the Dutch who seem to favour complete integration, to the French position, which is similar to ours, and there is the German position. As the Secretary of State knows, a great deal of negotiation and compromising have yet to take place. We believe that the Government are right on this one and that their view

[Dr. Clark]

will prevail. I believe that our French allies will be good associates in this case.

There are other aspects of the Queen's Speech, particularly on defence matters, with which we can concur. The opening statement that

"National security remains of the highest importance to my Government."

is something that we can go along with entirely. One of the aspects of the Secretary of State's Blackpool speech that offended myself and my colleagues was the way in which he seemed to imply that patriotism was the monopoly of one party. I am sure that, on reflection, he does not hold that view now and that he understands our anger about that point.

We know what the Government's intentions are—they have made them quite clear—and, in the ensuing year, we shall be trying to assess how closely the Government live up to their lofty statements. I must say, however, that in some of the records of their activities we find a huge gap between their intentions and the actuality.

It is another point of consensus that Labour has always supported NATO right from its inception. The Foreign Secretary heaped lavish praise on the former Labour Foreign Secretary, Ernie Bevin. Of course, that view is dear to the Opposition. We have stuck by NATO and believe that it has served not only this country but Europe and the world very well for almost 50 years. It has also shown its ability to adapt to the changed world system. Indeed, it must be a cornerstone of the security of Britain, of Europe and, in a sense, of the wider world.

Another point on which I hope we agree with the Government is support for the United Nations. We have always been enthusiastic about the United Nations and believe that it needs to be the key player in bringing stability to world security. Of course, we are keen to support further reform of that august body. We accept that it has to change and adapt as it enters its second 50 years. Much needs to be done.

If there is one lesson to be learnt—I think that we all take it on board—it is that an unsettled world, due to the breakdown of the two-power system and the breakdown of the client-state relationship, means more instability and more areas of military conflict. The role of the United Nations in policing such conflicts and sometimes enforcing the peace will involve military action.

If there is to be military action, we need the United Nations to be much more professional. I think that the United Nations itself knows that. No Government will commit their young men and women to a peacekeeping role unless they believe that they have a fair chance of coming out alive. We therefore need a controlled system of communications and command. A great deal of effort needs to be put into the United Nations to enable it to handle military situations more effectively.

Having said that, we believe that there is more to security than the military. Indeed, many of us would argue that many of the conflicts across the world could have been avoided if the economic and social problems of the areas involved had been dealt with more sensibly.

The architects of the United Nations devised the Security Council, recognising the defence and military role of the United Nations. They also planned an Economic and Social Council that would be of equal status, but it is a matter of deep regret to me that the latter, through the actions of the member nations, became an inferior council. I believe strongly that had more attention and more resources been given to the Economic and Social Council, many of the conflicts in the world would have been avoided.

We also note with pleasure that the Government state in the Queen's Speech that they aim to improve the co-operation between NATO and Russia. That is absolutely vital, and we shall be monitoring the Government's efforts in that regard. Indeed, there is a role for us all—not only the military—to play. We have the "Partnership for Peace" agreement with NATO and Russia, under which there will be military exchanges and co-operation. We have an intergovernmental relationship. If we are to try to help Russia to evolve into a pluralistic democracy, as we understand it, it needs help. We as parliamentarians ought to be using all the avenues available to us to make contact with members of the Duma, to try to explain to them our concerns and beliefs, and to try to break down the prejudice and suspicion between Russia and some of the countries in the west.

Mr. Mackinlay: Does my hon. Friend share my amazement and concern that there is no NATO mission in Moscow? Surely there is a very powerful case for NATO having a separate office and representation in Moscow, so that it can gather information about the domestic situation in Russia as well as convey the methods and intentions of NATO, which are clearly and demonstrably misunderstood and misread there.

Dr. Clark: I am glad that my hon. Friend has been able to make those points, because I have been very conscious of the fact that he has sat through most of the debate and it has not been possible for him to be called. Progress is being made. A small office of NATO is being installed in Moscow—I think that it is in the French embassy—at the moment. My hon. Friend knows that, because he has been to Brussels with me to talk to the NATO Secretary-General. I hope that it will develop into a much more fully fledged office, so that we can start explaining NATO's point of view.

We must all aim to create the security under which conflict and war between any of the NATO countries and Russia becomes as unthinkable as war between Britain and Germany is today. We must move towards such security.

The Labour party is also pleased to see the references in the Queen's Speech to efforts being made to restrict the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. Labour Members shall be watching the Government very closely on that. We have had some concerns about their approach to the comprehensive test ban treaty. They seem to have been somewhat reluctant to go along with it, but thankfully, with the help of President Clinton, they have acquiesced and now seem to be converts. I shall not say a great deal about the French nuclear tests, except that they were regrettable. I certainly regret the fact that the British Government were not able to express their views against those tests more forcibly.

We are pleased to see that a Bill is to be introduced to ratify the chemical weapons convention. We have been calling for that for some time. We believe that we need

to become one of the first 69 nations to ratify that convention. Of course, as we promised, we shall give the Bill a fair wind when it comes before the House.

We are also pleased to hear of the progress that is being made in Dayton, Ohio. We hope that an agreement on Bosnia will be reached. Certainly—this relates to my view about the way in which to build bridges with the Russians—I am delighted that we have managed to find a form of command structure that allows the Russian forces to work alongside NATO. That is a constructive, workmanlike approach, which is needed and will help to build understanding with Russia. It will also help to build security in the world.

We on the Opposition Benches are very conscious that we still have about 18,000 troops in Northern Ireland. We hope that further progress will be made and look forward to the day when some of those troops can be brought back to the mainland and deployed, perhaps at other bases. Having said that, I am conscious of the stress on the soldiers in Northern Ireland. I have seen the conditions in which they live, and they are very difficult indeed.

This is an unusual Queen's Speech, in that it contains two Bills relating to defence. The first is the Bill concerning reserve forces. We accept that the Reserve Forces Act 1980 needs to be amended and, again, we broadly endorse the provisions as we understand them. There has been wide consultation. We have obviously not seen the Bill—it is not to be published until tomorrow—but assuming that it is what we believe it to be, we shall approach it, as always, in a very constructive manner, as indeed we shall approach the Bill concerning the armed forces.

However, fine words achieve little. I am conscious of the old saying that fine words do not grow a row of beans, and that is certainly the case. The Government's record on defence, as opposed to their intentions on defence, is disappointing. We stand firmly by the belief that, to reduce the defence budget by 30 per cent., as the Government have, without carrying out a fundamental review, but simply resorting to a salami-slice operation, has added to the instability of the British armed forces and led to a reduction in morale. The hon. Member for Ayr (Mr. Gallie) described that clearly today when he referred to the RAF.

Hon. Members often quote the firm commitment given by the Prime Minister that there would be no more cuts in the armed forces. I remember clearly the solemn promise given to the House that the Army would have 120,000 personnel. The figures are not included in the "Statement on the Defence Estimates 1995". That clever, glossy document contains lots of pictures, but not the figures that we need. I am led to believe, therefore, that by next April the trained manpower in the Army will be down to 106,500.

The Government admit that they have a recruitment problem. Given that 3 million people are out of work, how the Government can fail to recruit men and women to our Army is beyond belief. It just shows how young men and women have lost confidence in the Government's ability to run our Army. I cannot understand it. It is a sorry testimony to the Government's mishandling of Britain's defences that those who loyally serve in our forces are under intense strain at operational level. The hon. Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin) made that point. If there is peace in Bosnia and we deploy 15,000 men there, half the young men in our Army will be stationed overseas and in Northern Ireland. That seems to present a major problem.

I am sorry that the Minister of State for the Armed Forces is not here, because there seems to be a huge lacuna in the Government's recruitment strategy. They are aware of the problem, which relates to black citizens. Only 1.4 per cent. of those who serve in the British forces are from ethnic minorities. In their "Statement on the Defence Estimates 1994", the Government wrote:

> "It is of concern to the Department that ethnic minorities continue to be under-represented".

Although they know that there is a problem, they seem incapable of attacking it. In its 1995 report on the defence estimates, the Defence Select Committee shared the Government's view, but said:

> "We cannot but feel that MoD has been less than enthusiastic about the whole process of ethnic monitoring."

I urge the Government to try to deal with that problem.

I raise another problem on the Floor of the House with a great deal of trepidation because it is a delicate matter, but it has caused me considerable anguish and annoyance. My hon. Friend the Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz) has also raised the problem, which simply cannot be ignored. It relates to an incident on 10 August this year, when two black women, one of whom is married to a soldier posted elsewhere, attended a social event at Oakington barracks in Cambridge.

The women were subjected to racial abuse, which included persistent chants of "Nigger, nigger, nigger." At a later stage in the evening, the soldier who had perpetrated most of the abuse disappeared, but he then came back with four other soldiers who, according to witnesses, subjected the women to further abuse, such as:

> "You niggers are only good for swinging from trees and burning. If I had my way, I'd get a white hood."

I could go on, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but I shall spare the House any further examples of such verbal abuse. I know that hon. Members will share my anger and concern. To make it worse, as the two women, now petrified, were leaving, two of the soldiers pointed guns at them. I shall say no more, but plainly such occurrences have no place in our civil society, nor have they any place in the British armed forces.

I accept that that case is an exception, but because of that, I use it to emphasise my point. I understand that following the intervention of my hon. Friend the Member for Leicester, East on 23 August, the special investigations branch of the Royal Military Police has begun to investigate the incident. It occurred, however, two and a half months ago, and I ask the Secretary of State as a matter of urgency, although I do not necessarily expect him to be able to reply tonight, to look into it. Will there be a court martial? Why have we heard nothing, when such incidents cause so much damage to the reputation of our armed forces and cause great offence not only to the black community, but to many others in our civil society? Such abuse must be stamped out.

Another injustice persists. Has the Secretary of State any plans to use the Armed Forces Bill to amend the

[Dr. Clark]

Crown Proceedings (Armed Forces) Act 1987? As he will be aware, certain ex-service personnel, especially those who served in the Royal Navy, were subjected to exposure to asbestos and now suffer seriously from asbestos-related diseases. Their civilian counterparts are able to obtain damages because of similar exposure, but those ex-service men are unable to do so. I wonder whether the Secretary of State can look into that matter, which is of great concern. That injustice needs to be put right.

Materials are as important as personnel, because in the modern military, one cannot do the job without modern equipment. It is a matter of great concern that we increasingly hear reports that the anti-European stance of the Secretary of State is influencing our procurement orders. The hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Campbell) made an eloquent speech on the very issue of orders for American aircraft.

We now know that the Government have looked into the possibility of acquiring F16 aircraft as a replacement for the Tornado F3. We have had that confirmed in writing by the Minister of State for the Armed Forces, who made the Government's reasons for that decision clear.

A much more serious charge relates to another report that the Government intend to order F22s as a cover initially for the Tornado, and then as an alternative to the Eurofighter. I hope that the Secretary of State will try to offer us an explanation of the current strategy, because he knows as well as I do that the Eurofighter project is now progressing well. It has had more than 90 sorties and, recently, an RAF pilot flew it for the first time.

The Secretary of State knows also that we are at a crucial stage in our negotiations with our partners. He knows that, as I speak, negotiations are taking place in Germany as to the future work share on the production of that very fine aircraft, which Opposition Members have backed from day one. The right hon. Gentleman knows that the timing of reaching agreement on work share is vital if we are to ensure that the memorandum of understanding is signed, as scheduled, for summer 1996.

I hope that there is no hidden agenda. I hope that there are not people in the MOD who hope by a sleight of hand to delay matters, so that they may reach a position that makes it difficult for our European partners to continue to go along with the Eurofighter development. As the Secretary of State knows, the Germans have included it in their Bundeswehr plan, the equivalent of our long-term costing. If we did not go ahead with it, it would be disastrous for our relationship with our allies and it would probably mean the end of the British aerospace industry.

Multi-million pound businesses are involved. We are speaking about bags of bucks in that case. I can believe that very many American industrialists want to supply us with F22s to drive the European aerospace business out of business altogether.

As I said, we agree with a considerable amount of what the Government have said in the Queen's Speech. We agree with many of the objectives. However, I confess that, when we have compared the actions with the words, we have found the Government wanting.

The Government repeatedly try to wrap themselves in the Union flag and then say that Britain's security is safe in their hands. I submit to the House that Britain's security has never been less safe under a Conservative Government than under the present one.

9.31 pm

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Michael Portillo): The hon. Member for Dundee, West (Mr. Ross) devoted much of his speech to the middle east and paid a generous tribute to my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary. The whole House joined together in paying further tributes to Yitzhak Rabin.

It is a cliché to say that for Yitzhak Rabin to make peace required more courage even than to make war, but it is a cliché that none the less I believe to be true. In doing so, he risked absurd slanders from his fellow countrymen—accusations of softness and even of treachery. A man who could bear the blows of his enemies with equanimity must have smarted under such lashes from his countrymen. Eventually, he paid the price of his peacemaking with his life.

There are not so many outstanding statesmen in the world today, and Yitzhak Rabin was characterised by his vision and leadership. Not only do I feel great sorrow at his loss, but I send to the people of Israel the wish that their wounds may be healed and that reconciliation may spread through their land. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."]

The other topic that was mentioned very broadly during the debate was Nigeria. I cannot add much to what my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary said in his introductory speech. The hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Campbell) and the hon. Members for Ilford, South (Mr. Gapes), for Streatham (Mr. Hill), for Norwood (Mr. Fraser) and for Sunderland, North (Mr. Etherington) all spoke about Nigeria with considerable passion.

I simply emphasise what my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary said. The Commonwealth has made an impressive response. It has marked a new stage in the maturity of the Commonwealth. Prompt action has been taken on an arms embargo, and Britain is willing to engage in discussions with her allies, friends and partners regarding any other possible responses that may be appropriate.

The hon. Member for Ilford, South welcomed the Chemical Weapons Bill announced in the Queen's Speech. I shall refer briefly to the two other Bills of concern to me directly which we shall place before the House in the present Session.

First, there will be an Armed Forces Bill to continue in force the single-service Acts—the Army Act 1955, the Air Force Act 1955 and the Naval Discipline Act 1957—that provide the framework for the system of discipline in the armed forces.

The Bill goes through a Select Committee process, and there will be a chance for the House to discuss homosexuality in the armed forces. We have long taken the view that homosexuality is incompatible with the special conditions of service life. The policy has now been examined by the High Court and by the Court of Appeal. I am pleased that both of them found our policy to be lawful. Our homosexual policy assessment team will continue to gather evidence which will be presented to the

Select Committee examining the Armed Forces Bill, so that its members will have a clear and updated assessment before them.

We shall also introduce the Reserve Forces Bill that attracted the special commendation of my hon. Friend the Member for Ayr (Mr. Gallie). It will introduce a power of call-out for humanitarian disaster relief and peacekeeping tasks, and it will create two new categories of reserves: high-readiness reserves and sponsored reserves. It will also provide an opportunity for reservists to volunteer to undertake productive tasks other than training, including periods of full-time service. Finally, the Bill includes important new safeguards for employers and reservists.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Guildford (Mr. Howell) made a remarkable speech of great breadth, in which he understood so well the diversity of British interests. Those interests start with the security of our national territory, of our dependencies and of our allies. But, as he pointed out, they go much wider than that. They include the promotion of free trade and investment around the globe. They include our interest in the spread of liberal, western-style democracies, partly for humanitarian reasons and partly because such democracies are more likely to be peaceful.

Our world still faces many threats. The prospect of global war has receded, but instead we face increased uncertainty. Regional problems that were for so long suppressed by the super-power stand-off are re-emerging in traditionally unstable areas such as the Balkans, the middle east and the Gulf. In north and sub-Saharan Africa, and even in Asia and the far east, we can see tensions between emerging major regional powers.

Instability brings in its wake challenges to our interests and our values. Those problems are certainly exacerbated by extremism, by the possession or potential proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and often by both. Such proliferation heightens regional tensions and may also intensify the scale and nature of future conflicts. We should not ignore the dangers of proliferation simply because it is going on well away from the shores of the United Kingdom. The Gulf conflict provided a vivid demonstration—we saw it on our television screens—of the threat to the armed forces of countries which, like Britain, take an active role in building international security. The proliferation of ballistic missile technology, especially if coupled with weapons of mass destruction, would pose a growing threat to our NATO allies.

My hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin) paid particular attention to the importance of developing our intelligence capability. In such an uncertain world, to be able to predict where the crises will occur will be of enormous importance. If we find ourselves involved in conflict, the ability to manage the battlefield through superior intelligence will probably hold the key to victory. The fact that we know what is going on reinforces our deterrent capability.

For all those reasons, our important relationship with the United States is underlined. In some of the Opposition speeches this afternoon—I am thinking of the hon. Members for Liverpool, West Derby (Mr. Wareing) and for Ilford, South—I still heard a resonance of that old Labour anti-Americanism which can play no part in building up the security interests of the United Kingdom.

Deterrence was relatively straightforward when there was a super-power conflict. The essence of deterrence is that any potential adversary should believe that one would be willing, in extremis, to use one's power and that one would be able to strike with overwhelming force. The current diffuse threats make deterrence much more complicated. It spans a range of capability from special forces, to rapid reaction forces and cruise missiles, up to and including nuclear deterrents.

I believe that nuclear weapons will remain a vital underpinning of our defence policy. Our strategic deterrent provides the ultimate guarantee of our national security. It makes a significant contribution to preserving peace and security in Europe. Our nuclear weapons are a deterrent: their role is to prevent war, not to fight it. The theology of deterrence will need to evolve in order to reflect the changing world, but its fundamental principle remains valid.

It is premature to think that we can move to complete nuclear disarmament. Of course, with the welcome end of the cold war, we have been able to make sensible reductions in our nuclear arsenal. The flexibility of the Trident missile system also allows us to move to a single nuclear weapon delivery system. However, complete nuclear disarmament remains a distant prospect at best. Nuclear weapons technology cannot be uninvented. In a nuclear-free world, there would always be the risk of a new confrontation generating a profoundly destabilising nuclear arms race. The potential for proliferation would always be present. No one has yet found robust solutions to those problems.

As a nuclear weapons state, the United Kingdom bears special responsibilities. I did not see any evidence in today's debate to suggest that Labour has begun to understand the nature of those special responsibilities.

Mr. Gapes: Will the Secretary of State tell us under what circumstances he would press the nuclear button?

Mr. Portillo: It is extremely important to understand that this country would be prepared to use nuclear weapons. I have said that nuclear weapons exist because we wish to deter war, not to fight it. However, it is extremely important for any adversary to understand that Britain would, in extremis, be ready to use nuclear weapons. That is the essence of the deterrence doctrine.

My hon. Friend the Member for South Staffordshire, (Sir P. Cormack) and the hon. Member for West Derby among others, referred to the Bosnian question. All eyes are currently on Dayton, Ohio. We hope that the latest chance for peace will be grasped by all the parties and that hopes will not be dashed, as has occurred so often in the past. We hope that hostilities will not recur and that the long-suffering people of Bosnia will not endure further misery.

In parallel with the Dayton talks, planning is continuing within NATO for a peace implementation force. Good progress has been made, although clearly a number of key issues can be resolved only once a clearer picture emerges from Dayton. I assure the House that the force will deploy only if there is a clear and satisfactory peace agreement to which the parties subscribe fully.

The force's role will be to implement a peace agreement and it will operate with the consent of the parties who have signed the agreement. The force's principal task will be to oversee the separation of the factions and to provide the stability necessary for an agreement to succeed. The force will be remarkably multinational. The headquarters of the Allied Command

[Mr. Portillo]

Europe rapid reaction corps—the ARRC—will play a key role. The United Kingdom has framework nation responsibility for the ARRC headquarters, for which we provide the commander and some 60 per cent. of the staff. Its deployment will provide an important test of its capabilities. I am sure that General Sir Michael Walker and his team will rise to the challenge.

As the House would expect, the Government are planning to make a significant contribution to the peace implementation force commensurate with our status and responsibilities within the Atlantic alliance. The final size of our contribution, and the force as a whole, will depend on the nature of the peace settlement, if any. It will also depend on the level of contributions from other NATO and non-NATO nations.

I agree entirely with the hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) that it has been an important breakthrough to include Russian troops in the arrangements, and we hope for other troop contributions from beyond NATO, including in particular Muslim countries. I confirm that a substantial United States deployment on the ground will be essential. I undertake that we shall report to the House with further details as and when our plans are crystallised.

My hon. Friend the Member for Southampton, Test (Mr. Hill) and my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier) paid particular attention to European defence. There are some clear lessons that we can draw from operations in former Yugoslavia for the defence arrangements that we should put in place for the future. They relate to the value of practical military co-operation, the fundamental importance of NATO and not letting theology or rhetoric get ahead of reality.

The Anglo-French summit last month marked a development in our defence relationship with France. Britain and France have similar perspectives. The summit recognised the global partnership that exists between us, built on the major contribution that both countries make to security in Europe and wider afield.

Much of the reason for that improved bilateral relationship lies in our military co-operation in Bosnia. That has brought our two armed forces closer together than at any time since the second world war. Our troops have found their French colleagues whom they have been fighting alongside on the slopes of Mount Igman to be of the highest quality and they have shared a good deal of comradeship in those operations.

For a long time, France has excluded herself from some of NATO's military activities. I believe that that exclusion by France has been a loss to NATO and to France. I welcome the fact that France is showing a new willingness to participate in the work of the alliance.

Again it is important to separate theology from practice. Many of the theological questions surrounding France's involvement and integration in NATO remain to be resolved, but it is just as important that, in putting together a practical operation for peacekeeping in former Yugoslavia, France has been willing to rise above those theological questions and co-operate in putting together what I believe will be an effective force. I particularly welcome that. I also welcome France's recent recognition that NATO has a crucial role in meeting the serious security challenges that we may face in future.

We intend, with France, to draw lessons as we work together over the coming months to build credible European defence arrangements. My right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary touched earlier on the agenda for our presidency of the WEU which, as my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Harborough said, starts at the beginning of next year.

The Government's approach to European defence is a practical one. It is about building defence structures that work. We address the key question: what is the gap in European defence capability that we are trying to plug? I have warned before of the dangers of concentrating on institutional issues and thereby losing sight of our main goal: building militarily credible and effective capabilities. Some talk of a political deficit while others suggest that intergovernmentalism is outdated. I believe that intergovernmentalism works. It has done so for 50 years in NATO. It recognises that defence is a sovereign nation's first responsibility. We shall not meet the challenge of tomorrow by institutional tinkering. Certainly we shall not meet that challenge by submerging our sovereignty and our armed forces into supranational constructions.

All the talk of political deficit misses the point, for it is not the problem. What matters is Europe's patent operational deficit. The WEU's operational development will be the first priority of our presidency of the WEU. We shall take that approach, however, in a way that complements NATO, not in a way that could weaken it. We have in NATO arrangements and procedures that have been developed in the best possible way, through consensus and practical military co-operation. These arrangements have been built up over nearly 50 years, and they work. We should not try to reinvent the wheel by developing new, separate and wholly European capabilities. That would be unnecessary, unaffordable and undesirable.

Instead, we shall reinforce the WEU's links with the alliance. The WEU needs access to NATO's assets, capabilities and expertise if it is to be able to mount operations on the scale that we want. Events in Bosnia have proved that point eloquently. We need to be able to demonstrate to the Americans that Europeans are able to do their bit. We need to convince others that even in situations where Americans may not be involved in Europe on the ground, Europeans will none the less have the necessary capabilities.

We shall carry forward work to establish a WEU situation centre that is capable of monitoring future operations. That is an essential part of the nerve system of any viable defence organisation. We want the centre to be well on the way to being operational by the end of our presidency of the WEU.

As the structures and procedures that I have described would be mere paper tigers unless exercised, we shall make proposals for a more coherent and progressive exercise policy within the WEU. For the reasons explained by my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary, the WEU, rather than the European Union, is the appropriate body for building up the defence capability of Europe. That was the central theme of one section of my speech in Blackpool. The hon. Member for South Shields accepted that argument and offered the Government his support, which I am pleased to accept.

There were references, especially by the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East and my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside to our procurement policy. Our equipment procurement policy must provide our armed forces with the right equipment on time and at the best value for money. Competition, therefore, remains at the heart of our approach. The Government believe that it would not be doing the United Kingdom industry any favours if through our procurement policy we were to protect it from international competition. Competition brings benefits to us and to industry. It promotes keen prices and encourages the most efficient use of industrial resources. It has had demonstrable effects on reducing prices. In some cases it has reduced costs by over 30 per cent.

Our procurement policies have contributed to making the United Kingdom defence industry healthy and internationally competitive. Last year, United Kingdom defence companies won export orders worth some £5 billion, representing about 16 per cent. of the world market. That was no flash in the pan. Over the past five years, the United Kingdom has been the second largest exporter after the United States. With the strength of a competitive defence industry, we have everything to gain from a genuinely open defence equipment market. We shall continue to strive for open markets, through NATO and through the European defence forums.

Best value for money does not always mean picking the cheapest solution. We aim for value for money in the longer term. That involves taking account of a range of factors, including industrial issues. We recognise the importance of a healthy supply base in Britain and in the rest of Europe. We wish to maintain our ability to run competitions for future requirements. The defence industry has had to take painful decisions to reduce its capacity in recent years. It is not our business to maintain industrial capacity for its own sake, but we do need to ensure that we do not through our actions lose industrial capabilities that are important either militarily or in the interests of future competition or collaboration.

Mr. Menzies Campbell *rose—*

Mr. Portillo: I shall continue for one more paragraph, because I think that it may well help the hon. and learned Gentleman.

The Eurofighter project is a good example of that approach. British Aerospace, our prime contractor, is the leading aerospace company in Europe. Eurofighter will be an excellent product if we are able, as I suspect that we will, to sort out the remaining managerial problems with the project, none of which is to do with the aircraft itself. We have entered into arrangements that we are determined to honour.

Mr. Campbell: I am most grateful to the Secretary of State for giving way. In the light of the analysis that he has just provided for the House, will he now confirm that the Government are committed to Eurofighter and that there is no intention to lease F16s on a temporary basis rather than embarking on the mid-life update of the F3?

Mr. Portillo: On the commitment to Eurofighter there is no doubt, and that is why I asked the hon. and learned Gentleman to hear another paragraph, so that he could hear it in my own words.

As far as the F16 is concerned, I am looking at a number of options for what we should do between now and the time when Eurofighter is delivered. I have made no secret of the fact that leasing F16s is one option to be looked at and an upgrade of the F3 is another.

Mr. Campbell *rose—*

Mr. Portillo: If the hon. and learned Gentleman makes it brief, I shall give way to him.

Mr. Campbell: In view of the answer that the Minister of State for Defence Procurement gave last week—that the existing Royal Air Force tanker fleet is incapable of mid-air refuelling of the F16—what arrangements does the right hon. Gentleman propose for that?

Mr. Portillo: All things have their costs and that is one of the costs that would have to be taken into account.

Dr. Reid: I raise this point lest the Secretary of State be misinterpreted, because we want to be helpful on this. When he says that he wants to get rid of any barriers to competition as regards our defence industry, can we take it that he is not saying that the British Government are thinking of abandoning article 223, our sovereign right in the last instance to make defence decisions that overrule the competition, although, of course, we do not want that to be misused by some of our European allies?

Mr. Portillo: I do not believe that the abandonment of article 223 will be part of the Government's programme for the IGC. I would ask the hon. Gentleman to read carefully what I said on procurement issues.

I wish to make the point that, in future, where we collaborate with others on a project, competition will be a crucial ingredient. Collaboration can provide useful savings over purely national programmes. Programmes that would otherwise be unaffordable become affordable. But collaboration is not an end in itself. It is worth while where it genuinely offers the most cost-effective solution compared to the alternatives, where it offers the prospect of the best long-term value for money. That must be the basis of future collaborative ventures.

From hon. Members on the Conservative Benches we have heard a breadth of vision and understanding, particularly in speeches from my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary, my right hon. Friend the Member for Guildford, from my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside and others. By contrast, the speech from the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) was devoid of principle. In it, he espoused a series of positions that were directly opposed to his positions of a few years ago. He appeared to be guided only by populism, only by the fear of standing alone, only by the wish to be in the majority, with no reference to right or wrong. In particular, he showed no understanding of the United Kingdom's special position and responsibilities.

We are a nuclear power. The success of deterrence depends on the knowledge that a country's deterrent works, and that that country would ultimately be willing to use it. The French President was advised to test, and he had no alternative but to do so. We would have done the same if we had been given that advice. The question is, would Labour have been willing to do so? It has wriggled on the issue. We would not be prepared to enter

[Mr. Portillo]

into an agreement that did not allow us to ensure the safety and reliability of our weapons.

The hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) stood up and admitted that he was a member of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament. Other Front Benchers do not mention their own membership, and some do not even remember it.

It being Ten o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.

Debate to be resumed tomorrow.

Boundary Road Junction, Norwich

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Bates.]*

10 pm

Mr. Patrick Thompson (Norwich, North): I am grateful for the opportunity to debate an issue that is of considerable concern to a number of my constituents. I welcome my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Transport, who will reply: I have happy memories of canvassing in his constituency during a by-election some years ago.

I also welcome my hon. Friend the Member for Langbaurgh (Mr. Bates), the Whip, whose presence increases the attendance at the debate by 50 per cent.—if my mathematics is correct.

Too often, issues and concerns involving planning, road improvements and so forth are dismissed in the acronym NIMBY—"not in my back yard"—or in a newer term, which I heard only recently. I am not sure whether my hon. Friend the Minister has heard it before, but BANANA can be translated as "build absolutely nothing anywhere near anyone". All too often, however, real problems occur, and people can be seriously damaged by developments and change in their localities.

In my constituency, the remedial works undertaken by Norfolk county council on the heavily used junction between Boundary road, Cromer road and Mile Cross lane in July 1988 seemed to be only of local interest, but they have wider significance in regard to the approach of local authorities to such situations, and in regard to the current state of the law and practice on compensation. There is no doubt that the traffic volumes at that junction justified the remedial work that was started by Norfolk county council in 1985 and completed on 14 July 1988. I know that the work was justified, because I use the junction regularly when I drive in and out of my constituency at the weekend and the beginning and end of the week. It is a worthwhile and good scheme: that is generally agreed.

Part of the scheme, however, involved new and much more complicated rerouting arrangements for the occupants of properties on Cromer road. Two of my constituents—Mrs. Duffield and Mrs. Langham, of 12 and 14 Cromer road—were advised by a county council officer to go via Mile Cross lane into Eversley road and then into Mayfield avenue out on to Cromer road and then left on Cromer road, just to get into their own front drives.

The inconvenience that my constituents experienced getting into their own properties was compounded by extremely disagreeable problems created by the new traffic lights. Mrs. Langham found that she and her family could not eat their meals in their dining room because of the audience outside, and that her bedroom was clearly visible to passengers on the upper deck of buses outside her home. Her neighbour Mrs. Duffield has described to me the effects of living in a house where car headlights shine directly into the property as vehicles turn out of Reepham road into Cromer road, and of the noise, pollution and vibration from which she suffers. It is much more difficult to get anyone to call on them, or to park nearby.

To be fair to Norfolk county council—which has been very helpful in answering my inquiries during my preparation for the debate—it offered compensation to

residents adversely affected by noise, vibration, smell, fumes and smoke under the Land Compensation Act 1973. I understand from Mrs. Duffield that the county council's officers advised that no claim for compensation would be entertained until a year had elapsed—the implication being that that was because compensation would be based on nuisance monitored over that time.

There are some further important points to make about the county council's conduct in this area. It failed to make it clear until October 1994 that it had power under section 246(2)(b) of the Highways Act 1980 to purchase both of these properties within one year of the opening to public traffic of the new road system. That was done only in correspondence to me. It was subsequently defended to me by the county council on 6 April this year on the ground that

"there is no statutory duty on the County Council to inform people of their rights."

Surely it is special pleading of a regrettable kind to transfer this obligation to private individuals or their advisers, especially when the chief executive of the county council had claimed that

"the Authority has no obligation or legal power to part with compensation other than in accordance with legislation."

That was dated 1 October 1990.

Unfortunately, the negotiations between the county council and the representatives of Mrs. Duffield and Mrs. Langham did not proceed smoothly. Both my constituents suffered a significant diminution in the value of their homes at a time when the property market was already falling. Despite the fact that Mrs. Duffield and Mrs. Langham live in adjoining properties, Mrs. Duffield received an offer of compensation in September 1990 on the basis that she had the most severe case and could be used as a "test case". Meanwhile, Mrs. Langham's advisers were being encouraged to make an appropriate claim based on the legal circumstances, with the county council's offer to her resting on the decision of Mrs. Duffield. The onus was firmly placed on the residents to accept whatever the county council was prepared to offer.

Not surprisingly, the settlement of these claims in November 1990 left both my constituents highly dissatisfied. Mrs. Langham's property is now valued at more than £20,000 less than it was five years ago, and Mrs. Duffield cannot contemplate selling. Both feel that they have been shabbily treated by the local highways authority. Their feelings have been aggravated by subsequent decisions by the county council. Traffic surveys in January 1990 and April 1992 showed that many motorists were avoiding the traffic lights that had been installed at the Boundary road junction by travelling along Eversley road to Mile Cross road. Eversley road had become a rat run.

The county council's highways sub-committee decided to erect bollards to close Eversley road to through traffic. That meant that the route for residents of Cromer road to get into their own properties became even more complicated. Mrs. Langham now has to pass through two sets of traffic lights to turn right into Mayfield avenue and then into Eversley road just to get into her rear drive. Both my constituents have been advised to take an even longer route via Reepham road, Heather avenue and Cromer road past a first school, making difficult turns into heavy traffic flows. I appreciate that the Minister may not be as familiar as I am with the roads in my constituency, but I am sure that he takes the point.

The alteration to the arrangements that were made in 1988 was made even more unpalatable by the county council's failure to inform residents of Cromer road that the views of the public were being sought about the closure of Eversley road. With the support of the ward members, one of whom lived in Eversley road, the revised scheme was approved despite the balance of opinion among those consulted being against the closure. Once again the county council failed to inform my constituents about the date of the closure of Eversley road although they were the people most severely affected according to the council's own report.

I hope that the Minister will accept that this is a sorry saga from the point of view of the people affected, who approached me about it. I have no doubt that it has been repeated many times throughout the country and that it will happen again. The lessons are clear. It is quite wrong for highway authorities to pick and choose whether they will inform residents who are adversely affected by improvement schemes of their rights. Simply assuming that their agents will be fully aware of the provisions of the Highways Act rather than those of the Land Compensation Act inevitably puts them in a weaker position. If only a minute proportion of the two properties that I have mentioned had been taken for the Boundary road scheme, both my constituents would have had their properties purchased at market valuation. As it is, they have suffered a considerable devaluation and their access problems have been made worse by the county council's decision in May 1992.

I understand that local authorities are reluctant to offer compensation on a discretionary basis. The financial implications are clearly important; so too are the difficulties in formulating criteria to ensure that people whose property suffers adverse effects outside the strict definitions of the Land Compensation Act are consistently dealt with. None the less, we all know constituents whose homes have been affected by public works, whose views may have been ruined by new developments, or whose businesses may have suffered as a result of traffic-diversion schemes, but who, under present legislation, are entitled to little or no compensation.

Local authority officers believe that the Government and Parliament have deliberately sidestepped the issue of compensation in such cases, preferring to leave this difficult matter to the discretion of local government, with the assurance that no action will be taken for financial reasons. I suspect that my hon. Friend may wish to comment on that point. I hope that that belief is unfounded. As my constituents' experience shows, leaving the determination of compensation to a local authority results in the worst possible deal for residents. If Norfolk county council was not prepared to inform them of their rights but instead to rely on a test case involving a resident of Cromer road whose advisers were not fully aware of the legal possibilities, the time for a renewed examination of the problem has clearly come.

At national level, we need to reconsider these matters. Why are the issues apparently dealt with much more expeditiously and smoothly on the continent? Is it because we are an overcrowded nation that we seem to make such difficulty of planning matters, which drag on and leave everyone upset and unhappy? Is it because—and here I show my prejudices—our legal administrative processes are fundamentally flawed and out of date, which my time in Parliament has convinced me that they are? Is that the

[Mr. Patrick Thompson]

problem? What can be done to help my constituents? I hope that my hon. Friend can give me some reassurance or advice. How can we improve matters? I look forward to his reply.

10.11 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. Steve Norris): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North (Mr. Thompson) on securing the debate and I am grateful to him for his kind remarks. I remember his valiant canvassing efforts on my behalf during my by-election in 1988. If I recall, a large Rottweiler took a significant piece out of his trousers during his canvassing efforts—an event about which he has never ceased to remind me on every occasion that I have met him since. As that is now seven years, I feel as if I have somehow paid for that suit several times over, but I yield to no one in my appreciation of his efforts and I shall be eternally grateful to him. In all seriousness, I have known him for many years and one thing is certain—his tremendous assiduity on behalf of his constituents, as he has demonstrated at this late hour by bringing to the attention of the House a matter that is so important to his constituents.

My hon. Friend has outlined the dispute between Mrs. Duffield and Mrs. Langham and the local highway authority, Norfolk county council, as a result of the junction alteration and subsequent works for traffic management. He acknowledged that, in practice, the county council was justified in undertaking the works on the junction where Mrs. Duffield and Mrs. Langham live, and it is important that we should place that on the record, but he raises the problems that his constituents have experienced from both the junction alteration and later works for traffic management in the neighbouring road.

The roads in the case that my hon. Friend mentioned are of course local roads, and that means that their management and development are the responsibility of the local highway authority, which, in this case, is Norfolk county council. I should say for the record, because it bears on his remarks, that, although the Secretary of State for Transport is also a highway authority, that responsibility is limited to the motorway and trunk road network, which, although it carries large volumes of longer-distance traffic, constitutes only 4 per cent. of the road network; the rest is the responsibility of the local highway authority. Decisions are primarily for them. As the House will understand, that is right and proper because they are democratically accountable bodies which exercise their responsibilities in the interests of their local communities.

I am sure that my hon. Friend will recognise that, in general, the local highway authorities bring a high level of competence to their work. I am sure that he will agree that decisions with essentially local impact are, rightly, matters for local government rather than for central Government. My hon. Friend was kind enough to suggest that I might not be as familiar with Cromer road as he is. That illustrates the point. The man from Whitehall cannot be expected to devote the same attention with the same degree of knowledge to such localised schemes as a local authority.

Having established that it is quite proper that a highway authority should be a local authority, I shall turn to the two problems raised by my hon. Friend. The first problem relates to compensation for the effect of the original junction improvement scheme. It might be helpful to the House if I give a brief explanation of the powers that can apply in land compensation cases. A range of powers, some discretionary, are available to a highway authority to acquire land or compensate those owners who are adversely affected by highway schemes.

Sections 149 to 171 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 require a highway authority to acquire land blighted by road proposals as defined in schedule 13 to the Act. Blighted land is, in general, the land required or land that is likely to be subject to compulsory purchase for highway purposes. That is a requirement on the highway authority to buy land needed for the scheme in advance.

Section 246(2A) of the Highways Act 1980 enables a highway authority to acquire, by agreement and in advance, land that is not required for a road scheme but that will, in the opinion of the highway authority, be severely affected by it. That is a new discretionary power, which was not available to Norfolk county council at the time of the alterations to Cromer road. It was introduced by section 62 of the Planning and Compensation Act 1991, which followed a full review of highway land compensation arrangements.

Section 246(2)(a) of the Highways Act 1980 enables a highway authority to acquire, by agreement, land adversely affected by the construction or improvement of the highway. That is a discretionary power which can be exercised only at the time the work is being carried out.

Section 246(2)(b) of the Highways Act 1980 enables a highway authority to acquire by agreement, land adversely affected by the use of the highway. That is a discretionary power, which can be exercised only once the highway is open to traffic.

Finally, part I of the Land Compensation Act 1973, which is the major legislation, requires a highway authority to compensate landowners for depreciation in the value of their property caused by physical factors such as noise and dust.

As my hon. Friend has suggested, I understand that Mrs. Duffield and Mrs. Langham both received offers of compensation to which they were entitled under part I of the Land Compensation Act 1973 for the loss in value of their home a result of the junction alteration measures taken in 1987 and 1988. Mrs. Duffield and Mrs. Langham were advised by independent professional valuation agents in their negotiations with the council and accepted offers of compensation in 1990. The council also reimbursed them for the fees charged by the agents.

It seems that the owners were not advised by either their independent professional valuation agents or the council of the discretionary powers in section 246(2)(b) of the Highways Act 1980, which I have just outlined. As I have explained, those powers allow a highway authority the discretion to acquire property, that, in the opinion of the authority, is seriously affected by the use of a new or altered highway. The discretionary power to acquire property in this way can be exercised up to one year after a road has opened or been altered; it then lapses.

The failure to communicate the full legal options available to the council is disappointing. It does not, however, follow that, had the owners applied for

discretionary purchase, the highway authority would have exercised its discretion to offer to buy their properties. In this case, sadly, those powers are now lapsed.

As my hon. Friend said, compensation has already been paid under part I of the Land Compensation Act 1973. His constituents were compensated for the loss in value arising from the junction alteration and I understand that, whatever their feeling about the conduct of the negotiations, they accepted the compensation offered as a full and final settlement of their claim for the depreciation in value caused by those works. My hon. Friend will understand that I have no locus to intervene in such negotiations.

I shall deal now with the second part of the problem—the effects on Cromer road of the later proposal to close Eversley road to through traffic. Mrs. Duffield and Mrs. Langham clearly feel that they were not adequately consulted by the council about that proposal. The House will appreciate that it is difficult for me to comment on that as a matter of fact. It is clear that the local highway authority was aware of the likely impact of the measures on properties in Cromer road when it decided in May 1992 that the further measure was necessary. It is less clear whether it did all that it could have done to ensure that those affected were properly informed of what was proposed.

Although the works in Eversley road have an effect on residents of Cromer road, no further claim for compensation arises as there is no physical alteration to the carriageway. That is based on the well-established and, in my view, entirely correct, principle that existing unaltered roads may be expected to be used to their full capacity. After all, the proposition is that a frontager should be compensated for an increase in traffic levels brought about not by any physical alteration but merely by some other factor outside the direct relevance of the road and the frontager. I wonder what my hon. Friend's reaction might be to the proposition that would, I assume, naturally flow from that, which is that, were traffic volumes to be reduced by, for example, the opening of an adjacent bypass, frontagers should be charged a substantial sum of money to cover the additional value that presumably attaches to their property. In essence, and in the public interest, the general policy—which states that when there is no physical alteration, no claim for compensation arises—is, I believe, a sound one.

Local authorities have wide powers under the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 to make traffic regulation orders to regulate traffic on local roads. Those powers are very flexible. Restrictions can be imposed on single streets, or parts of them, or they can apply to all roads within a particular area. Orders may, for example, prohibit, restrict or regulate the use of a road or any part of the width of a road by vehicular traffic of any class. They may have effect at all times or at specified periods or they can be applied to different classes of traffic. For example, exemptions might apply to heavy goods vehicles alone, and exemptions from the terms of an order can be made for vehicles used for particular purposes, such as taxis or delivery vehicles or those belonging to residents or businesses located in the area. If necessary, exempt vehicles may even be identified by permits.

Such an order is not subject to reference to the Secretary of State. The decision whether to make a traffic regulation order rests solely with the local traffic authority but, in exercising its powers under the 1984 Act, it must have regard to the desirability of securing and maintaining reasonable access to premises. It may, however, be open to the residents who are affected to seek further revisions to existing traffic management arrangements.

My hon. Friend raises an important point about informing citizens of their rights and possible remedies for nuisance caused by public development. The Government are firmly committed to that principle and to making information available in accordance with citizens charter principles. We have produced a booklet entitled "Land Compensation—Your rights explained". I have given my hon. Friend a number of copies which I hope that he will distribute to his constituents.

The Highways Agency, which has operational responsibility for trunk roads and motorway schemes, sends such booklets, together with its own charter statement, to people whose property may be affected by scheme proposals. It does that to advise them precisely of the remedies that might be available to them. Local highway authorities, including Norfolk, may well also consider issuing the advice in those booklets to inform owners who may be affected by local road schemes.

It is one thing for a local authority to point to the fact that it has no strict statutory obligation to inform every person affected of their potential right to compensation—that, after all, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is a long-established principle that you and I understand in relation to planning law, and it is based on the sensible proposition that a planning consent or, indeed, a road order, cannot be entirely set aside merely because of a failure to inform every single person who might be affected—but it is not satisfactory to suggest that that gives local authorities a right simply not to bother to let people know what their rights are.

Good practice, and, as I have suggested, practice which is followed by the Highways Agency—certainly in relation to its schemes, for which my Department is more directly responsible—is informing owners of their rights in precisely the form that I have outlined. That does not in any sense prejudge any success or otherwise of any claim that owners may subsequently make. Indeed, one of the advantages of information in such circumstances is that it allows local people to understand that there is a comprehensive system of compensation available; that it will not apply in every case; that it may very well be that, on occasions, a claim will not be successful, which will save potential correspondents considerable time and ultimately wasted effort. I suspect, however, that in a number of cases the information will also suggest to people that the framework for compensation is in fact relatively straightforward and indeed logical in the massive majority of cases. I commend that better practice.

Of course local authority discretion—dealing with the issue of discretion—is important, and so is the right of individual citizens to be informed about proposals that may affect their property. As I say, I am not in a position to judge whether Norfolk provided all the information that it should have done in this case. All I can say is that Mrs. Duffield and Mrs. Langham clearly do not think that they received all the information that they should have done. I invite the county council to reflect on whether there is a way in which it can improve its procedures to prevent such a problem arising again.

[Mr. Steve Norris]

I commend the principles of openness and consultation to all local authorities. In the event, that process is likely to avoid very considerable unnecessary acrimony, recrimination and, indeed, genuine hardship and distress to people who certainly do not deserve it.

Mrs. Langham and Mrs. Duffield may—I hope—take some pleasure from knowing that in this debate, my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North has enabled me to put across what I believe is an extraordinarily important point in this regard and one of which many local authorities would do well to take account.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-eight minutes past Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Friday 17 November 1995

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

BILL PRESENTED

EDUCATION (STUDENT LOANS)

Mrs. Secretary Shephard, supported by the Prime Minister, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Secretary Sir Patrick Mayhew, Mr. Secretary Forsyth, Mr. Secretary Hague and Mr. Eric Forth, presented a Bill to make provision for, and in consequence of, the payment of subsidy in respect of private sector student loans: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Monday next and to be printed. [Bill 4.]

Orders of the Day

Debate on the Address

[THIRD DAY]

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Question,

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, as follows:—

Most Gracious Sovereign,

We, Your Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Parliament assembled, beg leave to offer our humble thanks to Your Majesty for the Gracious Speech which Your Majesty has addressed to both Houses of Parliament—*[Mr. Hurd]*

Question again proposed.

Health

9.34 am

The Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Stephen Dorrell): Some parts of the parliamentary year and the parliamentary ritual are completely predictable. That is particularly true of the events surrounding the State Opening of Parliament. We have become familiar down the centuries with the arrival in the Chamber of Black Rod, the procession of Members of the House of Commons to the House of Lords and hearing the Queen's Speech. Another predictable ritual is that the Leader of the Opposition returns to the House the afternoon after hearing the Queen's Speech and declares it to be a mouse.

The Leader of the Opposition is a deeply conservative person. He has performed his role with his usual aplomb and spoken the lines allotted to him. Like him, I attended a public school and I know the atmosphere in which we were both educated. The public schools of the 1960s rather frowned upon individuality and did not encourage originality. Fettes certainly left its mark on the speech of the Leader of the Opposition this week.

The speech of the Leader of the Opposition was deeply disappointing and unoriginal. The right hon. Gentleman clearly failed to rise to the challenge facing him as Leader of the Opposition at that moment: to set out to the House and the country what Labour considers to be the priorities facing the nation and, more importantly, how it would address them. The right hon. Gentleman's speech contained no suggestions, no policies and no proposals. I shall be listening with interest to the speech of the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman), assuming that she catches your eye, Madam Speaker, to hear what she argues should be done in the national health service. I look forward to hearing her proposals and specific suggestions.

Ms Harriet Harman (Peckham): Getting the Tories out of Government.

Mr. Dorrell: The British people will not regard that as a remotely satisfactory answer to the challenge that faces the Opposition, that is, to tell them how, if they were elected to office, they would address the problems affecting the national health service or any other aspects of Government.

By contrast, the Government have set out consistently—it was reaffirmed in the Queen's Speech earlier this week—a coherent strategy for dealing with the

[Mr. Dorrell]

issues facing the Government and the people of Britain. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister made it clear in his speech that the Government attach prime importance to three clear priorities that face the country.

First, and overwhelmingly most importantly, we must ensure that the United Kingdom is internationally competitive and able to earn its living in the world. Unless we have an answer to the problem as to how we earn our living in the next 10 years, our debate on the national health service today is mere hot air. What pays for the national health service is the competitiveness of the British economy.

The Opposition are full of soundbites but they have no proposals at all which rise to the challenge of showing how Britain will earn its living in the world over the next 10 or 15 years. That is the first leg that the Prime Minister made clear underlies the Government's strategy, which is set out in the Queen's Speech and which reaffirms the strategy that we have been developing for a considerable time.

Secondly, the Government have shown themselves determined to address the problems of individual rights, stability and the maintenance of law and order in Britain to ensure that the people of Britain can be confident that the Government will carry out their most basic responsibility, which is to provide an atmosphere of stability that respects the rights and obligations of individual citizens. That, again, is something in which the Opposition are utterly uninterested. Over the past 16 years, the Government have consistently introduced proposals to deal with the problem of rising crime and to reassert individual rights and responsibilities. The Opposition have fought those proposals.

The third leg of the Government's strategy, to which my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and the Government attach great importance, is the improvement of public services. That is what we are debating today. It is an area where the Opposition face a specific and focused challenge. Instead of soundbites and press releases bemoaning this or that failure in a public service, how would they improve the management of public services, if they were ever to find themselves in Government? How would they increase the resources of public services? How would they change the culture of public services—in particular the national health service so that it can deliver better quality health care to the people of this country?

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): A fundamental is implicit in the right hon. Gentleman's remarks about public service, and in the health service that fundamental is care. Does the right hon. Gentleman really believe that care is a marketable commodity?

Mr. Dorrell: What I believe in passionately, and it is a shared commitment across the parties, is the principle that health care should be available to those who need it without being asked whether they can afford to pay for it. That is the simple idea on which the health service is founded. Our health service has been more successful in delivering that principle, under Governments of both political complexions, than have equivalent health care systems in other countries. That much is agreed between the parties.

What is not agreed is whether, as we face the day-to-day implementation and delivery of that shared commitment, the Opposition are man and woman enough to face the hard issues that must be faced if they are to turn high-flown rhetoric into hard reality.

Mr. John Austin-Walker (Woolwich): Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that, under his community care proposals, many elderly people are now being means tested and are paying for services that previously they would have received free under the NHS?

Mr. Dorrell: There are now about a quarter of a million more beds for elderly people—ensuring the provision of care at public expense—than was the case in 1979. That has been part of the growing improvement in community care over the past 16 years. Indeed, it has been one of the fastest growing aspects of public service.

Mr. Tom Clarke (Monklands, West): Only because there are more elderly people.

Mr. Dorrell: That is certainly one factor, but it is true to say that the public service now much better meets that demand than it did in 1979. I recall that when I was first elected to this place, one of the tasks that used to face hon. Members week by week was finding places in part III accommodation for elderly people clearly incapable of looking after, and providing for, themselves at home. The only option available to them was to go on a waiting list for part III accommodation. This Government have abolished that waiting list. I do not think that any hon. Member has had to engage in that activity for several years, yet it used to employ a substantial part of our time.

I want to deal with the specific proposals for which I am departmentally responsible and which were included in the Gracious Speech. I believe that both are welcomed by all parties. The first is the Bill relating to the health service commissioner, which will implement a key proposal of the Wilson committee, which examined the reform of the handling of complaints within the NHS. Both sides of the House agree that the committee produced proposals that will substantially improve the handling of complaints. It suggested a three-tier approach. The first is to encourage complainants and the local health care deliverer to resolve their difficulties informally. If that fails, the second is the establishment of a three-person lay panel at local level, with the majority of its members being independent of the trust or health care provider, to consider the complaint. If both those fail, the third tier is for the complaint to be examined by the health service commissioner.

If we are to deliver that system, which the Government accept and endorse, we need to extend the commissioner's powers to allow him to examine both the activities of the family health services and the clinical questions and complaints put to him. The Bill will provide for that. It is an important step forward in ensuring that the health service respects its obligation to listen to its patients and to their complaints and to learn from them. It will ensure that the health service treats its patients as human beings as well as as patients.

The other Bill for which I am directly responsible is the Community Care (Direct Payments) Bill, which was introduced in the other place yesterday. It will give local authorities the power to pay cash to certain people entitled to community care services—that is, cash in lieu of

services—so that individual recipients will be able to take the cash and buy their community care in the way that they choose, rather than having to accept the direct provision from a local authority. The disabled groups have pressed for that change for a long time. It is ironic that one of the most ardent supporters of the proposal has been the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Howarth). I look forward to his endorsement of at least that aspect of the Gracious Speech.

Mr. Tom Clarke: Will the right hon. Gentleman confirm or deny the policy of his predecessor, the right hon. Member for South-West Surrey (Mrs. Bottomley), that direct payments should apply only to people under the age of 65 and should be very limited? What do regulations 3, 4 and 5 actually mean? How widespread is the Government's approach?

Mr. Dorrell: The Government's approach has avowedly been to welcome the principle, but not to introduce it for all beneficiaries of community care at the first stage. Instead, we want to focus on specific groups so that we can test the system and ensure that it is well proven before it is implemented generally. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke) seems perturbed by that. The Opposition regularly tell us that new ideas should be tested so that we can find out whether they work before they are made available to everybody. We are taking the Opposition's advice in this case. We accept the direct payment principle and we will introduce it incrementally, starting with defined groups, so that we can determine whether it works.

Both the Bills are modest, but they are important developments in, and underline the Government's commitment to, public services, and in particular the NHS. It is a matter of public record that, since 1979, the Government have put huge additional resources into the NHS. There has also been a huge increase in the number of patients that it treats. Perhaps most important of all, certainly in patients' perception of the NHS, is the dramatic broadening of the range of treatments available. I take no political credit for that. It is the result of medical science developing. Medicine can now treat a broader range of conditions more successfully than it could in 1979. Medical developments have been made available to NHS patients successfully over the past 16 years; a broader range of treatment is available. Furthermore, there are higher-class buildings and facilities in which treatments are made available. We have seen a dramatic development of the NHS over the past 16 years.

Sir Sydney Chapman (Chipping Barnet): Is my right hon. Friend aware that the outturn expenditure on the NHS this year shows that we are now spending £30,000 million a year more on the service than was spent upon it when the Government came to power 16 years ago? Is that fact not a matter for commendation rather than condemnation?

Mr. Dorrell: I could not agree more with my hon. Friend. The huge increase in resources that has been devoted to the NHS is widely welcomed by many people, not all of whom are the Government's political sympathisers. The real-terms growth of the money available to the NHS this year compared with 1979 is about 70 per cent. It has grown by nearly three quarters in real terms since the Government came to power. That reflects a commitment to growth in terms of the number of patients treated and in the range of treatments available as well as to improvement in the quality of the conditions in which treatments are made available. That is a matter of public record.

As I was saying earlier in answer to the hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing), there is no distinction between the Front Benches about the vital importance to the people of ensuring that we maintain a system of health care that allows the benefits of medical science to be made available to the patients of the health service on the basis of their clinical needs, not of their ability to pay. Unfortunately, Opposition Members are making repeated attempts—the hon. Member for Peckham is involved, as was her predecessor—to create distinctions where there is none. There are plenty of other distinctions but on the principle or commitment, to which I have referred, there is no distinction.

Mr. Stephen Timms (Newham, North-East): I am pleased that the Secretary of State is talking about resources within the health service. I want to ask him about the allocation of resources within the service. He will know that his predecessor introduced a new capitation formula for distributing resources between district health authorities. It was based on research undertaken by York university, which carried the recommendation that resources should be focused on the most disadvantaged areas. Is the right hon. Gentleman aware of the effect of that formula on the East London and the City health authority, which has by far the greatest concentration of deprivation in the United Kingdom? In fact, it loses £23 million under the new formula whereas other much less disadvantaged areas gain under it. Will he review the outcome? Perhaps he will comment upon it this morning.

Mr. Dorrell: The formula was reviewed on the Government's authority using the independent advice of York university. To pick up the hon. Gentleman's phrase, it was not York university that recommended that we should target resources on areas where needs are greatest. That was the design criterion. That was the question that we put to York university. We said, "We want to target health resources at the areas where need is greatest. You tell us how to construct a formula that measures health need in such a way as to allow us to deliver our policy objective"—that is the Government's policy objective, not that of York university—"to ensure that health resources are targeted at need."

That is the central purpose of the health service. It has to apply that policy at every level, starting from the top, in allocating resources through the weighted capitation formula. The hon. Gentleman is picking up, as it were, the formula produced by York university and saying that he disagrees with the professors at York in their answer to the question that we asked of them.

Mr. Spearing: The result, not the answer.

Mr. Dorrell: Well, the result or the answer. I accept the hon. Gentleman's amendment. The hon. Member for Newham, North-East (Mr. Timms) disagrees with the result rather than the answer that York university offered. The hon. Member for Newham, South accepts that we asked the right question but he does not like York's answer. Perhaps that is something that he had better take up with the university.

Mr. Timms: I am not disagreeing with the York university outcome. Instead, I am disagreeing with the

[Mr. Timms]

way in which the Government have interpreted and modified the results of the university's research to produce figures that are diametrically opposed to what York university recommended. It is the way in which the Government have implemented the research that has been at fault.

Mr. Dorrell: With great respect, that is not true. The weighted capitation formula that has been introduced by the Government is based squarely on the advice of York university. We asked the university a specific question and it gave us a specific answer. That is the answer that we have implemented.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): There is no doubt that the health service has received substantially more resources since 1979. Will the Secretary of State put on record how much he believes the health service has received in additional resources bearing in mind the amount that is needed to keep pace with inflation in the health service, given the greater number of elderly people who are using the service and the greater cost of the high technology that the service uses? What is the real-terms comparative cost compared with NHS inflation over the period since 1979?

Mr. Dorrell: I have never understood that argument. Inflation is not specific to any individual part of the economy. Inflation means a rise in the general level of prices. We cannot have a general level of prices in different parts of the economy. The argument that there is a specific cost increase in different parts of the economy that is faster than the increase in other parts would be more persuasive if I could find any part of the economy where it was said that costs had been increasing more slowly than in the economy in general.

The reality is that we do not collect NHS pounds, education pounds or defence pounds in taxation. The reality is that we collect pounds. The extra resources that have been devoted to the health service have been paid for through taxation. The increased moneys made available to the health service reflect more than 1 per cent. of the gross national income increase available to the health service since 1979. The argument is not advanced by trying to invent a specific NHS currency. The currency in which people pay taxes is pounds sterling. We have provided much more of that resource to the health service over the past 16 years.

Sir Sydney Chapman: Perhaps the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) will be reassured when I say that, since 1979, the amount of money that we have spent on the health service, as measured by a percentage of gross domestic product, has increased from 4.7 to 6 per cent. That is a considerable and significant increase.

Mr. Dorrell: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. That is the 1 per cent. plus to which I was referring.

The hon. Member for Peckham has been trying to open up a distinction between the Conservative and Labour parties over the past few days, and most recently during a couple of interviews that we both gave to BBC radio this morning. She is working herself up into a substantial lather over an argument that she might care to reflect upon before she takes it too much further. The guts of her argument amount to this: 40 health authorities use NHS resources in a way that reflects their local health priorities. That is the charge that she is levelling. She is saying that we are using resources in a way that reflects priorities. If that is the charge, I ask that the other 60 authorities—there are 100 health authorities in the NHS—be taken into account as well.

It would be a scandal if the health service used resources in a way that did not reflect health priorities. If we responded to the hon. Lady's argument and spent money independently of health priorities, my permanent secretary would properly be before the Public Accounts Committee for abuse and waste of public funds. Of course it is true that those 40 health authorities, and the other 60 as well, use public money in a way that reflects their priorities. That is a charge to which we plead guilty.

Ms Harman: The charge that we are making today and will continue to make is that the NHS is now rationing. If someone needs those treatments but in their area it has been rationed out, that means that he cannot get it on the NHS. He have to go private. Rationing is sweeping through the NHS today, and the Minister is responsible for that.

Mr. Dorrell: The problem with that argument is a minor matter of fact. If one goes and talks to the private operators who offer elective surgery services in competition with the health services, what they actually tell us is not that more and more people are leaving to go private, as the hon. Lady says, but that the service that is available from the NHS on elective surgery has improved so much since the introduction of the patients charter, and the reduction of waiting times, that fewer of them are going into private care, not more. The hon. Lady is simply tripped up by the facts that she uses in support of her argument. She is simply plain wrong.

We come back to the argument whether we should use resources in the health service in a way that reflects priorities. That is not, I should have thought, a revolutionary concept, but let me quote to the hon. Lady a sentence that she might find of interest:

> "There is always likely to be a gap between the services which are provided and the demands made upon them. Difficult choices have to be made to decide how far particular demands should be met."

Those are not my words. They are not the words of somebody who has been engaged in some lurch to the right—I imagine that the hon. Member for Peckham would probably not accept that description of herself. They are the words of Mrs. Barbara Castle, as she then was, as Labour Health Secretary in 1976. In that year, she published a document headed "Priorities for Health and Personal Social Services in England". It was an explicit document, which set out to target—

Mr. Tom Clarke: Is that the best that the hon. Gentleman can do—20 years ago?

Mr. Dorrell: Indeed. I have to go back quite a long way to find any quote from any Labour spokesman in office, I am pleased to say. It seems to me to be relevant that Lady Castle—who is not normally regarded as a signed-up supporter of my right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) in every argument that he pursues—as Health Secretary published a document explicitly intended to focus the minds of health service managers on the need to assess their priorities and target

their resources on the delivery of those priorities. The attempt of the hon. Member for Peckham to stir up this argument as some new scandal is one of the silliest arguments that I have heard in a long time. As an editorial in *The Guardian* made clear on this subject a fortnight ago, it is an approach to the management of the health service, which has been there not merely as a matter of fact but as the duty of health service managers since 4 July 1948. The moment one spends taxpayers' money, one has an obligation to target it on resources. So to seek to open up that argument, frankly, is silly.

Much more serious is the question to the hon. Lady over the extent to which she shares the developing consensus on what should happen in the national health service, because one of the most interesting documents recently about the health service was published by the hon. Lady's predecessor, in June this year, entitled "Renewing the NHS: Labour's Agenda for a Healthier Britain". It was the considered and much fought-over text published by the right hon. Member—

Ms Harman: It was not fought over.

Mr. Dorrell: The hon. Lady says that it was not fought over, but there are some passages in it in which one can almost feel the presence of the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair), the Leader of the Opposition, leaning over the shoulder of the right hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett), dictating specific text. Nobody will persuade me that it was all the script of one hand. One can see the joins.

Let us go on to look at precisely what is said about the fierce arguments that the right hon. Lady and I used to have when we both previously held the health portfolio. In the run-up to the previous election, the Government introduced a series of reforms. The key reform in that process was the separation of purchasing from provision and the giving to purchasers of health care a choice as to which health provider should meet specific needs for their local population. That reform meant three things: first, calling NHS hospitals to account, establishing an independent accountability mechanism; secondly, giving purchasers a choice about where the health need of a particular area was to be met; and thirdly, because the purchasers had a choice, it meant a degree of rivalry, of friendly competition between the providers of health care. That was the fundamental change that we introduced in 1991.

At that time, the hon. Lady's boss, the present shadow Foreign Secretary, described that reform as "a monumental irrelevance".

Ms Harman: Hear, hear.

Mr. Dorrell: The hon. Lady has to be careful. She needs to read a more up-to-date version of the Labour party text, because this document, which is more up to date than the "monumental irrelevance" text, says—

Mr. Tom Clarke: This is supposed to be a debate on the Queen's Speech.

Mr. Dorrell: This is the Queen's Speech.

The question that the Labour party must face is how it would change the policies that we are pursuing.

The text on separation of purchasing and provision is now this:

> "We believe there should be a separation in the planning and delivery of health care. We want health authorities to commission care, but we do not want them to run hospitals on a day to day basis."

Is that now the policy of the Opposition, or is it not? The hon. Lady appeared to reject it.

Ms Harman: It was then.

Mr. Dorrell: It certainly was not.

Ms Harman: It certainly was.

Mr. Dorrell: The introduction of a split between purchase and provision was the reform over which the hon. Lady fought most vigorously because she said, quite rightly, that that was what created the internal market.

Ms Harman: The right hon. Gentleman is completely misquoting what we said. What we are objecting to is the internal market, with its transaction costs and unfairness. It was always the case before the internal market was introduced that there was freedom of referral and of choice. The internal market restricted that. Before the Government's NHS reforms were brought into place, my hon. Friend the Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) put forward the proposal that we should have a separate planning function and local devolved management, but what we never agreed with then, what we warned against then and profoundly disagree with now is the unfairness and cost of the internal market.

Mr. Dorrell: Excellent. The hon. Lady is at least on to the key point. Of course it is true that if one separates purchase from provision and gives purchasers a choice— *[Interruption.]* Did the hon. Lady say that there should be no choice?

Ms Harman: What I said is that GPs always had a choice. The internal market prevents the choice that was always available for GPs to refer their patients where they thought that they could best be treated. They always had that choice. Indeed, the resources followed the patient. The introduction of the internal market means that the patient has to go where the contracts are placed, and choice is restricted. It was because we are in favour of choice and clinical freedom of referral that we so objected then to the internal market and so object to it now.

Mr. Dorrell: The hon. Lady is completely missing the point, or is eliding two issues. She talks about choice in the referral by GPs. What she does not talk about is the choice of the health authorities as the separate planners, commissioners, purchasers—whichever word one wants to use—of health care. The key question is whether the health authorities have a choice. In terms of creating accountability within the health service, the question is whether health authorities have a choice as to which hospital or provider meets the needs of a particular population. The key change is to introduce a choice for the health authorities between different providers in order that they can compare the service between different providers and create the incentive for the providers to improve their care.

Mr. Spearing *rose—*

Mr. Dorrell: No, I am going to finish this point.

[Mr. Dorrell]

That was the key reform in 1991 which the Labour party opposed. It now says that it accepts—indeed, endorses—the separation of purchase and provision. It says something else as well. This is even more important, because it is the fundamental discipline that underlies what the hon. Lady and many others call the internal market.

The same Labour party document goes on to say:

"Health authorities will have agreements with different local health services, and will have choice as to where to place them to suit patient needs."

If health authorities are to be given choices in regard to where they place what they call health-care agreements and we call contracts—I accept the amendment—it is clear that Labour has accepted the fundamental change, which was introduced in 1991, and which the present shadow Foreign Secretary described then as a monumental irrelevance.

Mr. Spearing: We are coming to the nub of an important issue. Of course there is a choice, but surely it is a choice not just of provider but of price. The Secretary of State is requiring contractors to compete in terms of price, but I defy anyone to claim the ability to estimate the cost of the commodity involved. It is not like the production of a specific service or mechanical function. Surely the contractors will reduce the price as far as they can to secure the contract—which means that the service to the patient and the way in which it is delivered will suffer desperately. Choice involves price and competition; that is why we object to it.

Mr. Dorrell: The idea that a purchaser or planner who can choose where he places a contract or agreement to meet a local health need should be debarred from considering price or value for money is an extraordinary proposition. Most people would find it difficult to accept the implication of the hon. Gentleman's remarks.

The fact is that the Labour party now accepts the key reform that was introduced in 1991. We then encounter a problem. The Labour party also accepts an important principle to which the Government are deeply committed, and which is essential if we are to improve the quality of health care: the strengthening of the primary health care system.

Again, there is no difficulty in regard to objectives. We all agree that we deliver a better-quality, better-value service to patients if a broader range of services is available through the primary health care system, and if the GP plays an active role in the commissioning of secondary care for his patients and the opportunity to act as advocate for them. The disagreement is over how such a service can be delivered. The Government introduced the fundholding scheme as a means of achieving that shared objective—but how would Labour react to a scheme that was accurately focused on the delivery of objectives on which we all agree: the enhancement of primary care, and the empowerment of the GP as commissioner and advocate on behalf of his or her patients?

The first line of defence came from the hon. Member for Peckham, in her previous incarnation. On 15 March 1990, she said:

"There is no support . . . for the concept of fund-holding".—[*Official Report*, 15 March 1990; Vol.169, c.687.]

So far, just over 50 per cent. of GPs support fundholding. The hon. Lady was clearly wrong about that, and has been proved wrong. The point was put to her with some force in a recent television interview by Andrew Rawnsley, who said:

"The problem is that a lot of GPs rather like fundholding. They think they are better placed to make these decisions than you sitting up in Whitehall."

The hon. Lady responded:

"Well, let's be quite clear about this, Andrew. GP fundholding was not an idea of doctors; it was imposed on doctors."

That was said not in 1990, but within the last few weeks.

Andrew Rawnsley—not me—said:

"Well, the majority have now applied for it. It seems to be appealing to them."

I think that, in that exchange, Mr. Rawnsley won. *[Interruption.]* I shall go on, although I do not think that the House will want to hear the whole interview.

"Let me just finish my sentence",

said the hon. Lady.

"They've warmed to it",

said Mr. Rawnsley, quite rightly. The hon. Lady then said:

"Let me finish. They have not warmed to it; they were wholly opposed to it."

Perhaps the hon. Lady would like to explain why, if they were wholly opposed to it—*[Interruption.]* How much more does the hon. Lady want me to read out? I assure her that I shall return to that interview: there is plenty more in it.

The hon. Lady argued that GP fundholders do not like fundholding. In fact, 50 per cent. of GPs have voluntarily applied to become fundholders. The hon. Lady has some difficulty—*[Interruption.]* No doubt she will be able to return to that interview later.

Labour then decided that, as it clearly could not win the argument by pointing to GPs' own actions, it had better do a bit of research. The problem is that every time we do some research Labour does not like the answers, and calls for more and more research. Let me cite a few bits of research on GP fundholding that should at least allow the hon. Lady to accept that GPs are not biased against the idea.

Julian Legrand, founder of the Socialist Health Society, says:

"Perhaps the biggest success story of the reforms, fundholding is now widely thought to be at the cutting edge of the reforms."

There is one biased researcher who has formed an opinion that the Labour party does not like.

Then there is Professor Abel Smith, former adviser to Mrs. Barbara Castle. Mrs. Castle keeps recurring. Hers was a rather more robust and direct approach—a willingness to think through the issues—than that of today's Labour party. Her former researcher states:

"There is no overwhelming evidence that fundholders are able to get a better deal for their patients from hospitals. Fundholding represents a major transfer of power from specialists to GPs."

Then there is the predecessor of the hon. Member for Peckham—who, presumably, cannot be dismissed as being biased in favour of the Government. When the right

hon. Member for Derby, South went to the fundholders' conference recently—no doubt adopting her most appealing tones—she said:

"We want genuinely to pay tribute to the role that you as fundholders have played in kick-starting and developing innovative practice in both primary care and the acute sector."

Whether we examine the views of independent researchers or those of a former Opposition spokesman, the evidence repeatedly demonstrates that fundholders are in a uniquely powerful position to improve the quality of care. The hon. Lady asked, "What about the patients of doctors who are not fundholders?" GP commissioners—who are regularly cited as an alternative by the Labour party—acknowledge that they are exercising freedoms and exploiting ideas that the fundholders were the first to develop.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order. I apologise for interrupting the Secretary of State, but it is not appropriate for messages to be passed between the Chamber and any member of the public.

Mr. Dorrell: There are two cases for fundholding. First, it empowers GPs to improve the care available to their patients; secondly, once they have established an improvement that benefits their patients, other NHS GPs quite properly then look to their arrangements to ensure that the same service is available to their patients.

That leaves Labour with a problem. Labour Members say that they are committed to improving the quality of primary care, but they do not like the most powerful means that we have devised to deliver precisely that objective. At least the right hon. Member for Derby, South was clear: she said that she would abolish fundholding. She was sometimes a bit vague about exactly when she would abolish it, but it was clear that that was the commitment for as long as she remained the Opposition spokesman.

Let us return to the interview with Mr. Rawnsley. The hon. Member for Peckham has produced a different approach: Labour is no longer committed to abolishing fundholding. Mr. Andrew Rawnsley said:

"You are clearly against it so you will scrap GP funds."

The hon. Lady replied:

"No. What we are saying is we will replace it."

Therefore, there has been a change of policy. Labour will not abandon or abolish it, it will replace it. That is an interesting policy development and I look forward to hearing it explored by the hon. Lady in her policy speeches. That brings me to another point.

Mr. Timms: I should like to ask the Minister about fundholding. Will he join me in commending the efforts of those doctors who have come together to form multi-funds, quite explicitly to avoid the most damaging effects on their patients of individual practice fundholding?

Mr. Dorrell: I have made it clear that Government policy has never been that every GP in the health service should become a fundholder. When one speaks to GPs who use other forms of commissioning, it is clear that the great majority of them recognise that they get a hearing from health authorities and are able to engage more directly than ever before in the health service in calling secondary care to account because fundholding has changed the terms of trade and the nature of the relationship between primary and secondary care. All GPs benefit from that. To abandon fundholding would be to take the relationship back to what it used to be when it was dominated by the acute sector and primary care benefited from a great deal of rhetoric but was never given the power to deliver the commitments that were given by politicians.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): Does the Minister accept that he has created a two-tier system in which one group of doctors is able to bargain on the basis of having a great deal of cash and the other group, if it is lucky, might be able to say that its patients are getting a different level of care. The Minister may think that that is a brilliant service but I think that it is abominable.

Mr. Dorrell: The hon. Lady should listen to some of the people who are not fundholders. They argue that they do not wish to become fundholders but recognise that they are able to do what they do because of fundholding. How will the hon. Lady explain to those doctors that relationships in the health service will go back to what they were before fundholding when there was a great deal of good will and many speeches about the importance of primary care but nothing happened because the system was dominated by the acute sector?

The hon. Member for Peckham used to enjoy hinting, when she was formerly a health spokesman, that Labour would spend more on health. Since that time, she has been shadow Chief Secretary and it was one of my more enjoyable experiences during my time in the Treasury to listen to the hon. Lady arguing a very un-Chief Secretary-like case. She must have been the only holder of that portfolio ever to argue for more and more spending. The normal and conventional duty of a Chief Secretary is to impose some kind of restraint on extra spending commitments.

Ms Harman: That is fantasy.

Mr. Dorrell: It is not fantasy. The hon. Lady should look at the speech. In it she made a number of specific commitments to extra spending: it was an extremely expensive speech. The reality is that matters have become somewhat tighter since she left that post. They are probably not tight enough, but certainly tighter, and particularly in the health service. The Leader of the Opposition not only dictated the key sentences in the document from which I have quoted but made some statements on television which the hon. Lady would find quite uncomfortable. In "The Money Programme" on 24 September the right hon. Gentleman was specifically asked about extra spending on the health service. Peter Jay asked:

"It is your strategy, I think, that people are interested in. You will yourself have to increase taxes, will you not, in order to finance the increased spending programmes which Labour is talking about?"

The Leader of the Opposition replied:

"Well, you don't need necessarily to increase spending at all."

He did not speak about taxes, and he went on:

"In many of the areas we are talking about, for example, in the health service, there is money being wasted."

In response to a question about extra spending, the right hon. Gentleman was specifically making it clear that he regards extra money for the health service as an extremely low priority and was not prepared even to commit himself

[Mr. Dorrell]

to any increased spending. That is a less generous commitment to the health service than that of the Government, because we are committed to a year-by-year increase in the real resources that are made available to the national health service. That increase has averaged 3 per cent. per annum in real terms since 1979.

I acknowledge that there is no difference between the parties on the commitment to the delivery of a high-quality, universal health care system. The real division is between Conservatives, who are prepared to take the necessary steps to deliver it, and Labour, which is prepared simply to wish for it without facing any of the real decisions. The question that the House and the country must face if we want to deliver a high-quality health service is how to sustain and deliver it, given the background of rising expectations, the advances of modern medicine and all the other pressures.

If the hon. Lady is to be taken seriously in her new portfolio, she will have to address some key issues. She has to recognise, as her predecessor ultimately and rather begrudgingly did, that the traditional health service was undermanaged and that investment in managing the service was needed. Secondly, we have to ensure that managers in the health service are allowed to improve its efficiency. Labour's commitment to abandon market testing must be ditched. That commitment would cost Labour £130 million and it would deliver exactly the same patient services but more expensively.

The hon. Lady will have to consider her predecessor's affection for regional health authorities. It is extraordinary that, although the hon. Lady likes to make speeches about there being too many administrators, Labour opposed the abolition of regional health authorities. That means that Labour opposed a saving of £60 million during the passage of that legislation in the previous Session. The Opposition will have to look again at how they develop their policy on partnerships with the private sector. They will have to allow institutions to change because if the health service is to deliver an efficient, high-quality health care system next year or five or 10 years hence, Labour will have to face some hard decisions.

Labour must recognise the need to invest in research and development, and that is the easy bit—extra money to understand what is effective. When that knowledge has been developed, it has to be used to ensure that clinical practice changes and that clinically less effective treatments are not preferred. The hon. Lady will have to learn about those pressures and disciplines if she is to be taken seriously as a party spokesman who is interested in and committed to the future of the NHS.

The Government have led the way at every stage in the process of health politics. I do not challenge Labour's general, genial good will towards the NHS. The Opposition certainly offer ineffectual support and make speeches about what a wonderful institution it is, but when the chips are down, they offer no real commitment to the NHS because commitment does not mean soundbites: it means thinking through the issues, understanding them and producing solutions. It means fighting against the vested interests that often oppose solutions and taking difficult decisions.

Ms Harman: Who are they?

Mr. Dorrell: One of them consists of the people who opposed market testing. Nurses are a great vested interest. I look forward to seeing the hon. Lady taking to the barricades and fighting the vested interests of nurses—if that is what she thinks they are. She will have to learn to resist the soundbite and prefer substance if she wants to be taken seriously as someone who is committed to the future of the NHS. Labour offers only a feeble echo of what the Government have decided to do. It is a late echo, a late endorsement of what has been shown to work. That is the true divide between the parties. Labour Members are not participants in the argument, but dilettante bystanders until the solutions have been shown to work. Until we hear something of substance from the Labour party about how the health service can face the next decade's challenges, it will be viewed by all true friends of the national health service with contempt.

10.29 am

Ms Harriet Harman (Peckham): The Secretary of State for Health is clearly practising for Opposition. He sounded not like the Secretary of State, but the shadow Secretary of State. In his wholly defensive speech, which lasted for nearly 55 minutes, he spent most of his time attacking Labour's plans for the national health service and hardly any time defending his Government's NHS record, let alone putting forward how they will solve the problems that they have created in the NHS. All he can do, like the other Secretaries of State, is attack Labour instead of getting on with the business of good government. That is exactly what we have seen this morning.

The Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Peter Lilley): The hon. Lady is reading from a prepared speech.

Ms Harman: I wrote those words on hearing the speech of the Secretary of State for Health. I could not possibly have anticipated how defensive he would be.

Labour has made health the subject of this debate on the Gracious Speech because it has a duty to expose the Conservatives' hidden agenda. The two-tier health service is with us today and the privatised NHS will be with us tomorrow: that is the sole aim of Tory health policy. The British people are proud of the NHS. They believe in a health service that is free at the point of need. With good reason, they do not trust the Tories to sustain and support that health service.

I shall set out what lies behind the Tories's health policy, how, under a Tory party that has lurched to the right, we are clearly on the road to a privatised NHS and what we will do to stop that process.

Of course I would not have expected the Secretary of State to deal with the Tory health agenda today because it is a hidden agenda. The Tories do not want this debate now or in future. The former Tory party deputy chairman, John Maples, spelt it out clearly and gave the game away. In his notorious Maples memorandum, he said that, for the Tories

"the best coverage for the next 12 months would be zero media coverage on the national health service."

He clearly recognised that any news on the NHS was bad news for the Tories.

Mr. Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): Far from zero publicity on the health service, is it not a fact that people up and down the country are recognising the real crisis in the health service? I look forward to handing to my hon.

Friend an unprecedented edition of the local newspaper in south-west Wales, the *Evening Post*, entitled: "Your Health Service In Crisis: Sick and Tired", in which even that independent newspaper felt impelled to show to its already knowledgeable population what is happening locally and throughout the country.

Ms Harman: I shall carefully consider the information that I hope my hon. Friend will give me. Of course he is right. The British people will not allow the truth about the national health service to be swept under the carpet by this Government and nor will we.

Labour created the NHS and it is our duty to ensure that Tory Ministers do not succeed in destroying it.

Mr. Hartley Booth (Finchley): The hon. Lady refers to truth. As she is in favour of truth and open government, will she say what Labour Front-Bench Members receive from Unison?

Ms Harman: I am not dealing with that point in this speech. All the Registers of Members' Interests are properly complied with and, if the hon. Gentleman wants, he can look the information up in the Library.

Labour created the NHS and we will not allow distractions from the Tory Back Benches or hidden agendas from the Tory Front Benches to distract from that. The Tories' single-minded agenda, relentless but never admitted, is to push as many services out into the private sector and, at the same time, make the NHS work like the private sector. All that is done in the face of opposition from people who use the NHS and work in it, whose morale is at an all-time low.

Take the case of long-term nursing care. Close the long-stay wards and people must go into the private sector. They used to receive treatment free and now they have to pay. Take the case of dentistry. First, charges were pushed up so high that people could hardly tell the difference between NHS and private dentistry; then fewer and fewer dentists did NHS work, so more and more people ended up going private.

Mr. Lilley: The hon. Lady just told the House that information about the amount of money that Front-Bench Members receive from Unison was in the Register of Members' Interests. I have it before me and that information is not there. Perhaps she would inform the House just how much they do receive.

Ms Harman: The House voted for a change in the procedure for declaration of interests. We propelled that change, which the Tories tried to prevent. It is now through and the information will all be placed in the Register of Members' Interests.

Mr. Dorrell *rose—*

Ms Harman: No, I will not give way on that point. I have made it clear. The Secretary of State for Health did not want to discuss what is going on in the national health service. All he wants to do is smear Labour and attack what we are trying to do. He has failed to deal with the real question of what is going on in the NHS, so I and my colleagues will do that in this debate and ignore Tory Members' disruptions.

Mr. Dorrell: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Ms Harman: No. I have made it clear. The Government are not prepared to talk about what is going on in the national health service and are resorting to tactics of distracting and cutting across in this debate. Their agenda is clear and I will not give way on that basis. I shall continue my speech because I am talking about what the British people are concerned about, which is the destruction of the NHS by this Conservative Government.

Mr. Piers Merchant (Beckenham): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Will you clarify a point? I was under the impression that hon. Members should declare an interest if they are to make a speech on a subject. As an interest is clearly involved here and no declaration has been made, will you guide us as to whether that is correct?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: It is entirely up to each hon. Member to decide whether they have an interest to declare: it is not for the occupant of the Chair to rule on that. Before we go any further down this route, I say to hon. Members that, in the Table Office, there is a published document, which I have before me, which outlines the new rules specifically.

Ms Harman: It is absolutely clear that the Conservatives' interest is in covering up their destruction of the national health service and the effect that it is having on patients. I have mentioned dentistry. Charges were pushed up so high that people could hardly tell whether they were receiving NHS or private dentistry. Then fewer and fewer dentists did NHS work so more and more patients went private. There are 2.3 million fewer people on NHS dentist lists than there were 18 months ago: 2.3 million more people have to pay because they cannot receive NHS treatment. The Tories can deny that it is privatisation—indeed, they do—but the British people know that it is. They used to receive their dental treatment on the NHS; then they had to go private.

Mr. Dorrell: The numbers are the same.

Ms Harman: The Secretary of State has not read the answers to the parliamentary questions that I asked him. There are 2.3 million fewer people on NHS dentist lists than there were 18 months ago and, month by month, family health services authorities register an increase in people who apply to them for help in finding an NHS dentist.

The British people know that this is privatisation. They used to expect that, if they needed long-term nursing care, it would be provided on the NHS. Now it must be provided privately. A new engine of privatisation is being driven into the heart of the national health service: rationing. An increasing number of health authorities are chopping, bit by bit, the services available on the national health service. The Government pretend that it is not happening, but the evidence is absolutely clear.

It is clear from local health purchasing plans that treatment on the NHS is becoming a lottery: what one can get depends on where one lives. District by district, lists are emerging of what one cannot get on the national health service.

Mr. Dorrell: Will the hon. Lady give way on that point?

Ms Harman: I shall not give way to the Secretary of State. He failed to set out what the Government seek to do and simply attacked the Labour party. I shall not allow

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him to use my speech as a further opportunity to attack our plans. I am discussing what is actually going on in the national health service—

Mr. Dorrell: You are lying.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I heard the word "lying". That is not an acceptable word.

Mr. Dorrell: I apologise for the use of that word, Mr. Deputy Speaker, which I withdraw. But it makes me angry to hear people clearly misrepresenting what is going on in the health service. When patients go to the health service for treatment, the doctor's opinion determines what treatment they get.

Mr. Thomas McAvoy (Glasgow, Rutherglen): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The Secretary of State has apologised for saying, "You are lying". Is he then entitled to go on and make the false accusation that he made in the first place?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I must be the judge of that.

Ms Harman: It is no misrepresentation to say that what people can get depends on where they live. District by district, lists are emerging of what people cannot get on the national health service. Two years ago, only four local health authorities were rationing—excluding treatment from the NHS. Now, using the Blackwell Masters database, we have shown that 40 health authorities—a third of all authorities in the country—are rationing. It is no good the Conservatives objecting to the word "rationing", because that is what health authorities themselves call it.

One must be careful where one falls ill as this rationing sweeps through the national health service. Do not get the menopause in west Kent as no specialist menopause services will be provided there. Do not get brittle bones in Dorset as no more screening for osteoporosis will be provided there. Do not get infected wisdom teeth in Hertfordshire or Kingston and Richmond. Do not get a glue ear in the Isle of Wight or the other authorities that have declared themselves to be grommet-free zones. Do not have a stroke in Buckingham as savings in stroke management are being sought in that area. Do not have difficulty having a baby in the former Health Secretary's constituency of South-West Surrey, as no NHS fertility treatment will be provided there. However, west Kent seems to be pursuing a policy to increase the birth rate: no block contracts for male or female sterilisation; and no contracts for abortion.

Those excluded treatments are the thin end of the wedge. Yesterday it was grommets and fertility treatment; today it is varicose veins and osteoporosis screening; tomorrow, it will be hernias and hip replacements. Concern about rationing is mounting in the medical profession. Dr. Sandy Macara, chairman of the BMA, said in a speech this week:

> "I deeply regret the passive endorsement of the perceived inevitability of rationing. It is tantamount to telling our paymasters that we do not require more adequate resources, that we will get together to agree which of our patients' needs will not be met, that we will, in Shakespeare's words, 'bend with the remover to remove'."

The Secretary of State must come clean. He has just had an opportunity to do so but he failed to take it. The Government pretend that they know nothing about this. I asked the Secretary of State to place copies of all the health authorities' and commissions' purchasing plans in the Library and the Minister answered that copies of the plans were not available centrally. I asked the Secretary of State to specify where some treatments were not available on the NHS and his Minister replied that the information was not available. He did not say that it was not happening or admit that it was happening, but simply said that the Government did not know. Well, the Labour party does know, and we are telling the country today that rationing is sweeping through the national health service.

I asked the Secretary of State for Health what plans he had to establish a national database that lists by health authority which treatments are available on the NHS and which are excluded and available only privately. The answer from his Minister was no, they had no such plans. That is not knowing on purpose—a feigned, calculating ignorance—so that the Secretary of State can pretend that the effect at local level of the decisions that he has taken nationally will be blamed on local health authorities but not on him. He must admit what is going on and, unless he is prepared to condemn the wholesale removal by managers' edict of treatments from the NHS, it will be clear that he secretly endorses it.

For all his denials in those parliamentary answers, we know that the Secretary of State is up to his neck in it. Of course he knows what is going on. How could I possibly believe the answers to those parliamentary questions saying that the Government do not collect the information centrally? They must collect it, for they drive it. They are driving rationing because it leads to privatisation. If people cannot get what they need on the NHS, they must either go without treatment or go private. Private health care is booming, contrary to what the Secretary of State said, and rationing is set to give it another boost.

The private sector is encroaching on the NHS. The Secretary of State says that the NHS needs fewer hospital beds. He derides our complaint about hospital beds, saying that NHS hospital beds are an old-fashioned issue for discussion. Let us look at what is happening. There are 28 per cent. fewer NHS acute hospital beds than there were 15 years ago, but there are 68 per cent. more private beds than there were 15 years ago. The Secretary of State said that fewer beds are a sign of improvement in the NHS. Can it be that more beds are a sign of improvement in the private sector?

It is the same story with hospitals. There are 28 per cent. fewer NHS hospitals but 47 per cent. more private hospitals than there were 15 years ago. That shows the relentless advance of privatisation. People fear and dread the privatisation of health care because they know what it means: unfairness and a massive increase in costs. People fear and dread the commercialisation of the NHS because they know what it means: fewer nurses and more managers.

The Tory alibi for slicing acute services out of the NHS is that we cannot afford it. They say that the demand for health care is infinite, there is a bottomless pit and we simply cannot do it. They grossly overstate the growth in demand for health care in order to use it cynically as an excuse to promote the argument that more and more services must go into the private sector. With an ageing population and new techniques there is obviously an

increasing demand, but demand for health care is not infinite. It is more expensive as well as more unfair to push that demand out of the NHS and into the private sector. The evidence from around the world is overwhelming: private health care is more costly and more unfair.

Competition in health care does not reduce costs, it increases them. In the United States, where all health care is privately delivered and there is a well-developed private health care market, total expenditure on health is equivalent to nearly 16 per cent. of gross domestic product. In this country, with the NHS, total spending on health is under 7 per cent. of GDP.

No doubt, the Government will label our complaints about rationing as scaremongering. [HON. MEMBERS: "Yes."] Conservative Members say yes. They accused us of scaremongering when we warned that the consequences of an internal market would be huge increases in the cost of administration, but we were right. Every year, an extra £1.5 billion is spent on administration, on managers and accountants.

There has been some discussion about extra resources, but look where they are going. In 1986, there were 500 general and senior managers in the NHS. In 1993, there were 20,000—an increase of nearly 4,000 per cent. Over the same period, the number of nurses and midwives in the NHS dropped by 9 per cent. We want more resources in patient care and fewer resources for managers and accountants.

The result of the Government's actions is that there are more people to count the cost of treatment, and fewer people to provide the treatment. They have put cost before care and profit before patients.

The Secretary of State has recently said that he is a "bureau-sceptic". He is criticising the administration that he has created. If I was a health service manager, I would think it was pretty cheap for the Government to create so much bureaucracy and then attack it. But that is their style. The Secretary of State now says that he is a "bureau-septic" and he attacks all the managers. That is a surprise to those of us who remember what he said at the time of the NHS reforms, when he was a junior Health Minister. I know what he said then because I read the debates last night. He was what I can only describe as a "bureau-fanatic". In a debate in March 1991, he extolled the virtues of more and more management in the NHS. "Health care management" he enthused

"is good quality health care for the patient"

—it is hard to see how that is the case—

"and good value for money for the taxpayer. That is what the investment in management is designed to achieve".

The Government went on to invest £1.5 billion extra. Does the Secretary of State think that that £1.5 billion extra provides good-quality health care for patients? Does he think that £1.5 billion extra spent every year on accountants and managers is good value for money for taxpayers? The patients do not. They would rather it was spent on the people providing the care.

The Secretary of State dealt with primary care services. We warned that giving control over their own funds to some GPs, but not to others, as my hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) mentioned, would mean that purchasing power, and not clinical need, dictated priorities for treatment. That was our accusation, and that is what is happening. The Government accused us then of scaremongering, but we were right.

In the Minister for Health's constituency, the Winchester and Eastleigh Health Care NHS trust and the North and Mid-Hampshire health commission announced that, because the commission had no further cash, the trust was not going to take any non-urgent cases from non-fundholding GPs until the end of the financial year in March 1996. Fundholding GPs on the local purchasing group, non-fundholding GPs, the trust and the commission are trying to club together to buy the hip replacement operations for the patients of non-fundholders who would lose out. They are trying at local level to make an unfair system fair. They are trying to make sense out of a senseless system. There is a two-tier waiting list, as we warned that there would be. Patients of fundholding GPs wait for no more than 10 months for hip replacements. Patients of other GPs wait for anything up to 18 months. Admission to hospital is based on purchasing power, not on clinical need.

We also warned that to close hospitals in London without improving primary and community care services would cause a crisis. We were accused of scaremongering, but we were right. Patients at King's College hospital spend up to 18 hours on trolleys in the accident and emergency department.

Let me tell the House what happened to my constituent, Mrs. Foster, who was rushed to the A and E department at King's at 8.40 pm on 3 October with a suspected heart attack. She was seen quickly by a doctor and put on a trolley in A and E. She waited for 19 hours on that trolley in a room with 10 other people on trolleys, including stab victims, one of whom died while she was waiting. Mrs. Foster asked for a bed pan, and she was given one—an hour later. She asked for a pillow and was given one—four hours later. She was finally moved to a bed in a ward at 3.40 on the following afternoon.

Let me make it absolutely clear that Mr. and Mrs. Foster have no complaints about the excellent staff, but they are unhappy to see a situation in which bed shortages mean that the staff cannot provide the services that they want to provide, and which patients need.

We warned that hospitals would compete instead of co-operating and that planning would give way to market forces. The Secretary of State mentioned that this morning, when he spoke about rivalry and friendly competition. Let me tell him how the internal market is working in practice.

The Government accused the Opposition of scaremongering when we said that hospitals would stop co-operating and would fight against each other. The House should note the example of Sue Snowdon, a consultant kidney specialist at Dulwich hospital. She has been told to take three months leave from her job rather than work her notice before she moves to her new job at St. George's hospital. Dulwich hospital is paying her to work in her garden, but not on its wards, because it fears that if she continued to treat her patients at Dulwich they would follow her to St. George's, and Dulwich would lose money.

We warned that the Government were privatising the NHS bit by bit, and we were right. We warned that they are making the NHS more like the private sector, and that

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is what they are doing. The market-testing of clinical services, which is now sweeping through the NHS, is taking that strategy forward.

The British people want two things from their health care services—excellent care and fairness. One cannot achieve fairness in a privatised, commercialised system. It is particularly important that the NHS gives equal access to everyone because of the health inequalities that mar our country, which the Secretary of State did not even mention. How long one lives and how good one's health remains is determined by one's income and social status—whether one is rich or poor. "The Health of the Nation" and numerous other reports have charted the gross social and economic inequalities of divided Britain, which lead to health inequalities.

It is vital that the Department of Health should take the lead in ensuring that other Departments and local government work together to end the inequalities that lead to the gap in people's relative health. It is also vital that the NHS is able to provide that equal access to health care; otherwise we will have an unequal NHS, and that will worsen rather than redress health inequality.

The Gracious Speech contains two specific health measures. We welcome the Bill to strengthen complaints procedures and look forward to studying its detail. I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke) would like to mention the important issue of direct payments for people with disabilities, should he manage to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

We also welcome the measure to empower the users of services, but we seek an assurance that that legislation will not contain any perverse incentive to compel users to buy purely from the private sector. We want the Bill to provide a genuine extension of choice, but for that to happen there must be a level playing field between public and private provision; otherwise choice will be extinguished as the public sector is simply driven out of the market.

We want genuine choice for users of community care, but we also want to ensure that those who receive such care are afforded proper protection against low-quality and substandard services. Now is the time for the Government to act on Labour's call for a proper system of regulation and inspection of the whole range of community care services, public and private, residential and domiciliary. Perhaps the proposed Bill will give them the opportunity to do so.

The Tories never had any mandate from the British people for their health reforms. Remember all their consultations on opting out hospitals? Those were a complete sham. The reforms have never won the support of the British people, and the NHS must be freed from crude Tory free-market dogma. Labour will take it forward to meet the new and great challenges of the next century.

We shall attack and redress health inequalities and improve primary care services, providing fair treatment for every patient and a say for every doctor in the services available to his or her patients. We shall develop services based on research and evaluation, and provide a fair framework of services and support for the growing number of elderly and disabled people. We shall restore the morale of those who work in the NHS by ensuring that they have a bigger say in how it is run. That is what the Gracious Speech and the Secretary of State's speech should have said, but they did not.

Comprehensive health care agreements will replace costly and bureaucratic annual contracts between hospitals and health authorities. Paperwork will be cut and the money put into the front line. The NHS is the most tangible evidence there is that we can achieve more together than we can achieve alone, privately trying to bribe our way through the system. We shall fight to defend the national health service from Tory attack, until we get into government and ensure its renewal.

11.1 am

Sir Rhodes Boyson (Brent, North): I welcome the opportunity to speak on the Gracious Speech, and I shall raise several topics, beginning with my concern about health and then moving on to education and other subjects.

The Queen's Speech has obviously already cheered up the economy. Yesterday we learnt that the annual rate of inflation had fallen by 0.7 per cent. to 3.2 per cent, and in October the budget surplus was £1.3 billion. The good news in the Queen's Speech is already showing in our economy.

I welcome the Secretary of State to his new post, and assure him that whatever differences I have or will have with him, I respect him considerably as a person of integrity and of foresight. Two factors affecting health concern me and many other London Members. First, the number of beds in London has been cut more than the number in the rest of the country, and the figures seem to bear that out. That is a general concern.

Secondly, I know that the situation at Edgware hospital concerns several of my hon. Friends, as well as myself. I refused to vote for the Government after the debate on the health service in London because I was worried, and still am, about Edgware hospital. The Secretary of State willingly met me, and other hon. Members, soon after his appointment, and we put our views to him. I expected then, and I still expect, something to be done about Edgware hospital.

I was thus rather surprised to read an article in the *Hendon Times* a couple of weeks ago—an article that reveals the value of local newspapers. According to the *Hendon Times*, in a short debate in another place Baroness Cumberlege said that

"He—

the Secretary of State—

"does not intend to revisit the decisions taken by previous Secretaries of State".

She also said that the Government had

"gone to great lengths to explain the compelling benefits for patients from the planned changes".

I was concerned about that, because I did not know that the debate had taken place—I probably should have read the House of Lords *Hansard*. If the Secretary of State does not intend to revisit the decisions taken by previous Secretaries of State, that is his privilege, but I shall most certainly revisit them, and so will the people in my area. Those decisions have not gone away, and cannot be dismissed in that way.

People may have gone to great lengths to explain the

"compelling benefits for patients from the planned changes",

but my people still do not believe them. They still believe that the Secretary of State is wrong, and that the decision on Edgware hospital—the single decision that concerns me most—was wrong too.

I shall not speak at length on the subject, because I want to speak about other subjects on which I can support the Government, but I must put on record the fact that I am still concerned about Edgware hospital, especially the cutting of the casualty department.

Other hon. Members will have their own views on the subject, but in my constituency the main difficulty is getting from one place to another. It can take 50 minutes to travel the step from the Edgware hospital to Northwick Park hospital on a Saturday afternoon, and a casualty could be dead before he got there. I do not know where the traffic surveillance is done, but that is one of the most difficult areas in London in which to move about.

I leave the matter there for now, although I trust that the Secretary of State understands that I am not leaving it on one side, because my people are so concerned about it. Obviously one does not expect everything to be granted, but one expects to be listened to in the House, and the people who live on the Edgware side of my constituency expect some concession.

As a London Member of Parliament I am concerned about several issues in London. I am a Lancastrian, but I have now lived half my life in London, and although my accent has not changed, my views on certain aspects of London have changed since I came down here. I saw London as a boy, and my father always referred to anybody south of Manchester as a "city slicker". I have noticed that most "city slickers" are as varied and as honourable as people in Blackpool. I cannot say more than that, because I cannot give a greater compliment. If I wake up in the next world and a green tram passes, I shall know that I am in heaven. If it does not, that will not be heaven. The Blackpool trams will be up there with the tower.

Several things concerning London worry me. I voted for the abolition of the Greater London council. [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh."] At that time I was right, but we now have probably the only capital in the world without an elected body to speak for it. *[Interruption.]* Some of my hon. Friends may disagree with what I say, and that is their right, but the difficulty is: how are we to speak for London these days? There is no London body, although various bodies have tried to take on the role.

I am worried about the traffic in London, and I was concerned that there was no reference to crossrail in the Gracious Speech. My people want crossrail, and so does the rest of the city. Over the next 10 years we need not only crossrail but two new tube lines in London, if the city is to remain, as I wish it to, one of the six great capitals of the world. I regret the fact that there was no mention of crossrail.

I have heard rumours that the Treasury does not favour crossrail, but I hope that I am wrong. Indeed, I may be wrong in all that I say on these subjects. I hope that the rumour that I have heard is not true. There will be great disappointment among business men, in the City and among the population of London if we do not continue with crossrail.

Another matter that worries me is the future of the painted hall at Greenwich. We were sea people: in my childhood I read mainly books about the sea and I joined the navy as a boy seaman at the beginning of my naval career. Our history on the sea is finer than that of any other country, and that record will continue. People who forget have no future. We must never forget that we were and still are a sea people. We have a great river running through London; it is one of the finest in the world.

I am therefore worried about what is happening at Greenwich. We have a marvellous maritime museum there, which is one of the best in the world. Everyone should visit the exhibitions held there, as I do from time to time. I hope that something can be done to preserve the painted hall and the rest of the buildings so that the public can view them.

I know that Greenwich university has taken an interest in the site, and I am concerned about the status of the profession of which I was a member before I entered the House: teaching. There is a crisis of confidence in teaching in this country; it does not involve simply money, but status. The site at Greenwich could be used as a staff college for headmasters. They could learn about the country's history if they had not been properly taught at school and the college could become a great institution to raise the status of the teaching profession. There is much talk at present about the maritime museum and Greenwich university. The painted hall would provide the ideal place for a staff college, where senior heads could meet other people within the profession and further their teaching techniques.

There are some educational issues on which I agree with the Government—I am sure that my hon. Friends will be delighted to hear that. I agree with them on grant-maintained schools and the assisted places scheme. Although the subject was not mentioned specifically in the Queen's Speech, the Prime Minister has mentioned the prospect of doubling the number of students on assisted places schemes and an increase in the number of grant-maintained schools, which have been highly successful.

All but one of the secondary schools in my constituency are grant maintained. I took no part in their decision to become grant maintained, but left the matter entirely to the parents of the pupils. They made the decision, sometimes against the wishes of trade unions. The parents were balloted and, as a result, the schools became grant maintained. All the schools have improved—I visited one, Preston Manor, on Tuesday. Grant-maintained schools have proved to be an excellent innovation in this country.

When I was a headmaster I said that I was responsible to the parents, not to the governing body. I also said that if in any year when I was head of the school, fewer people wanted to attend it than there were vacancies, I would resign. The pupils and parents know whether the school

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is working properly or not. It is far better for the parent body to be in charge of the school than the local education authority, which is basically concerned about numbers.

Grant-maintained schools have been highly successful. I very much regret that the Labour party's policy is not to keep them, but to take away their freedoms. If, as the Labour party has suggested, foundation schools are introduced and we see the return of local authority representatives, we shall have taken a step back. There is no doubt that parents in my constituency will not vote to end the system of grant-maintained schools. I do not think that the Labour party realises the difficulties that it will encounter over such votes. Almost 100 per cent. of the secondary schools in my area are grant maintained—about 12 primary schools in Brent are grant maintained. I cannot always say that Brent leads the world, but perhaps it does in this case.

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): Brent is not doing too badly now.

Sir Rhodes Boyson: I must not be diverted from my speech by my hon. Friend.

The Labour party is making a bad mistake by pretending that it will continue with grant-maintained schools while pursuing a policy of wiping out their independence. I pay tribute to Sir Robert Balchin, the chairman of the Grant-Maintained Schools Foundation.

The Prime Minister mentioned doubling the number of assisted places. The scheme has been very successful. I steered it through the House and used to argue with one Opposition Member about its introduction. Some 30,000 children now have places on that scheme. Those children come from some of the most deprived homes in the country and attend some of the finest schools. If that is not reverse discrimination—which I believe the Labour party once believed in—I do not know what is. It is a good scheme that takes children from poor homes and places them in some of the best schools in the country. There are five applications for every one of the 30,000 places on the assisted places scheme.

It is interesting that three out of five Labour voters in a MORI poll held last year wanted the assisted places scheme to continue. I am not here to help the Labour party win the next general election. If it continues with its current policies, it will be damaged. I do not want it to win the next election, but I do not want to see it damaged. The next general election will be fought on such issues. As three out of five Labour voters want the assisted places scheme to continue, unless Labour wants to lose the general election it would be remiss to continue with its present policies. Perhaps it wants to lose the general election because it has become so used to being in opposition that it wants to remain there. There are certain advantages in doing so: it can grumble about everything without taking responsibility for anything.

The sort of people who take advantage of the scheme are bus drivers, nurses, clergymen, postal workers and divorced mothers. They send their children to some of the best schools in the country, and their ability to do so is not based on income. The average income of the families of children on the assisted places scheme is only £10,975—60 per cent. of them earn less than £10,000. The scheme does not give money to the rich, but takes people from the bottom of society's economic pile and gives them the best opportunities.

Mr. Marshall: Will my right hon. Friend confirm the statement made in the letters column of today's *The Times* that almost all the schoolchildren who participate in the assisted places scheme go on to win places at university?

Sir Rhodes Boyson: I am very grateful to my hon. Friend for that intervention. I believe that the figure is 90 per cent., which may be higher than the number of students from Eton who go on to university. If the Labour party wipes out the assisted places scheme, many people will register their disapproval at the ballot box. I shall certainly give them the opportunity to do so by making sure that Labour's policy is public knowledge.

I had thought that the Labour party was becoming more realistic in its views—after all, Labour Members are quite pleasant people. However, this week I read a statement by the Labour education spokesman proposing to phase out A-levels. We can have three-year degree courses in this country only if we also have A-levels. We have the shortest degree courses in the world because the second year in the sixth form is equivalent to the first year at university. If A-levels are wiped out, we will have to spend more money providing four and five-year degree courses. A-levels are the gold standard of British education and I was amazed to read the Labour spokesman's statement. I hope that it will be denied during the debate today and that Labour Members will admit that they made a mistake by failing to read the small print or something like that.

We need a vocational certificate in Britain that is equivalent in status to academic A-levels. That is what our European friends have—I am a Eurosceptic, but I must be friendly to Europe in this debate on the Queen's Speech. Like Europe, we must have a certificate on the technological side that is equivalent to the academic side.

At the beginning of my speech I said that the economy is improving—and we have seen signs of that in the past two days. I think that the Government could show their faith in the future by using any available money to increase Christmas bonuses for pensioners. Today's pensioners suffered the unemployment of the 1930s—it was particularly bad in the north country where I come from—and they suffered through the war. I was a social security Minister and every year we talked about doing something for pensioners. If there is any money available in the Budget arising from reductions in taxation and so on, the Government could improve pensioners' Christmases by increasing the bonus to £50—or £100 if the economy continues to boom.

I am convinced that the Conservative party's education policies are the best in the country. Occasionally my views differ from those of my Government on minor matters, but that does not lessen my overall support for the Government and the welcome that I give to the Queen's Speech.

11.23 am

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): I hope that the right hon. Member for Brent, North (Sir Rhodes Boyson) will forgive me if I do not follow him in all the twists and turns of his carefully structured speech.

The House of Commons is advantaged by the fact that he is a Member—not least because he is not teaching in the state system.

Sir Rhodes Boyson: I spent the whole of my life teaching in the state system and I was educated in the state system. I want to see the state system flourish rather than being ruined by the Labour party.

Mrs. Dunwoody: That is exactly my point.

Mr. John Marshall: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Dunwoody: No. The hon. Gentleman has just entered the Chamber and he must take his own chances.

This morning the Secretary of State talked at considerable length about the great advantages of a public school education. I am afraid that I did not enjoy those advantages and my constituents must listen to the product of the state school system speaking in what I regard as fairly clear and understandable English. I do not regard my state school education as a disadvantage.

I would have appreciated an equal amount of plain speaking from the Secretary of State this morning. He took a long time to say very little about the future of the national health service. For many people, the reality is not what we heard from the Secretary of State this morning: the reality is that the health service is run by increasingly overworked staff who have very low morale. They are very worried about their inability to provide the level of care that they were trained to administer and many doctors and nurses do not see a clear pattern of development in their professions in the future.

When discussing what is occurring in the NHS, we should recognise that some of the best ideas are subverted not because there is anything wrong with the core decision to change the way in which health service provision works, but because the resources and the staff are not available to deliver the necessary level of care.

I shall spend a few minutes discussing the provision of care in the community in my constituency. Cheshire has not done well in the spending assessments and there are very real differences between Cheshire and comparable counties. That has meant that those who provide care services face a continuing battle to balance the amount of money with demand for services.

That is the depressing aspect of the debate. My constituents know what is happening in health care provision; they see it every day. They see the pressures on hospitals and the fact that fundholding general practitioners have access to large amounts of money—which they occasionally do not spend correctly—while other GPs have to argue and fight in order to secure the same level of attention for their patients. That is not providing an improved health system: that is a simple two-tier system.

The Secretary of State knows the right words to use, but he cannot disguise the real situation. The Government are very good at using weasel words to disguise the real state of health care in this country. I will give way to the Secretary of State if he believes that he has not had enough time to debate the subject this morning.

Mr. Dorrell: The hon. Lady says that she listens to her constituents, who know in detail what is occurring in the health service in Cheshire. Unless her constituency is wildly out of line with what is happening in the rest of the country, the hon. Lady may like to comment on the fact that, when polls are taken asking people what they think about the service that they receive from the NHS, nine out of 10 say that it is either good or very good.

Mrs. Dunwoody: If the Secretary of State relies heavily on opinion polls, he will know how popular the Government are and how the average person is not persuaded about the correctness of their health policies. The people are firmly convinced that the Government have got it wrong, and I agree with them.

The local health authority produced a very glossy document entitled "Continuing Health Care for people with longer-term illness or disability in Cheshire". Using the same terminology as the Government, it states:

"Where a patient has been assessed as outlined above as needing care in a nursing home or residential care home . . . they have the right, under the directions of choice . . . to choose, within the policies of the county council and within the limits of cost and assessed needs, which home they wish to move to. Where, however"—

there is a nice little sentence tucked on the end—

"a place in the particular home chosen by the patient is not currently available and is unlikely to be available within three weeks . . . that person should be discharged to another home until a place becomes available."

That is the real choice. Owing to the enormous pressure on funds, Cheshire will constantly have to address a gap between what it is expected to provide and what it can provide. If there is any pressure within the NHS people will be told, "We are terribly sorry, but although you might have liked to have gone to a particular place, you will be discharged when it suits us." The Cheshire Disabilities Federation has been discussing the problems with the social services department. Its representatives are so worried that they have asked to come and see the Minister.

The Cheshire Disabilities Federation was told that a number of changes were being considered to deal with the overspend. They included a reduced assessment in response times. That is simple. It means blocking more NHS beds. A reduced work force was also proposed. That means letting people go and not replacing them. Cheshire social services also proposed slower responses to hospital discharge requests, the development of more restrictive eligibility criteria, the closure of some local authority residential provision for older people and some day care provision and to combine the rest of the changes across client groups.

Those proposals sound fairly straightforward, but they hide the fact that in future fewer elderly people will be able to get day care assessment, fewer elderly people will be able to leave the NHS at the speed they require or obtain the level of care at the place that they wish, and fewer staff will be provided where they are most desperately needed. I do not regard that as a suitable way of planning health care in my county or an adequate response to the needs of an elderly population.

In my constituency, because of the high incidence of industrial diseases, many people require a higher level of care than those with larger incomes and a different level of life enhancement, but there is now greater pressure on the services that they desperately need. There is probably a higher proportion of people suffering from industrial deafness, there are certainly more people suffering from asbestosis and there are people desperately needing care because they are alone, such as single mothers on

[Mrs. Dunwoody]

desperately low incomes trying to cope in difficult circumstances. The effect of that is apparent throughout the population.

I had hoped that the Secretary of State would come here this morning, not to deliver an hour's party polemic, but to make a serious attempt to identify the difficulties in the health service and the problems that the Government have created with fragmentation and to attempt to find a way of putting it back together.

No one need doubt that the excrescences of management are so great that they are not only costing clinical care a great deal of money, but they are becoming painfully obvious. My national health service trust pays some employees £80,000 a year—and they are not chief executives. It is not an improvement in management; it is that there are more managers.

Nor has there been better planning in my local national health trust. Some time ago, a decision was made to go off into the private sector and build an incinerator to dispose of clinical waste. A great deal of effort and money was put into planning that pseudo-commercial development. We were told that the incinerator would be enormously effective and would attract industry. People would be happy to use the facilities and all the extra money would be poured into the NHS to provide better clinical care. That plan then disappeared off the face of God's earth because there have been changes in the circumstances which apparently were not allowed for in the original market testing that we had been hearing about at great length. Suddenly the whole plan was dropped with no discussion about what it cost the NHS or people in the area, or what the decision meant in terms of patient care.

I have seen the deterioration of care within the NHS in my lifetime and in my constituency. I have watched staff being told to reapply for their own jobs, argue for their particular little corners and deal with circumstances that mean that people have been forced seriously to consider private provision. I have watched the Government encourage private health care, not only in terms of financial and fiscal benefits but in every other way. It is a deliberate plan to run down the health service in a deleterious and dangerous way.

This morning I seriously thought that the Secretary of State would try to identify the real problems so that we could attempt to build a general consensus and begin planning for a better future. Instead, we had a supercilious and shallow assessment of the political difficulties which frankly do not do the present Government any credit.

I can only say to my constituents that those of us who care about the future of the NHS will make them only one pledge: that an incoming Labour Government at least will be aware of the real problems and seek to address them as urgently as possible.

11.36 am

Sir Sydney Chapman (Chipping Barnet): As the House will know, this is my re-entry attempt as I am speaking in a debate on the Floor of the House for the first time in nearly seven years. The reason is that until last July, I had the privilege of being in the Government Whips Office. One condition of belonging to that most prestigious club, of which right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health has had some experience, is that one is supposed to take a vow of silence. It was not a complete vow of silence, because I should say, with all due immodesty, that we made some of the most popular speeches in the House, not only because they were the shortest, but because we asked the person in the Chair to adjourn the House.

I have to say, and I hope I am not breaking the Official Secrets Act in so doing, that I could best describe more than six and a half years in the Whips Office by saying that as time passed I increasingly realised the truth of the ancient Chinese curse, "May you live in interesting times". However, just as every Member agrees on one thing—that it is an honour and privilege to have the opportunity to serve our constituents in this august Chamber—I would like to put on record my appreciation to my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister for the privilege that I felt in serving in his Administration and that of his predecessor. To adapt a well-worn adage, they also serve who only stand and Whip.

I should also add that, as some of my hon. Friends will know, for the past three and a quarter years I had the additional privilege of being Vice-Chamberlain of Her Majesty's Household. That required three specific and extra duties: to carry messages to and from the House and to write to Her Majesty every day that the House was sitting to let her know what was going on. As those letters will not be made public for 30 years, I assure the House that I always wrote with impeccable political impartiality. Thirdly, on three occasions I had the duty to be the hostage at state openings of Parliament and I could not return here until the safe return of Her Majesty to Buckingham palace. The problem was when she safely returned I wanted to stay there rather than come back here.

I am grateful to have the opportunity to follow the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) as I was born in a different part of the county that she represents. I am also pleased to follow my right hon. Friend the Member for Brent, North (Sir R. Boyson), for whom I have such a tremendous regard that I have just signed his nomination papers for re-election to our 1922 Committee.

It is worth remembering that when we are talking about the national health service, we are talking about people. The difficulty that politicians face is that in addressing the problems and achievements of the NHS, we inevitably have to deal with statistics. Some will come tumbling from my lips. The Government's greatest achievement in the NHS over the past 16 years is to have committed—thanks to the taxpayer—an additional £30,000 million a year to the service. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said, that represents an increase in real terms, after allowing for inflation, of 70 per cent.

I am trying to deal with the real issues in the NHS. The hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich, for whom I have a great deal of respect, was rather unfair in her comments on my right hon. Friend's speech. Of course there are problems, the main one being the escalating demand for NHS services. That is due to two factors—first, because of the introduction of so many new and very expensive operations, treatments and drugs, and, secondly, because as the years go by demographic changes in our society result in more elderly people as a percentage of our total population. Not long ago, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security said that 42 per cent.

of his budget is spent on the elderly in our society, who represent about 16 per cent. of the total population. A staggering statistic to bear in mind is that as those demographic changes continue, in 35 years' time there will be 50 per cent. more elderly people and a correspondingly shrinking work force.

The very exciting, almost mind-boggling, advances that there have been and will continue to be in medical know-how and technology have had a profound effect on the way that we deliver health care services to the nation. There is a good example of that in Barnet and I want to pick up one or two of the relevant points mentioned in the eloquent speech by my right hon. Friend the Member for Brent, North.

For more than 60 years we have been fighting for a new general hospital in Barnet. I shall be even-handed in political partisanship and admit that successive Governments have thwarted that wish. In 1970, Barnet received approval to demolish old huts—separate corrugated iron sheds, which are presently wards and where operations have been carried out—and to build a new ward block. That was frustrated by a Labour Government. I can be even more politically even-handed by saying that the then Minister responsible for health was a Dr. David Owen, who I understand has moved to new political pastures and, for all I know, may be moving even further. He wrote to Barnet community health council in 1975:

"We are all aware of the pressing need for better hospital facilities in the Barnet area. It is the economic situation we face which prevents us remedying Barnet's particular difficulties."

I shall continue to be even-handed and say that a new Barnet general hospital was put back on the agenda four or five years later. By that time there had been a change of Government. At the beginning of 1980 the health authority put forward proposals to build a surgical block, but a year later that scheme fell victim to the need to rein in public spending. We must treat with caution some of the Opposition's admonitions when they talk about the need for more funding for the NHS.

The good news is that the first phase of the redevelopment of Barnet is going ahead and is due for completion in 1997. That phase centres around a new and enlarged accident and emergency department with a new maternity unit. In recent years my constituents facing a happy event have had to go to Edgware to have their babies. Soon, those who want to do so can have them in Barnet.

The problem in Barnet cannot be put simply, but it must be put medically and fairly. Because the A and E departments were on two separate sites, sufficient cover could not be given to both. There is a popular misconception among all our constituents that an A and E department in a hospital can cater for any accident or emergency. That is not the case and never has been. There is strong evidence, at least in my part of the world, that where A and E facilities have been split over two sites lives have been lost.

I want to quote one or two statistics—not those produced by politicians, but given to us by the experts. A Royal College of Surgeons' report contains the shocking statistic that one in four deaths in A and E departments is avoidable. A British Orthopaedic Association report states that one in five people is inadequately treated after major surgery and one in eight left with a severe avoidable disability. I find those statistics shocking.

Even closer to home, a study undertaken by a Dr. Richard Warren shows that in the old north-west Thames region—it is now amalgamated into a new north Thames region—there were 86 avoidable deaths a year in A and E departments. It seems to me that if we are at all interested in what must be the highest priority of any health service—to save lives—changes must be made to reduce the number of deaths and casualties. That can be achieved by having a new and enlarged A and E department on one site. We should not forsake the other site completely, but use it for other NHS functions, including a minor accident treatment centre.

I have at least partial good news for my right hon. Friend the Member for Brent, North, for my hon. Friends the Members for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall) and for Finchley (Mr. Booth), who I am delighted to see here today, and for my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, North (Sir J. Gorst), who is unavoidably absent. The new minor accident treatment centre, which we have been promised before the A and E department at Edgware merges with Barnet, is due to open next week. We can take comfort from that.

Mr. Booth: Will my hon. Friend allow the comment to be made that the casualty unit in Edgware will cope with the problem raised by my right hon. Friend the Member for Brent, North (Sir R. Boyson)? Is he aware that there is a fear in the Edgware area that people may die before they reach a casualty unit in that there will be, as part of the casualty unit in Edgware, a place where crisis cases will be stabilised, as they are in the community hospital in Finchley, before they are moved on, in time, to the major trauma centre, which will be either Northwick Park hospital or Barnet general?

Sir Sydney Chapman: As my hon. Friend will understand, I cannot be expected to answer his question definitively.

It is important to understand that the majority of cases now being dealt with at Edgware will continue to be dealt with there. Of about 40,000 cases a year that are dealt with at the accident and emergency department at Edgware, only 1 or 2 per cent. could be described as life threatening. Even if one of my constituents collapsed and suffered a serious injury almost in the next road to Barnet general hospital, he or she would not necessarily be taken to that hospital. According to the seriousness and the nature of the injury, it may be that the person could best be dealt with at another hospital. I am sorry to be so morbid, but a person collapsing just outside Edgware hospital may not, even now, be taken to it. He or she may be taken to Northwick Park, the Royal Free or Barnet general.

It is important that we get these issues over to the public honestly and intelligibly. My hon. Friend the Member for Finchley will know that nowadays about 55 per cent. of surgery cases are day care. That has been a tremendous development in the NHS.

I am extremely grateful to have been called to make a contribution to this important debate. I shall conclude by iterating my central point: the delivery of our health care service must change according, and as necessary, to the massive changes and advances that are taking place in medical technology. With much political opprobrium, the Government have been responding responsibly and responsively. The way that they are managing our health

[Sir Sydney Chapman]

service through the various agencies is the most realistic, relevant and responsive in meeting the needs of our constituents. I give them a simple and direct message: keep at it. Whatever the opprobrium the Government now face, tomorrow the people will realise that they took the right decisions in the long term for the benefit of our constituents and for that of the NHS.

11.52 am

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): I welcome the hon. Member for Chipping Barnet (Sir S. Chapman) back to full voice after his relative purdah while doing the job that he enjoyed most—writing a daily letter to the Queen. Perhaps he might recommend to Her Majesty that in future some form of direct mail would be a more time-efficient method of sending and receiving messages, thus releasing his successors from letter writing and enabling them to have time to do other things. There could even be a direct television feed from the Chamber. That would allow Her Majesty to have a more rounded view of things.

I am happy, of course, to take up the hon. Gentleman's remarks. He is a distinguished London Member. I did not know until today that he, like me, had the honour of being born in Cheshire and is, therefore, a supporter of that fair county, like the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody).

I have only recently been given the job of looking after health and welfare policy for my party. I succeed my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile). It might be thought that there is all the difference in the world between the health needs of the people of Machynlleth and those of the people of the Old Kent road, and so there is in one sense, but the national health service was designed by Beveridge and introduced and implemented by the Attlee Labour Government to be a service that afforded equal access for all. It was intended to be a national health service covering the four countries of the United Kingdom.

The test of how well we are doing is not how easily we can find fault in the policies, embryonic or completed, of other political parties, although that is a proper test of their seriousness, but how well we are providing the health care that the nation needs from the resources that the nation can afford to spend on them.

I come to my new job with the recent experience of the battle over the future of Guy's hospital, which is in my constituency. It was a paradox that my first speech on health was at the final meeting of the medical and dental committee of Guy's hospital before its demise and merger with a new medical and dental committee of Guy's and St Thomas's. I shall not talk about Guy's today because it has been discussed many times previously and I have no doubt that it will be discussed again.

I merely say that the debate about the future of one of Britain's most eminent hospitals taught me that there is an important agenda that we must all consider. It covers matters that affect the hon. Member for Chipping Barnet and other Members. How do we ensure that the health service does not spend unnecessarily large sums on management when it should be spending those moneys on front-line care? How do we ensure that the decisions that are taken in the health service are made as democratically as possible and not behind closed doors in secret, as so often happens nowadays? How do we ensure that we do not, in the interests of political dogma of the day or of the political agenda of an Administration, destroy excellence that cannot be replaced? How do we ensure that we build up the morale of all those in the health service so that we have adequate recruits and do not find ourselves short, in time, of A and E consultants, nurses or any other specialists in the service? Lastly, how do we ensure that the health service has the confidence of the public?

Whatever the Secretary of State may say and believe, a huge proportion of the British people is greatly worried and sceptical about how safe the health service is in the Government's hands. I shall give an example. Recently, the Association of London Authorities commissioned a large opinion poll to ascertain the issues of greatest concern to Londoners. It is significant that health came top of the list. That is no accident.

Before this debate I spoke to the person in my office who has looked after health matters with me over the past five years. I asked her to reflect on the five years and to tell me what issues kept on arising in correspondence or during telephone conversations. One such issue was the morale of those who work in the service. Another was how people felt about getting into the service when they needed to use it. How long do they have to wait? How long do they have to wait for treatment after an initial appointment? Why cannot people get a bed in many parts of the country? They are bussed around and sometimes, in tragic cases, they are flown around the country only to die as a consequence. How is it that when someone is lucky enough to get a bed he or she finds that a person of the opposite sex is in the next bed, often in extremely embarassing circumstances? That happens in our modern health service in 1995. How is it that hospital patients are so often let down badly by the treatment that they receive? Some patients are left on their own because there are not the staff to attend to them. Sometimes there is severe neglect.

There are serious concerns about the future of NHS dentistry, which were alluded to by the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman). There is great and genuine concern about the amount of money being spent on management, advertising and public relations, for example. The inevitable consequence of the way in which we now organise the health service, with so many different sub-agencies all having to deal with each other, is that one builds up huge amounts of management, passing letters to each other, making contracts, negotiating. It is not the incorporated service that it was. That has to be dealt with, because a huge amount of resources are wasted in that direction.

Why do we still have such inequality between those who buy into the service? Fundholding has produced an inequality of access for the person who is meant, on my behalf as a lay person, to have access: my local GP. Why have we ended up in 1995 with a two-tier policy for access to health and not the originally intended common policy available to all? Those issues are constantly raised by our constituents and fellow citizens. In some ways, it is not different in the Machynlleths and the Marylebones. There are differences. Primary care is often much worse in the inner cities than the rural areas. There is an issue about prescribing GPs in rural areas that does not exist in the inner city.

On some items, there is often a common concern throughout the country. One such common concern is the insidious spread of the private sector through the health service, which may lead to bits of it being sold off. The reality is that the proposal for Guy's hospital—if one can get hold of the plans, which is difficult—is that part of it will go for private use. That is accepted as being part of the agenda, but it has never been voted for by the country. The people have never said that is how they want their health service to proceed. Yes, one has to buy in private services, but it is intended to be a public service run in an accountable way by and for the public.

I can be brief on the Queen's Speech because the Queen's Speech was brief on the subject of health. There were two proposals for two modest measures. As the Secretary of State indicated, they are both structural as opposed to budgetary or resource-filled. One proposes better access to a better procedure for complaints to the ombudsman; the other proposes to give people with certain forms of disability the right to buy their own care. I welcome both. They will be good measures. We shall try to make them as good as we can when the House considers them. The Government will have our support.

I notice that the second was specifically said not to bring any more resources with it. That does not surprise me, because, of course, there was nothing about more resources for the health service. I know that it was not the Budget speech—that is yet to come—but I imagine that we shall not see any significant additional resources anyway, even when the second half of the Government's programme is unveiled, which is what they are going to spend, for which we shall have to wait another 10 days.

Mr. Spearing: I had not intended to intervene, but I read in the Queen's Speech that there will be legislation to enable

"particular groups of people who want to purchase their own community care."

Surely the hon. Gentleman is assuming that it would be of equivalent value to the totality of community care and that there could perhaps be private organisations, such as Southwark health care plc or Newham community privatised health services, which creates the very sort of market in health care, for which the boroughs are responsible, that has ruined the health service itself?

Mr. Hughes: I rarely dissent from the views of the hon. Gentleman, apart from on Europe, where he is a Euro-sceptic and I am a Euro-fanatic, but on this issue he may be reading too much into the proposal. My understanding is that the proposal is wanted and that it gives the local authority power to enable people to buy their own care rather than have it bought for them. That does not presume that it comes from any place different from where the local authority might purchase it. I believe that to be the case.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. John Bowis) *rose—*

Mr. Hughes: I shall let the Minister confirm that.

Mr. Bowis: I am happy to intervene to say that the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) is totally correct and the hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) is totally wrong. The measure will, following the proper and due assessment of somebody's care needs, enable that person, if he or she so chooses, to have the equivalent money. Therefore, there is no financial implication to find and purchase the care to suit the individual's needs. It is more flexible. It is what disabled people want. I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's welcome for it.

Mr. Tom Clarke *rose—*

Mr. Hughes: The hon. Gentleman who speaks on these matters for the Labour party wants to intervene. I hope that I am getting time out for this. I give way one more time.

Mr. Clarke: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman, but although he is a usually generous person, on this occasion he should be really careful. My hon. Friend the Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) is much nearer the point. If the hon. Gentleman reads the small print of the Bill that was published in another place yesterday, he will see that my hon. Friend is right on the ball.

Mr. Hughes: I have seen the Bill, including the small print. I did not mean to indicate to the hon. Member for Monklands, West that I, like he, will not give the Bill particular care and scrutiny when it is before us to ensure that it delivers what it was intended to deliver and responds to the requests that were properly made by disabled people and others for a more flexible system. We shall come back to that. The Bill will probably be before us fairly soon—perhaps in the new year—given its start in another place yesterday.

I think that we all know that behind the debate about structure is the debate about the Budget, and that is the key issue. That is why I asked the Secretary of State about real-value increases in funds. Yes, we have increased considerably, as the hon. Member for Chipping Barnet said when he intervened, the proportion of our GDP that we spend on health, but we are still significantly below the average of our neighbours and comparable countries, both in Europe and the European Union, and across the Atlantic, too. In countries such as the United States, the balance between public and private contribution is different. We all know that.

The test of the health service and how well it does is the user—the public—rather than those who work in it, important though they are. It is important that, as we plan the future of the health service, we use the test: are the public getting the health service that they want? So that there cannot be any misunderstanding, I shall briefly set out my party's priorities for the health service. If anybody is interested, they can buy the booklet, which was the policy passed at our conference. It is called "Building on the Best of the NHS". We had a full and frank debate this year, including one controversial item, to which I shall return in a second.

First, we have to put the money where most people will benefit most easily to the maximum benefit. That is why we argue that it is good to hypothecate some of the revenue collected—I dissent from the Secretary of State on this point—and put it specifically into health uses. We would put an extra 5p on tobacco duty, which we would use to make eye tests and dental checks free again and to freeze prescription charges. We think that that is a good idea. We think that the public would benefit considerably from it and that it is the right way to proceed. A further 1p on tobacco duty would allow some extra money to go into community care. The beneficial consequence of those

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proposals is that by reducing smoking we considerably reduce the bill to the health service, because smoking costs the health service a considerable amount—an estimated £600 million a year.

The next area that needs reform is the undemocratic mess of the structure of the health service. The Nolan committee made it clear that there needs to be much better scrutiny of those who are appointed. Many of us would say that we need to reduce the number of people who are appointed and have considerably more people elected. The Secretary of State personally appoints more than 5,000 people to NHS jobs. The reality, therefore, is that decisions are taken by nominees of the Secretary of State, not by representatives of the local community, and thus not in a way that is accountable in any real sense of the word. I agree with the Secretary of State that there will be difficult decisions about priorities, but they are currently taken by placemen and placewomen, often by their medical advisers and not by community representatives, who are the best people to make those judgments, just as in Parliament we have to make priority decisions for the nation as a whole. We must have more consultation about the setting of priorities. We must have far greater accountability for appointments to trusts, the constitution of NHS trusts, health authorities and community health councils.

As local government becomes more accountable and is reformed, health commissioning should be passed to local authorities. There is debate about that in the profession, but our party has supported the concept. The link between social services and health is becoming ever closer; logically, they should be united in the context of commissioning at local level.

We must also consider the long term. I have always believed that, despite all the efforts of bodies such as the Health Education Authority, the country still spends too much time, effort and money in concentrating on building the best health-care system rather than ensuring that we have the best health. We need social policies that reduce inequality and improve health.

We must not continue to allow the rich to get richer and the poor to get poorer; we must not continue—in 1995—to condemn large numbers of people to living in overcrowded, unsatisfactory accommodation. We must not continue to allow so many people to be out of work, and thus unable to earn a decent income enabling them to be warm and well looked after. We must not allow education to be so poor that people cannot take the decisions that are best for their health. Nowadays the pollution of the environment—particularly in urban areas, and particularly as a result of vehicle emissions—induces, directly or indirectly, additional disease. We must concentrate on the health promotion agenda if we are to secure the health in the nation that will allow us to meet the bills that the NHS will always demand.

The public are as committed to the NHS as they have ever been, but they are aware that we still spend less than they would wish. They are aware that many needs are still unmet in health and community care. As all the surveys show, they would prefer additional investment in those services to a cheap, short-term cut of a penny or two in income tax. We need directly beneficial investment in the health service. For instance, the public would welcome a reinstatement of free eye checks.

We must reclaim the NHS from the bureaucrats, administrators and appointees, and give it back to real people. We must also keep an eye on the long-term bills: by investing in a healthier nation, we shall both reduce our bills and manage our resources better.

I shall be sad if debates such as this become party-political banter rather than an attempt—with as much agreement as possible—to obtain the securest possible public health service, free at the point of delivery, for all in the next century and beyond.

12.12 pm

Mr. Hartley Booth (Finchley): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes), with whom I have been debating for 20 years or more. The hon. Gentleman is still wrong in various respects: for instance, his suggestion that it is possible to finance all sorts of wonderful improvements in the NHS by increasing the tax on tobacco by 5p is simply wrong. The hon. Gentleman knows what happens in the European free market about which he is so enthusiastic; he knows that we would lose rather than gain by hiking up tobacco prices in the way that he suggests. People would buy tobacco in other countries such as France.

I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Chipping Barnet (Sir S. Chapman). He served his term on the Front Bench for nearly seven years, and has now broken his Trappist vow. We are glad to reclaim what we lost during those years: my hon. Friend need no longer be taciturn.

The Queen's speech requires us to look beyond the proposals that it contains. It should focus our minds on the very purpose of government. I have always believed that Government's aim should be to transcend the immediate—to view long-term objectives, to rise above self-interest and to bring prosperity of body, mind and spirit to all our people. According to the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman), the Queen's Speech merely laid out the road to a privatised health service. There is, to say the least, a vast chasm between what I would define as the Government's aims and the hon. Lady's limited perception of those aims.

Testing the wider perception of Labour's view of our aims does not produce much more illumination. The right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) said that our proposals in the Queen's speech were a rag-bag and right-wing; he described them as "a mouse". That was how he described excellent proposals that will improve education, tackle organised crime and improve our housing stock, as well as dealing with problems in transport and broadcasting and the complaints of NHS patients. Those proposals do not constitute a mouse; they certainly do not constitute a rag-bag. And the stuff about right-wing is all talk.

As for the experiences of the chairman of the Conservative party this week, he was not an example of the ship of state that leaks from the top. He did not leak; he referred to the Gracious Speech in advance, quite properly. He simply said that the proposals in it would be good, and that they had a second purpose in flushing out Labour. Why not? That is absolutely right. In painting him as a villain, Labour Members lower themselves to the

level of the paint-hurlers of the street. That is just another example of Labour's claim that the best form of defence is attack.

What proposals did Mr. Blair seriously advance?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman should refer to the right hon. Member for Sedgefield.

Mr. Booth: What did the right hon. Member for Sedgefield say? What were his proposals? He certainly had a wonderful proposal for central heating: lots and lots of hot air. He who talks of mice and trivia demonstrated his concern. In his speech, he said, "Let us consider Nolan." He was obviously concerned about the pay of Members of Parliament. He also said: "Let us consider utilities' bosses." He was clearly concerned about the politics of envy. And he said, "Let us consider Iraq." All those points were sideshows; the right hon. Gentleman disregarded the important aspects. Except by way of a passing reference, the right hon. Gentleman did not consider the earnings of Britain as a whole. To him it was more important to speak about the pay of hon. Members. He did not consider the successes of the utilities and privatisation. His theme was the envy of a few, but he should have said that privatisation has transformed Britain. Before it happened we pumped £50 million a week into the nationalised industries, but now we receive £50 million a week from them in taxation.

In considering our export achievements the Leader of the Opposition referred only to Iraq, and that is disgraceful. The right hon. Gentleman purports to be the leader of the Government in waiting, but, as my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said, he is not fit to govern.

There has been no reference in the debate to our excellent proposals for legislation on a chemical weapons convention and a comprehensive test ban treaty. The Gracious Speech refers to drug misuse. I am sure that the whole House would wish to express sympathy to the parents of Leah Betts, who died yesterday. If the death of that girl is a warning to the hundreds of thousands of young people who may be offered drugs at parties and if they refuse them because they remember her tragic demise, she will not have died in vain.

The Government propose to increase free trade. Labour is clearly keen on Europe but it should be warned that as well as the endemic socialism in Europe and our criticism of Europe's courts, there is also endemic protectionism.

Mr. Spearing: There is no endemic socialism there.

Mr. Booth: I note the hon. Gentleman's intervention. He is well versed in European matters, but Europe's endemic protectionism is a threat to us as a world trading nation, and we must understand that. We must argue against protectionism even when it is propounded by the famous Mr. Goldsmith.

Thank goodness that we intend to combat fraud in the European Union and ensure that flexible labour markets are restrained and social costs lowered. We shall hear more about that and Labour will ignore the issue at its peril. The people are beginning to understand it and they will not allow Labour to push its line.

The Gracious Speech mentions support for the middle east peace process. Earlier this week there were tributes in the House to Premier Rabin. We wish Mr. Peres well in his burden of carrying forward the peace process.

Once again the Gracious Speech refers to the importance of Northern Ireland. Over many years we at least have accepted that Northern Ireland is worthy of being at the top of the agenda.

Before I deal with health I should like to deal with the reference in the Gracious Speech to the economy. People are always better off under Labour, but they are the people in France, Germany and Japan—our competitor countries. They do rather better and Britain does much worse.

Why do we hope to reduce taxation? The Gracious Speech mentions the improved performance of the economy and we are open about our desire to improve it further by reducing taxation. Labour would have it that we want to reduce taxation to bribe people to vote Conservative, but nothing could be further from the truth and nothing could portray Labour more accurately in its true colours as a party of envy and not of economic understanding. The real reason for wishing to lower personal taxation is that every time that it has been done the country has benefited and the Treasury has received more money.

The Institute of Fiscal Studies confirms that as we lowered personal taxation in the 1980s receipts went up. More people from all over the world stayed in Britain, contributed to our economy and paid more to the Treasury. As we reduced corporation tax we became a magnet for investment. Therefore, reducing corporation tax was a valuable stimulus to the economy. Labour says that reducing taxation is bribery but it is not: it is a vital ingredient of our vibrant economy. Sadly, we need to reiterate that all too often as the jibe is thrown at us by the Opposition.

The Government propose to improve and expand nursery education, but this is my opportunity on behalf of my constituents to sound a note of caution to the Government. I hope that it will be recorded, although I am sure that Ministers always listen to Back Benchers. I see that a note is being taken, as it always is, by our listening Ministers. We need improvements in nursery education, but they must be flexible. They must recognise that in different boroughs and different localities there are different needs. Barnet and Finchley already have excellent nursery services. Some £2,600 per head for three and four-year-olds is shelled out for that. The Government propose £1,100 for four-year-olds and that represents a reduction of £2,600 for three-year-olds and a pro rata reduction for four-year-olds. I hope that we in Barnet will be allowed to keep our present system which is much better than what is proposed for other areas that have no provision at all. It will be an improvement for them but it would certainly not be an improvement for us. We hope, therefore, to have the opportunity to continue what we have in that region.

We must recognise that asylum is not a race issue, but a world issue of great importance which I hope hon. Members will treat with the seriousness that it deserves. Around the world, 200 million to 300 million people are potential economic migrants. In Africa, Asia and southern America, there are huge migratory trends. I hope that the balance between accurately defining what is and what is not an economic migrant and the need to allow people who want and deserve asylum from terror into our country is accurately described and dealt with in our legislation. I look forward to that.

[Mr. Booth]

The homeless issue is a cri de coeur for myself. For some years, I have been battling to get through a Conservative proposal, although it has had some support from other quarters, to ensure that homeless people's needs are recognised. There are seven empty houses for every homeless person and 825,000 void properties, of which about 110,000 are in the public sector. The fact is now recognised by the Department of the Environment. I want a bigger recognition of that scandal. I want the Government to stand up and recognise that we have that huge resource of empty property, which could be used for homeless people. As a nation, we have no excuse for having empty properties when we have homeless people. The two must be married up. It will also have benign Treasury implications, so there is no reason on earth why Ministers cannot welcome that proposal with both arms. I hope that, at a conference in February next year, they will announce some proposals to welcome it.

As I opened my mouth this morning to brush my teeth, I found that there was a second reason for opening it. I had my radio on and I heard the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) say that the Government were encouraging administration and bureaucracy and spending a fortune on it in the NHS. Nothing could astonish me more. That was a statement from a spokeswoman for the Labour party, which seriously suggests that competitive tendering is nonsense and is to be kept out of the system, yet we know that, whenever competitive tendering is permitted in local authorities or the NHS, on average, there is a 7 per cent. saving.

The hon. Lady said that the Government, who introduced competitive tendering and want it in the NHS and elsewhere, want bureaucracy and not savings. Was it because she is so close to certain trade unions? When I asked this morning about her support from Unison, she was reticent. I hope that she will find time to place in the Library of the House of Commons information about how much Labour Front-Bench Members receive from Unison. Many hon. Members and others would like to know so that we may achieve a balance in these issues.

The Government's NHS proposals must be set in context. They may be small in themselves, but they are part of a series of reforms that have taken the NHS further forward than at any time since the 1940s, when it was introduced by the Labour Government. As my hon. Friend the Member for Chipping Barnet (Sir S. Chapman) said in an eminent intervention, there has been a huge rise in funding—it has increased by 70 per cent.—and we have taken courageous decisions of choice and priorities throughout our period with the NHS.

A Front-Bench Labour Member referred to a limited period when apparently the number of nurses fell, but, from 1983 to 1993, there were 18,000 extra nurses and 8,000 extra doctors and dentists. Throughout the service, we have ensured not only that we were increasing staff, but that their terms and conditions of service improved. We have allowed more time off for nurses as well because we have recognised that they are in a stressful position.

Mr. Spearing: The hon. Gentleman extolled competitive tendering. Earlier, I got the Secretary of State for Health to agree that choice meant price and that price in competitive tendering could sometimes mean constraints on the operation of or indeed the end of the firm, or a reduction in the terms and conditions of employment, including those for nurses. Does the hon. Gentleman agree therefore that competitive tendering, where hospitals can press terms and conditions on their employees or go out business, is not appropriate to the health service?

Mr. Booth: Not at all. I do not fully understand the hon. Gentleman's point, because what he said broadened the issue considerably. When competitive tendering in the NHS is properly administered, the rules of labour law are applied properly so that no one is exploited. We have laws to ensure that people do not work too long. If a private operator is brought in, the rules for its employees are often much more stringent than those for the old public sector employers who, because of Crown immunity, were often exempt from the full rigours of employment law.

Mr. Austin-Walker: Does the hon. Gentleman acknowledge that, in Hillingdon, Pall Mall care services have taken over under a private contract and have reduced workers' pay below the level at which they qualify for family credit?

Mr. Booth: It is essential that contracts of service are drafted so that such problems—I accept that it is a problem—do not arise. The drafting of contracts is important and future contracts must learn from past mistakes. Another safety valve is that, if a contractor does not provide what is required in the contract, it can be ripped up and started again.

Mr. Austin-Walker: I hope that the Minister will clarify the position when he replies. I understand that it is not permissible to place in the terms and conditions of a contract conditions relating to pay.

Mr. Booth: That would be a breach of British law. People in the private sector cannot be exempt from the application of rules that the House has passed for their benefit. If examples of that exist, the hon. Gentleman will no doubt bring them to the Minister's attention and he will deal with the matter.

Opposition Front-Bench Members have raised the issue of fundholders time and again. The hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) said with great scorn that there were two levels of care. We can have two provisions, both of which are good and can be right. The fact that there is a choice does not mean that one is wrong. That can be demonstrated by the fact that 50 per cent. of doctors have decided to become fundholders while 50 per cent. have not. It cannot be argued that those who have chosen not to become fundholders have hit the rule book, because they can now join others and become fundholders.

When I visited a GP fundholder in my constituency I saw the amazing extra provision that he and his partner were making available to his patients, all because he had been given personal responsibility for his budget. He had a physiotherapist on site, saving time, money and inconvenience, and he had made various other medical services available for his patients. That would all be denied if we went down the Labour party route. GP fundholders and NHS trusts have brought decisions closer to patients. When one needs a GP, an appointment now takes only two days whereas it used to take weeks.

I am told I have to rush so I will move on quickly. There are proposals to change the jurisdiction of the ombudsman, which have been sought for 20 years. During

1994 and 1995, there were more than 250 cases in which clinical complaints about the NHS were rejected by the ombudsman, Mr. William Reid. The ombudsman has been wanting change for over 20 years. But will the Labour party praise that change? I do not hear any praise coming from Labour Front Benchers. Perhaps we will hear some at the end of the debate. At least the spokesman for the Liberal Democrats supported the change.

The Labour party has not praised the fact that the proposal will widen the jurisdiction of the ombudsman to GPs, dentists, pharmacists and opticians. The Labour party does not praise the fact that we have provided greater choice in the provision of community care. I am pleased that the Liberal Democrats are supporting that.

There are two points that I would like the Minister, in his closing remarks, to address. The NHS still needs, despite its great achievements, to improve in various areas, including health prevention and administration. I have mentioned the issue of autism in the House before. There are thousands of forgotten and unknown children in this country with autism. Children with autism are on a continuum and it is difficult to define. The complaint was not even known about 20 or 30 years ago, and nor was the related ailment, Aspberger's syndrome. I would like the Minister to recognise the importance of new moves, not least the national autistic resource centre that was launched this week. It is important to help the many children with autism and the many parents who suffer because of their child's problem with autism.

The second issue is the problem of residential care and the NHS. I have been campaigning all year for elderly people who have problems with residential care. Although the Labour party, during the 1940s, proposed to means-test the income and capital resources of the elderly, it is only now that means-testing has become an acute problem. I would like the Minister to tell us that the Government will be more generous to elderly folk in residential care who are in huge difficulties at the moment.

The greatest test of NHS success is the longevity of our people. During the past 15 years, life expectancy has risen from 69 to 74 for men and from 74 to 79 for women. Life expectancy has improved largely because of the success of the NHS. I do not believe that we should end the debate without acknowledging and thanking the NHS for its role in producing that great success.

12.43 pm

Mr. John Austin-Walker (Woolwich): Before I commence, I should say that I am a member, and have been for 23 years, of the Manufacturing, Science and Finance Union, which includes in its membership doctors, health visitors, community and school nurses, and a wide range of professional, technical and ancillary staff in the NHS.

In view of the current guidelines, I thought that I should make that statement early. The Table Office could not provide guidance on whether I needed to declare an interest in the debate, but I notified the people there because, with my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn), I had tabled an amendment to the Address. I should add that MSF makes a contribution of £600 per annum to my constituency party. In the interests of open government, the House is entitled to know that.

Mr. Lilley: The hon. Gentleman has done the right thing; will he condemn his Front-Bench spokesmen for refusing to do as he has done, and tell the House how much they are paid in sponsorship by Unison?

Mr. Austin-Walker: I made my statement at the beginning so that we would not be diverted by irrelevancies during this important debate. I consulted the Table Office and read the guidelines, but they are not precise or clear. My understanding was that it was up to me to decide whether I regarded myself as having an interest, and I believed that I should err on the side of caution and make the declaration. I am sure that my Front-Bench colleagues will make their own judgment, study the guidelines and act in accordance with the principles of disclosure.

Mr. John Marshall *rose—*

Mr. Austin-Walker: I am not prepared to give way to the hon. Member for Hendon, South, who came into the Chamber at 11 o'clock and has been in and out like a fiddler's elbow ever since.

The Queen's Speech was an obvious disappointment for anyone interested in health, which, as the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) said, and as the recent survey by the all-party Association of London Government showed, is the main worry among Londoners. Londoners face particular problems of underfunding, but their concerns are shared throughout the country.

Poverty and poor social and environmental factors are key determinants of ill health, and the Queen's Speech gives little suggestion that the Government have any plans to deal with the increasing inequalities in society.

On Wednesday my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Attercliffe (Mr. Betts) mentioned the King's Fund report, which shows that, for the first time in 50 years, death rates among the poorest people are rising. The report confirmed that social divisions have accelerated at a rate not matched for such a sustained period in any other rich industrialised society. While the incomes of the poorest 10 per cent. have fallen by 17 per cent. in real terms, the incomes of the richest 10 per cent. have risen by 62 per cent.

What my hon. Friend the Member for Attercliffe said about Sheffield applies also to my area, which is served by the Bexley and Greenwich area health authority, and to other parts of London. Indeed, a recent report revealed that all the inner London boroughs are included in the list of the 20 most deprived local authorities in the country.

My hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-East (Mr. Timms) spoke earlier about the distortion in the way in which health resources are distributed, and there is nothing in the Queen's Speech to suggest that that will be redressed. Taking evidence from directors of public health before the recess, the Health Select Committee heard that current calculations tend to take resources away from deprived areas in favour of more affluent areas.

For example, in my region of South Thames money is taken away from areas such as Camberwell, Woolwich and Lambeth and given to areas such as Worthing and

[Mr. Austin-Walker]

Eastbourne. In my hon. Friend's region money is taken away from the deprived parts of east London and given to the leafier parts of Essex. As the director of public health for Croydon said in the *British Medical Journal* last June, to distribute resources according to age

"without distinguishing between poor elderly and rich elderly, is to discriminate against the group which has the greatest need of all."

That point was also eloquently made by my hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) in connection with Cheshire.

Nationally, that arrangement transfers resources from the north of England to the coastal areas of the south. As my hon. Friend the Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon) has said, there has been a shift of resources, including money, from poorer to richer areas, and that fulfils the Government's political objectives.

In London, after the Tomlinson report, it became the perceived wisdom that London received a larger share of the NHS cake than it deserved. It was argued that London contained 15 per cent. of the population and received 20 per cent. of resources. Analysis of the allocations for the current year for hospital and community health services—the HCHS allocation—shows that the capital's share has dipped below 15 per cent. Professor Jarman has shown that, when adjusted for factors such as market forces and London weighting, the allocation to district health authorities in London was more than 5 per cent. lower than the national average resources per capita.

In March last year at the Select Committee on Health the hon. Member for Croydon, North-East (Mr. Congdon) asked the then Secretary of State what proportion of resources should be allocated to London bearing in mind higher costs and deprivation factors. The right hon. Lady replied:

"my view is that we should seek to close the gap . . . I accept that there continue to be reasons why London has special needs. We accept that on health and we accept that on personal social services."

The right hon. Lady who said that was hell-bent on closing hospitals throughout the capital—Bart's, Edgware, Greenwich district hospital and Guy's.

In their lurch to the right, the Government seem to be paying heed to the clarion calls of the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood). I wish that the present Secretary of State would take heed of the contribution of the right hon. Member for Wokingham to the debate on Wednesday, when he said:

"there must be enough different types of hospital from which people can choose. That means bringing an end to many closure programmes."—[*Official Report*, 14 November 1995; Vol. 267, c. 44.]

London's share of NHS resources has dipped below 15 per cent. The previous Secretary of State said that she accepted that there was a need to close the gap and that London has special needs, in the spheres of both health and social services. But under the standard spending assessment distribution mechanism, London received 21.8 per cent. of the total personal social services for this year. If national health service resources were to be distributed on a similar basis to the SSAs, London would have received £5 billion compared to less than £3.5 billion. London would, should and could have had an extra £1.5 billion this year. Perhaps then the right hon. Member for Brent, North (Sir R. Boyson) would have seen Edgware hospital saved.

The Queen's Speech also held little comfort for elderly people. The former Chancellor, Lord Howe, took great credit for breaking the link between pensions and average earnings so that the average pensioner income has fallen since the Tories came to power from one third of average male earnings to only one fifth—pensioners are now £20 a week worse off. Once again this winter we can expect beds in hospitals up and down the country to be blocked by elderly people who are too poor to heat their homes and who suffer from hypothermia. Some will recover and be discharged, but thousands will die and thousands more will not recover sufficiently to be discharged and will require long-term care. That is Tory Britain as we approach the new millennium.

I refer briefly to community care, particularly the long-term care of elderly people. In the 1980s, owing to social security changes, there was an explosion in often unnecessary institutionalisation of elderly people in the mushrooming private nursing homes, with a consequent dramatic increase in the DSS bill. That was followed by the 1990 national health service and community care reforms, which centred on closing NHS geriatric beds and placing responsibility on cash-limited social services departments which, unlike the NHS, rely on means-tested charges—a point made by the hon. Member for Finchley (Mr. Booth). That could be seen as a scheme to raid the elderly's private savings.

More recently, restrictions on council spending and the requirement to spend a substantial proportion of community care money in the so-called independent sector has resulted in the continuing privatisation of community care. In both those processes, the provision of domiciliary care and support has taken second place to residential care. The move from NHS provision to community care has led to a great disparity in treatment and services, with some elderly people being charged for services while others are not. They are often charged not on the basis of need or their ability to pay, but on the basis of the type of building or the area in which they live. The move has also led to arguments about what constitutes nursing care, which is supposed to be provided free at the point of need.

I accept that nursing care can be broken down into a series of tasks or various components, some of which require the skill of a qualified nurse and some of which do not. However, it cannot be right to use that as a mechanism whereby elderly people are charged for some elements of their care and not for others. Nor can it be used as an excuse to make cuts in some areas through spurious grading exercises.

I shall give one example of differing treatment. An elderly person in an NHS hospital who uses incontinence pads or who makes use of the incontinence laundry service is not charged. However, once that person is in the community—whether at home or resident in a local authority or private nursing home—that person may be charged depending upon the area in which he or she lives. We must ask another question in this case: where is the continence nurse?

I am sure that if nurses were intimately involved in purchasing and commissioning decisions, prevention and health promotion would shoot up the priority list. I believe that nurses can play a very real role in locality commissioning. I am sorry that that prospect is not

mentioned in the Queen's Speech—we will have to wait until the next Queen's Speech under a future Labour Government.

Means testing and reliance on private insurance schemes or requiring pensioners to sell their homes does not provide a cheaper service. Such schemes may require a lower tax input, but they do not provide a cheaper scheme. What is not covered collectively by the taxpayer becomes a charge on the individual or an insurance bill.

We must also consider the gender issue if the Government are contemplating going down the private insurance road. The majority of those who need care now, and who are likely to need long-term care in the future, are women. Hopefully, we shall see continuing improvements in the area of equal opportunity, but today—and for the foreseeable future—women are more likely to need long-term care and are more likely to have career breaks and not enjoy continuity of employment.

Women in my constituency tend not to have careers: those who are in paid employment have jobs. Apart from breaks in employment, women tend to be in lower-paid work, which is often part-time, and they may not receive holiday pay—that is certainly the case if they work in the contracted-out services of the NHS. They are less likely to be in an occupational pension scheme and less able to contribute to a private insurance scheme. Therefore, they are much more likely to have to depend upon state-funded provision. Furthermore, any scheme that is funded through private insurance will prove more expensive in terms of administration, bureaucracy and assessment.

I now turn to an issue that is not included in the Queen's Speech. There is nothing in the speech to suggest that the Government intend to deviate in any way from their doctrinaire policies. The private finance initiative currently threatens the hospital service in Woolwich. The Brook hospital is to close next week and that may be followed next year by the closure of Greenwich district hospital. We now find that the hospital that the NHS was to inherit from the Ministry of Defence—the former Queen Elizabeth military hospital, which is now the Queen Elizabeth hospital, Woolwich—could be handed over, lock, stock and barrel, to the private sector.

The hospital needs to be refurbished and expanded. The Government could have provided the necessary money, but instead the development is subject to the private finance initiative. Why is that so? It is because the Government say that they must transfer the risk. What risk is that? If there is a risk—or if that is what the Government are telling the private sector—the private sector will clearly want an additional payment as a reward for taking that risk.

Last week the railway rolling stock was sold for about half its value—some of it to a Japanese bank—so that we can rent it back again. Do we honestly believe that Japanese banks are interested in providing an efficient, effective and reasonable transport system for the British people, any more than they are interested in providing a decent health care service?

In addition, as a result of the PFI there have been considerable delays in health service building. Can the Minister tell us what delays have occurred as a result of the PFI? What guarantees can he give that the Queen Elizabeth hospital will be ready in time for my constituents in Woolwich, Plumstead, Abbey Wood and Thamesmead and the neighbouring areas of Erith, Belvedere, Northumberland Heath, Greenwich, Eltham, Welling and Bexleyheath?

The entire private finance initiative is a financial con trick. It is not cheaper at the end of the day and it is not only left-wing politicians who say so. Peter Puplett, the former group economist at Tarmac, wrote in *The Daily Telegraph*:

"The initiative will cost taxpayers much more in the long term than the traditional system of paying for public investment, either out of current tax revenues or from borrowing."

The *Economist* commented that it will give the Government an opportunity

"for creative accounting designed to disguise their spending commitments."

I would like to refer briefly to mental health care in London. I am only too aware of the inappropriateness of hospital care for many patients who should be cared for and treated in the community. On the other hand, I am also painfully aware of those people who urgently need hospital provision—often short-term in a crisis—when no bed is available. Bed occupancy figures in my area show occupancy levels in excess of 120 per cent. It can take a consultant psychiatrist 36 hours to find an emergency bed. I represent a constituency in south-east London where patients sometimes have to be placed as far away as Woking or Oxford, some in expensive private hospitals at NHS expense.

Coupled with the inadequate provision of emergency beds is the appallingly low level of community support services. Patients are placed on a supervision register on discharge because it is feared that without support they could be a danger to themselves and others. Yet in the North Thames region, fewer than one in 10 of those discharged in the first quarter of this year have been seen even once a month by community psychiatric staff. There is a wide chasm between the rhetoric of community care and the grim reality. There can be no case for closure of psychiatric beds until effective community care provision is in place.

I referred earlier to the private finance initiative. I referred to the need for openness in government and for disclosure. I belong to a union that represents people who work in the national health service. Those people have a vested interest in the national health service, not only as it is their employer, but because they use it.

Who will benefit from the private finance initiative? Already construction companies such as McAlpine and Tarmac are forming consortia with private health care companies. It should not go unnoticed that McAlpine and Tarmac between them contributed £1 million to Conservative party funds. That is the sleaze, that is the corruption and that is the distortion and we ought to bring it to an end.

1.3 pm

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): I listened with some interest to the speech of the hon. Member for Woolwich (Mr. Austin-Walker). I congratulate him on declaring an interest at the beginning of his speech. When he signed an amendment to the Gracious Speech about trade union rights, he did not, as a sponsored trade union Member, think it right to declare that interest.

Mr. Austin-Walker: I said at the outset that I had consulted the Table Office and registered that interest. It

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will appear when the motion is printed next and before the vote takes place. I made that abundantly clear at the start of the debate.

Mr. Marshall: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman has now explained himself. When I raised the matter on a point of order yesterday afternoon, none of the sponsored trade union Members who signed an amendment dealing with trade union rights had declared that interest. We smoked out two yesterday afternoon, we have now smoked out a third and there are some more to be smoked out.

I was surprised by the hon. Gentleman's attitude towards the PFI. He asked who would benefit from it. As a London Member, I can tell him that hundreds of thousands of our fellow citizens in the capital will benefit because the largest project under the PFI is the provision of new trains for the Northern line. As he should know, by the middle of next year there will be a significant number of new trains, provided under the PFI, taking Londoners to work on the Northern line. As a London Member, he should welcome that rather than criticise the PFI.

Mr. Spearing: Japanese owned.

Mr. Marshall: The owner is not Japanese—it is GEC, a good British company that provides hundreds of thousands of jobs, is a major British exporter, and is headed by Lord Prior.

The PFI succeeded in increasing the level of investment in London Underground, with the result that the Northern line will undergo a £1 billion modernisation project. Surely Labour Members should welcome that, not criticise it.

The debate shows that the Opposition do not understand what the PFI is about. It is not about Japanese companies running the NHS; it is about companies providing the property in which the NHS can provide care for patients. One does not need to be the property owner in order to run the hospital. Some of the greatest retailing companies do not own the shops from which they trade. Labour Members should come with me to Brent Cross in my constituency, where companies such as Marks and Spencer and Boots provide an excellent service from shops that they do not own, but rent. So will it be with the PFI. Someone will own the hospital and the local authority will use it to continue to provide a first-rate service.

Mr. Spearing: Surely under a national health service the people own the hospitals.

Mr. Marshall: It is a question not of who owns the hospital, but of who provides the service, whether it is a good service and whether it is free at the point of consumption. When a patient goes into the operating theatre, the last question he wants to ask the surgeon or anaesthetist is, "Who owns the theatre?" He wants the best possible treatment, as speedily as possible, with excellent after care.

The success of the Government's health policies is shown in a document from Healthcare Financial Management Associates which was reported in today's press. It shows that between 1988-89 and 1992-93 there was an increase of 500,000—8.6 per cent.—in the number of patients treated. The interesting point is that that increase occurred at a time when the number of NHS beds had been reduced by 18.4 per cent. The statistics confirm that the number of people being treated can be increased despite a decrease in the number of beds. Indeed, the figures relate only to the period 1992-93. Since then, the Government's NHS reforms have further increased the number of patients being treated.

I listened with amazement to the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody), who spoke about a deterioration in health care. In fact, the statistics for the number of patients being treated, the length of time people wait for treatment and the nature of treatments under the NHS all show that the health service that she described is not one that the vast majority of patients would recognise. They have experienced the new treatments, the reduction in waiting times and the increase in the number of people being treated.

When I did a survey of my constituents, I included two questions. The first was, "Have you recently been treated by the NHS?" Everyone who responded yes to the first question was asked to move on to the second question, which was whether the treatment was good or very good or whether he had any other comment to make. Everyone who commented on the treatment received under the NHS said that it was excellent. Everyone was thoroughly satisfied with the service. It ill behoves Members to spend their time denigrating the quality of treatment given by dedicated NHS staff. The service is first rate, and the vast majority of those who go into hospital would confirm that.

I am amazed by the Labour party's attitude to general practitioner fundholding. Labour Members talk about a two-tier service and fail to recognise that fundholders are giving their patients a better service than they received four or five years ago. I would expect most Members to say, "I welcome this improvement for my constituents." That is not the Labour party's approach. Instead, Labour Members complain that their constituents are getting a better service through fundholders than before. That sums up the Labour party when it comes to the health service.

What has the Labour party to offer the health service? First, it would burden the health service with additional costs. It would introduce a national minimum wage. It is still at an unspecified level, but it would no doubt mean that the NHS would have to pay more in wages than at present. Given the Labour party's attitude to charges, there is no doubt that it would deprive the NHS of some revenue in future. Labour's future for the NHS is higher costs and less revenue through charges. We are told by the shadow Treasury team that there is no commitment to spend extra money. There is nothing in Labour's prescription for the NHS that will do anything to shorten waiting lists, to increase the availability of hospital beds or to provide an improved service for patients. It presents a dishonest prospectus when it criticises the Government. Labour does not have a penny more to spend, but at the same time it has additional costs to impose. It will, as I have said, deprive the NHS of revenue.

I congratulate my right hon. and hon. Friends on the consequences of the reforms that have led to an improvement in the quality of service within the NHS. There are, however, one or two issues that I wish briefly to raise.

My right hon. and hon. Friends will, I am sure, have read early-day motion 3, which has 238 signatures. Some years ago, the Government decided, rightly in my view, that they should give help to haemophiliacs infected with HIV. I believe that it is equally right to give assistance to those who have been infected with hepatitis C. Some 600 or 700 of those people will develop sclerosis of the liver. When they do, they know that they have limited life expectancy. I ask the Government to reconsider the problem. If they were to limit assistance to those individuals who developed sclerosis of the liver, they would have to compensate about 600 or 700. They would do that over a number of years. The cost to the Exchequer would probably be about £40 million, no more. The compensation would not be very expensive and morally it would be right.

I welcome the determination of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to listen to public opinion before determining what he will do about future hospital closure programmes. Sometimes we have gone for the technically very advanced when many local communities would have much preferred their local hospital to remain. I support many of the points made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Brent, North (Sir R. Boyson).

My hon. Friend the Member for Finchley (Mr. Booth) talked about preserved rights for the small group of relatively elderly people who were in homes before community care came into effect. Currently, we have seen threats to some of them: they would get assistance only if they were moved from one home to another. It seems quite wrong to threaten to move a lady or gentleman of 75, 80, 85 or 90 to another home before giving assistance under the community care policies. Those elderly people have all helped themselves until their funds ran out. I do not think that the Government should look at that problem in quite the way in which they have.

I am pleased to see that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security will be winding up the debate, because there are two issues about which I feel strongly in respect of the social security budget. The first is the level of housing benefit, which is a rapidly rising cost that distorts the housing market, forces up rents in the private sector and acts as a severe disincentive to those who receive it ever to get off benefit. The second problem is the size of the bill for single-parent families. It is currently just under £10 billion. Our noble Friend Lord Lawson once talked about the need for fiscal neutrality. I believe that there should be neutrality between families and one-parent families, but our benefit and tax systems do not do that at the moment, and there is a perverse incentive for single-parenthood rather than for married couples. I hope that my right hon. Friend may in a few days' time be able to give us some knowledge about some of the single-parent benefits. There is a strong case for saying that in the future single parents should be deprived of some of those benefits. There is an equally strong case for freezing them for existing recipients.

Strong social security and health measures depend on a strong economy. We must emphasise the way in which the Government have managed to transform whole rafts of British industry, as my hon. Friend the Member for Finchley said, by privatising sectors of the economy, which has led to vast increases in productivity, huge increases in investment and a much better quality of service for the customer. Industries such as BT, British Airways or British Steel have all been transformed since they came into the private sector and are no longer the subject of state subsidies and state intervention. Some of us can remember the quality of service that we had from BT in the early 1980s. In those days, most payphones—two thirds—did not work. Today, there are many more payphones and they actually work. Today, the cost of telephone calls is dramatically lower than it was at the beginning of the 1980s. Industry has become much more profitable and contributes much more to the Exchequer. By improving the basic infrastructure of industry, telecommunications, steel and so on, we have helped to encourage other companies to come into this country.

I am glad that the Gracious Speech gives encouragement to grant-maintained schools, because the first such school in London was Hendon school, in my constituency. The second was Queen Elizabeth's boys school in the constituency of my right hon. Friend the Member for South Norfolk (Mr. MacGregor). I remember taking him to Hendon school. After he had gone around it, he met some of the teachers. One of them came up to him and said, "Mr. MacGregor, I am a member of the Labour party." One wondered what would happen next. He then said, "But the best thing that happened to this school was that it became grant-maintained." When Hendon school was under local authority control, it was severely under-subscribed. Today, it is heavily oversubscribed. I am glad that it has become one of the first language academies in the country.

I shall refer briefly to the proposed asylum Bill. This country has had a very long history of providing a haven for victims of persecution, be they the Huguenot refugees or those who came to this country in the late 1930s under the "kinder" transport scheme from Germany and elsewhere. Many of my constituents came to Britain in 1938 and 1939 as refugees from Nazi persecution. Obviously, they are entirely sympathetic to genuine refugees; but, as all of us know from our constituency cases, the current arrangements are being abused.

I shall always remember a telephone call that I received on a Saturday in February this year. My children told me, "Father, it is Downing street on the line." They thought that something was going to happen. In fact, Downing street was on the line asking whether I would take a telephone call from a firm of solicitors. The firm of solicitors told me that a certain individual, who had been an illegal immigrant for some years, was due to be deported at 10 o'clock the following morning—but, I was told, a telephone call from me would save him.

When I made my telephone call, it did not have the effect that the solicitors had expected. The next morning I telephoned Heathrow again, and was told, "You may be interested to learn that he was due to fly out at 10 o'clock this morning, and that at 9.5 am—after a conversation with his solicitor—he applied for asylum." The clock started to tick all over again: that meant that that person would have a significantly longer period in the United Kingdom.

We must all have felt ashamed recently when it was divulged that some Algerians who had applied for political asylum were using the hospitality of the British people and the Department of Social Security, in the form of income support and housing benefit, to plan bombing raids in Paris. Hon. Members may have read in one of the leaders in last week's *Mail on Sunday* that that hateful organisation HUT, which seeks to foment hatred and racism on our university campuses, is another asylum

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seeker and is receiving income support and housing benefit from the British taxpayer. Only today, the press reports that President Mubarak of Egypt is complaining to the British Government that we are supporting opponents of his regime who are seeking asylum in this country and misusing our hospitality.

This is not a question of racism. Our immigration controls are being circumvented by individuals who come here as economic migrants. They frequently do not apply for asylum when they arrive. They may apply a month or two after their arrival; or—as in the examples that I have given—they may not apply until they are found out and told to go home.

It is, perhaps, significant that 95 per cent. of appeals launched by those who are refused asylum are turned down. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security is surely right to say that it is no longer proper for applicants to continue to receive income support and housing benefit while their appeals are being considered. Let us suppose that, by some mischance, my hon. Friend the Member for Chipping Barnet (Sir S. Chapman) applied for income support, and was turned down. While the appeal was being heard, he could not receive income support. Why do we put asylum seekers on a higher level than everyone else?

I believe that the Government's proposals are fair and right, and that they will be accepted by 99 per cent.—if not 99.9 per cent.—of people in this country.

1.23 pm

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): In the closing part of his speech, the hon. Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall) mentioned circumstances that may or may not be widespread. I, too, have occasionally encountered such cases. In some instances, asylum has not been granted, and people have returned to a certain country that I will not name. The Foreign Office can give me no guarantee that they have not subsequently been killed.

I agree with the hon. Gentleman that this is an important matter. It is so important that I hope that he will join me and his hon. Friend the Member for South Staffordshire (Sir P. Cormack) in the atmosphere that was introduced by the Prime Minister in an intervention on my right hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) on Wednesday that this matter should go to a Special Standing Committee or through a special Committee procedure. Without that, this important matter cannot be dealt with in the way that it should.

The hon. Member for Hendon, South spoke about a person going to hospital and not caring less who owned it when he was placed on the operating table. Of course that would be true at the time, but even the constituents of Hendon, South would not be too content if, for example, Barnet hospital, which we have heard about in the debate, or Edgware hospital, if it is saved, were paying rent for a building or land to some private company that had to make a profit. I think that we can leave the matter there.

I had an exchange with the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) about the increased involvement of the private sector in health care. The hon. Gentleman and I spoke about the Gracious Speech and the proposed legislation. The hon. Gentleman was a bit trusting because he and the Minister, who I am glad to see in his place, said that I was wrong. I hope that in replying for the Opposition, my hon. Friend the Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke) will mention that some sections in the legislation make it quite clear that the Government have in mind that "particular groups of people" may be paid by a local authority to purchase health care in the community. If that is done, the grant can be lower because another part of the document states that account may be taken of financial circumstances.

If the person concerned has the means to supplement the amount, perhaps to a higher sum to be paid to a private provider, there will be every inducement for him to do that. There might be an inducement for some of his relatives or friends to help with that supplement, especially if the service is more immediate than that which could be provided by the local authority, whose expenditure is capped. There is every reason to suppose that there will be an inducement not only for the payment to be made by the local authority following local demand, but also for an increase in private providers, and that means an increase in private contractors in the health service providing that community care. Perhaps the Minister or the Secretary of State for Social Services, who has just entered the Chamber and is in consultation with his hon. Friend, will deny that possibility. I shall win either way because if the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey and the Minister are right I shall be pleased. However, if I am right some people will get a nasty surprise.

I now turn to the wider issue of health service funding and how it is organised. I mentioned the basic principles in an intervention on the Secretary of State and later in an intervention on the hon. Member for Finchley (Mr. Booth). Appropriately enough, I made those interventions when we were debating contracts and competitive tendering. Quite clearly there is a problem about the amount to be spent on the NHS but we understand that, as a proportion of GNP, the figure is about half that of the United States of America. As the Secretary of State said in opening the debate, we spend the money very efficiently. So what is the problem? The problem of course is priorities. In *The Guardian* today, under the headline "Rationing in Third of NHS", an article makes accusations about what is coming up. The Secretary of State for Social Security may say that it is newspaper tittle-tattle, but he owes the House and public an explanation or a refutation, if he can make one, of that article. He will of course have been shown it by his officials and he may take the opportunity of refuting it, if he can.

Baroness Thatcher, the former right hon. Member for Finchley, in her famous White Paper, "Working for Patients", specifically introduced an element of commercial competition in the health service. At the time, I was most disturbed. I said that we were introducing care as a commodity. That is why I asked the Secretary of State for Health whether he believed that care was a negotiable and commercial commodity. If everyone, including the media, reads the record or if they were listening or watching, they will find that he did not answer the question. Once one introduces that element, one is in dire trouble.

At the time—I make no apologies for it—I issued a public challenge to any London Conservative Member to debate with me whether such a matter was against

Christian principle. I was not saying that it was against Christian faith: that is another matter. Many people agree with Christian principles, even if they do not agree with Christian faith and they have every right to do so. The point is, however, how can one estimate the amount of care that a person will need? One cannot do it like an enterprising firm in my constituency called Clutch King. It has all the clutches of every motor car and it will give a person a contract. One can estimate that, but when an elderly person goes into hospital, perhaps for a relatively simple operation, how much extra care can one estimate? One cannot do so. We therefore have that provider-purchaser relationship.

To keep in business, to prevent itself from becoming bankrupt and to prevent imposing changes in employment conditions on its staff, who are full of good will—I disregard the argument about whether it would be legal to change those conditions, although I understand that, under subcontracting, it will be—a hospital will be at financial risk. Is it Guy's hospital that has gone bankrupt?

What sort of a health service is it if health service workers know that their enterprise—at ward level, in the dispensary or in relation to a specialist service—is likely to be wiped out because of such competition? We suspect that that has happened in respect of the blood transfusion service. The Brentwood service, which serves hospitals in north-east London and Essex, will be wiped out. Did that happen for any reason other than the introduction of those inappropriate principles in the health service? That has not yet been sufficiently understood in the country or in the Government.

A third of the beds in the East London and City health authority are to be dispersed, abandoned and reduced—24 of them in a proposed transfer from St. Andrew's hospital in Bow to extensions at Newham General hospital. How can that be given the bed shortages that my hon. Friend the Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) mentioned? We know that the problem applies across London. How can that be? It seems mad. In addition, notifiable diseases and people's ages and demands are going up.

I know that all sorts of technique exists. We are told that technique projections speed treatment up, that people are going in and out of hospital quicker because of, for example, key-hole surgery, which is right, but let us always keep a surplus of beds and ensure that they are not required. That would be the right way to proceed, but commercial forces come into play and force the closure of beds.

The borough of Newham, which is the size of Derby, Nottingham or Leicester, has no secure accommodation. It is difficult to get people to certify when things go wrong. The pressures on people in east London are tremendous, so people go berserk and all sorts of things happen. My hon. Friend the Member for Woolwich (Mr. Austin-Walker) mentioned people who are a danger to others and themselves. A terrible murder was committed in Stratford.

I gave notice to the Secretary of State for Health, who is no longer here, that I would mention the law relating to the release from psychiatric hospitals of people who had been transferred from prison. My researches show that the law is defective in that matter. People leave psychiatric hospital when they have served their sentence and I can find no proper procedure whereby a definitive decision is taken about signing them out. I hope that the Minister can point to the relevant chapter and verse in the law, because I cannot find it. I cannot accept the findings of the Woodley panel in relation to that double murder, when one of my constituents murdered another because a person who should not have been in the community had been discharged.

St. Bartholomew's hospital, which is one of the greatest hospitals in the world, has been dispersed. How does that conserve our Christian tradition of a medical service, particularly as it serves people in a large built-up area? What will happen to a taxi driver who lives in Newham if he has a heart attack in that area in the future? Those pursuing that policy must answer that question.

I shall close my speech by injecting into the debate on the Queen's Speech a theme that has not been developed in the House before, but which no Conservative Member could refute. The national health service is a prime public service. Public service in this country and this House has been one of the great themes of this century. Indeed, it is one of the great things about Britain and our community. In the past 10 years, however, a difference of opinion has emerged on the Government Benches. Some, such as the former Member for Wolverhampton, South-West, Mr. Enoch Powell, or the hon. Member for Ludlow (Mr. Gill), believe that public service is important on a narrow range of matters, while the one-nation Tories believe that it is important on a wide range of matters. But others do not believe in a public service at all. They get around that by saying that it is an intrusion by the state. They beat it back at every point and inject private enterprise and capital as far as they can. They have done it with gas and water, are doing it with the railway and are now trying to do it with the health service to an even greater extent.

The hon. Member for Hendon, South says that it does not matter who owns the hospitals as long as the service is all right. That is one example where privatisation has gone too far. It is undermining the traditional British concept of public service, which the Government, not only in this Queen's Speech but in Queen's Speeches over the past five or 10 years, have undermined. The public now sense that. I hope that, in this debate, I have shown how that has worked insidiously. It may be a clue to the basic differences that now exist on both sides of the House and the reason why the Government should go as soon as possible.

1.39 pm

Mr. Michael Stephen (Shoreham): Anyone reading the newspapers these days, or listening to Labour or Liberal spokesmen, would think that the Conservative party has destroyed the national health service. The reality is the exact opposite. The national health service has been one of the greatest successes of this Conservative Government and its predecessors over the past 16 years.

Today, we treat more patients than ever before, to a higher standard than ever before, and waiting times are now lower than ever before. If we compare that record with the position 16 years ago, what did we see then? Nurses' pay was allowed, by the Labour Government, to fall below the rate of inflation. The hospital building programme was abandoned. Cancer patients were unable to enter hospitals because of picket lines by trade unionists outside. So well did the Labour Government

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look after pensioners that they could not even find the money to pay their Christmas bonus for two years running.

The number of beds is often used by those who do not really understand the health service as an index of success or failure. Paradoxically, the better the health service gets, the fewer the beds we need, for a variety of reasons, and I shall mention one or two. The pharmaceutical companies round the world have developed wonderful new drugs, and that means that conditions that would, in the past, have led to hospital in-patient treatment no longer require any hospital treatment at all. Technical developments have meant that surgeons are able to deal with people as day cases when, in the old days, they would have been admitted for a week or more to hospital. The introduction of GP fundholding has meant that more surgical and medical procedures are carried out in GPs' surgeries close to where patients live, so that they do not have to go into hospital.

The Opposition suggest that there should be empty beds, just in case. Of course, any sensible hospital manager would try to plan so that he has enough beds for normal demand, but there will always be peak demand. If there are enough empty beds to meet peak demand that occurs once in a blue moon, the money tied up keeping those beds empty is wasted, and could otherwise be spent on patient care. That is a matter of judgment for hospital administrators and it is more an art than a science.

Hospital administrators are much derided by the Opposition. I happen to think that the administration of a multi-million pound service should be done by administrators. In the old days, administration was done by doctors and nurses, some of whom were good at administration and some of whom were not. What the Government have done is to decide that administrators should be employed to administer.

In the old days, some extraordinary things happened because of lack of good administration. A friend of mine, who is a surgeon, told me that he operated for only a small proportion of the time that he could, because the administration did not put the people on the operating table. Again, a constituent came to my surgery to say that his mother had died in hospital two years before, yet incontinence pads were still arriving. The family had told the hospital that the old lady was dead, but that made no difference. The family were using the incontinence pads for loft insulation. That was the kind of waste that happened when hospitals were not properly administered.

The number of administrators, about which the Labour party talks so often, is frankly irrelevant. What matters is the number of patients that we are treating; the standards to which we are treating them; and the time that they have to wait. It does not matter how many administrators there are—the bottom line is patient care.

I do not have the honour to represent a London constituency, but I am aware of the standards of excellence that exist in some London hospitals. I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health is determined to see that those centres of excellence are not broken up. The people concerned may move to different buildings—that does not matter all that much. What matters is that the medical teams and centres of excellence remain able to do their jobs.

I am glad that resources have been shifted out of the capital down to my county of West Sussex. We have been receiving many millions of pounds in extra funding for the past three years, and we shall soon be up to the capitation target that we should have reached a long time ago.

I congratulate the Secretary of State and his predecessor on the £41 million that has been made available for building an almost completely new hospital in Worthing to serve my constituents. I also congratulate the West Sussex district health authority and the FHSA for the tremendous work that has been done for my constituents over the past year. They have brought down waiting times dramatically and improved the quality of care enormously.

Every constituent to whom I have talked, who has had experience of the NHS, has nothing but praise for the service. The only people who criticise it are people who read the misleading articles in the newspapers and listen to Liberal and Labour Members.

Hurstwood Park in Sussex is a centre of excellence in neurology. Experts say that it is no longer suitable for that highly technical branch of medicine, and perhaps some changes will be necessary. However, I hope that my right hon. Friend will bear in mind the wish of all the people of West Sussex that there should remain easily accessible to us not only neurology services but neurosurgery too.

We must always ensure that anyone who wishes to have an NHS dentist can have one. I am a little concerned about the activities of some of the private health insurance people, who are telling dentists that if they persuade their patients to take out private policies the dentists will get more money. I ask my right hon. Friend to keep an eye on the activities of such companies, and to ensure that if no NHS dentist is available in a locality, the FHSA employs one so that all our constituents can get NHS dental treatment.

As for mental illness, of course there should be places to accommodate all those persons who are so mentally ill that they could be a danger to their fellow citizens. I know that the Government take that responsibility seriously. However, one of the problems is that we cannot lock somebody up unless a psychiatrist will certify that that is necessary for the protection of that person or the public. All too often problems arise because psychiatrists are not willing so to certify.

GP fundholders have made a tremendous difference to the delivery of NHS care to our constituents, because they have turned the health service into a primary care led system—a system led by those who are closest to the patients, have the most direct contact with them and understand their needs and requirements best.

The flexibility accorded to GP fundholders also means that they have been able to provide services such as physiotherapy and chiropody for patients in their surgeries, rather than patients having to wait and go to a hospital.

I have the honour to represent a constituency containing many people over retirement age. It is absolutely essential that, whatever a person's age, free NHS care both in hospital and through the GP should be available. I know that the Government are committed to providing those services.

However, although the needs of some people who are very old but who do not need in-patient treatment in hospital could be met by residential care outside hospital, many cannot afford to pay for such care. It is important that the Government do everything that they can to give the best possible help so that people can provide throughout their lives for meeting the costs of residential care in their old age.

It is not, and never should be, necessary for someone to sell the family home to pay for his residential care if his spouse still needs to live in it. If a house is sold voluntarily it should never be, and is not, necessary for the remaining spouse to find himself or herself with nowhere to live. Only the surplus after the remaining spouse has been properly accommodated should be used to pay for the care of the person who has had to go into residential care.

I have been in the House for three and a half years and I have listened to Labour and Liberal Democrat Members in debates on a wide range of subjects. I have been disappointed with what I have heard. I thought there might be some truth in the suggestion that Labour had changed, but that is not so. I believe that the leader of the Labour party might have changed—or wishes the public to think that he has changed—but I have no doubt that most of his right hon. and hon. Friends, on whose votes he will rely if ever he is to form and sustain a Government, do not agree with him. They are honest men and women; they are socialists through and through, and believe the Labour party to be a socialist party. They want nothing of the quasi-Conservative policies that the leader of the Labour party is peddling in order to get elected at the next general election.

I listened to the speech of the Leader of the Opposition on Wednesday. During the half hour or so that he spoke I waited to hear a single constructive proposal as to how he and a future Labour Government, were we ever unfortunate enough to have one, would deal with the problems that the Labour party is so ready to identify and of which we are all, in any event, aware. But I listened in vain. Apart from a few vague phrases which were so general as to be meaningless, his speech contained no constructive proposals.

The British people cannot have confidence that the Labour party has any idea of how to deal with the problems of tomorrow any more than it knew how to deal with the problems of more than 16 years ago which resulted in the terrible mess that the country was in when we took office in 1979. I hope that when the British people come to make their decision, they will realise the true character of the Labour party, will not support the Labour party and will give the Conservative Government another opportunity to build on the tremendous success that they have achieved over the past 16 years.

1.51 pm

Mr. Tom Clarke (Monklands, West): This has been an interesting debate; it would have been all the more interesting and informative if right hon. and hon. Members had adhered to our informal agreement. We might then have heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Rutherglen (Mr. McAvoy), who is now unlikely to catch your eye, Madam Deputy Speaker.

In a speech that lasted for one minute less than one hour, the Secretary of State for Health did not seem to give us a statement on the health service, his responsibilities and the Queen's Speech, but a screen test for a future role as Leader of the Opposition. I am sorry to have to say this to him, but I have some experience of the film industry and I do not think that he did very well. But he need not worry too much about that as I do not think that he has much competition.

The Secretary of State spoke about my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition producing a mouse of a speech, which was particularly odd when considered in the light of the central issue of direct payments, which is, I understand, the flagship of the Government's care in the community policy. What we heard from the Secretary of State was a mere squeak—it was quite inadequate.

Care in the community is an extremely important issue. If we wish to separate rhetoric from reality we need look no further than the speeches of my hon. Friends the Members for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody), for Woolwich (Mr. Austin-Walker) and for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing). We heard nothing from the Government to confirm the crisis that exists in care in the community; Conservative Members sit back almost as though pretending that the crisis does not exist. It is not as though the Government were not warned: they were warned years ago by the National Audit Office. That warning led to the Griffiths report and, ultimately, to the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990. Sir Roy Griffiths said then, and his view is just as applicable now, that given the chaos in community care, the one alternative not open to a responsive Government was to do nothing, which seems to be precisely what the Government have done.

The Secretary of State for Social Security need not listen to me. I occasionally see him and his right hon. and hon. Friends in sociable settings when we meet distinguished organisations and voluntary bodies. Those people know what is going on in the field and I refer the Secretary of State to some of their views about community care.

Scope recently produced a document entitled "Disabled in Britain: Counting on Community Care", in which it discussed the idea of charging for services. It said that local authorities have always been able to charge for domiciliary services but that, until recently, few did so. However, under community care, central Government allocates money to local authorities on the assumption that 9 per cent. of the revenue for the services will be raised through charges to service users. If the shortfall is not met through charges, the guidance advises local authorities to forgo that service provision. According to Scope, consequently many social services departments have either been forced to start charging for services they previously provided free or have increased existing charges.

A survey tells us that 17 per cent. of disabled respondents say that they have had to refuse a service because they could not afford to pay for it and that 18 per cent. have had to start paying for a service that they had previously received free of charge. If that is not lurching to the right, I do not know what is.

We can also refer to the views of distinguished bodies such as the Royal College of Psychiatrists. Its report revealed that, since the introduction of care in the community, there have been 34 killings by seriously mentally ill patients in contact with psychiatric services. The Zito trust—which was founded in the name of

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Jonathan Zito, the musician who was murdered on the London Underground—puts the figure at one killing a month. In other words, a murder is likely to be committed every month by a known patient who has been referred to doctors previously on the grounds of mental illness. We are invited to ignore that reality of community care in Britain.

Mr. Stephen: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Clarke: Yes, but the hon. Gentleman should bear in mind the fact that his speech cut into the Minister's time and he is about to do that again.

Mr. Lilley: That is my problem, not the hon. Gentleman's.

Mr. Stephen: How many of the patients to which the hon. Gentleman has referred were certified by psychiatrists as needing to be locked up for the protection of the public?

Mr. Clarke: I would be delighted to debate the matter if time allowed. I look forward to such a debate. As the Minister observed that the time considerations are his problem and not mine, he should not be too surprised if he finds that he can speak for only a few minutes.

The severely mentally ill are far more likely to do harm to themselves than to others. If that fact is not crucial to community care, what is? The National Schizophrenia Fellowship published a report last month highlighting the number of suicides among people suffering from schizophrenia. The report suggested that one in 10 schizophrenics commits suicide, and it admits that its methodology has probably underestimated the figure. There are about 250,000 schizophrenics in the United Kingdom.

They are not the views of a Labour party that is behaving irresponsibly—although we take them on board—they are the views of responsible organisations and responsible people. Bharat Mehta, the chief executive of the NSF, said:

> "Independent studies show that suicide rates are highest in the first month after discharge from hospital. Currently, people are being discharged too soon before adequate preparations for living in the community can be made".

In its 1992 paper "Health of the Nation", the Department of Health said that the Government had set a target of a 33 per cent. reduction in the suicide rate among people with severe mental illness. Two years later, in its follow-up paper entitled "Fit for the Future", the Department of Health admitted that it had been unable to report any findings because no definition of "severe mental illness" had been agreed.

There has also been an increase in violence, particularly towards social workers and GPs. Sadly, a doctor was murdered this year in Airdrie, the town next to my constituency. They are not isolated incidents. The Government do not seem to realise what is happening. They publish polished documents and spend money on advertising which is a world apart from the reality that I am now seeking to address. What is their view on the fact that 85 per cent. of people with learning difficulties live in the community and are provided with very little care?

On disability, a few weeks ago we debated a quarter of a century of the important Act that my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris)—the Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act 1970—took through the House. That Act and the Disabled Persons (Services, Consultation and Representation) Act 1986 that I piloted through the House are not fully implemented. May I say to the hon. Member for Shoreham (Mr. Stephen) that if the section of the 1986 Act had been fully implemented and assessments made before people left psychiatric hospitals, the problem that he identified would not have occurred.

Mr. Lilley: What does the hon. Gentleman propose should be done to tackle the problem of violence that he identifies and I believe greatly exaggerates? As, on Second Reading, the Labour party opposed the measures that we introduced to provide supervised treatment of patients in the community, what does he now propose in addition to them?

Mr. Clarke: I am not surprised that the Secretary of State completely distorted what I said. He did not appear to realise that I was quoting the views of professional bodies, organisations and individuals working in community care. I did not submit those views, although I now endorse them. It would be an insensitive Secretary of State who rejected those views with such speed.

The right hon. Gentleman asked what we proposed to do. We shall not have to wait very long to be in government, but I shall tell him what he ought to do as we are debating his Government's Queen's Speech. He should tell us when the so-called Disability Discrimination Act 1995 will be implemented. He should tell us when the Government will implement the two earlier Acts to which I referred. Particularly in view of the problem of carers, which does not influence the Secretary of State one iota, he should tell us something about yesterday's excellent publication—he might challenge it until I tell him that the Department of Health made a considerable contribution to its production and I congratulate Mr. Roger Tyrell on that—"Stronger Links", which dealt with the need for caring for children who are disabled. I challenge the Secretary of State to tell us what he proposes to do about that document as the facts are known to his Department.

What about problems of children with disability? The health service management unit report published in March stated that up to 40,000 young carers in the United Kingdom are aged between 11 and 18. More than half of them live with a lone parent and almost half that number have mental problems. The Secretary of State should address those issues if he proposes to deal with the problem at all.

If the Government's care in the community policy is as successful as we are told, before we finish debating the Queen's Speech next week can the Secretary of State or the Home Secretary explain why there is still an enormous problem of mentally ill patients in prison? Last year we were told that the figure was 19.2 per cent. The Minister has not updated the figures today. I challenge him to do so and to produce the report that Professor John Gunn has already delivered to his Department which shows that one third of remand prisoners have a medically diagnosed mental disorder. I challenge him too to tell me whether in his speech or any other speech to the Conservative party conference, when Ministers crowed about law and order,

they explained the real problems in Britain's prisons and the additional problems being created by their policy of care in the community.

Mr. John Marshall *rose—*

Mr. Clarke: I am not giving way because I want to be fair to the Secretary of State and give him time to respond to the debate.

I challenge the Government to do what the Opposition will do when we are in Government, which is to produce a plain person's guide to the various Acts relevant to disability and care in the community. That should not be too difficult; after all, shortly after the Secretary of State left his previous post at the Treasury last year, and after the disgraceful scenes in this House when the disability Bills were being debated, the Government found £1 million for their propaganda to persuade people that they were sympathetic to disability and care in the community issues. Of that £1 million, only a miserable £2,000 was spent on making their propaganda available to people with hearing impairments or unable to read, for whatever reason.

The money is there and I again challenge the Government to produce a plain person's guide. If they did it as well as the document dealing with young carers was done, it would be a welcome but considerable departure from the Department's approach to these important matters.

I also invite the Secretary of State to spend a little more time going around the country talking to organisations of and for disabled people and of and for carers. Above all, he should talk to those individuals and families for whom the Government's care in the community policy has been a disastrous failure. Within those groups he should talk to the young disabled people who leave school at 19. It is a traumatic time for them, their parents and their communities. Sadly, there is no Government strategy to deal with all those serious problems.

If there was a strategy for joint planning, such as that included in my 1986 Act, the people of England, Scotland and Wales would be far better served. The health authorities would be working with social services and social work departments and with patients and their advocates. Once again, people leaving hospitals on the basis of assessments would know that their future was secure and that they would not be sleeping on the streets.

The Minister dealing with disability matters a few months ago is now the Secretary of State for Wales. When I went to Wales I was appalled to be told that best practice is being discontinued to the point where one group of people with learning difficulties were told that they would be placed in homes in the community, but were then profoundly disappointed when they were simply put on a bus and sent elsewhere.

I want to conclude with the important issue of direct payments. We welcome the principle, but it must not go the way of community care. For the Government to raise the expectations of disabled people and then to disappoint them by failing to deliver was bad enough the first time—to do so again would be inexcusable. If, as the chairman of the Conservative party has said, it is necessary to separate rhetoric from reality, that could not be more true than for this issue.

So far, the Government have said little about what the words in the Bill actually mean. It was published only at 7 o'clock this morning, when my hon. Friend the Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) was already in the BBC studios. There are a number of areas of specific concern on which the Government have not yet told us their thinking.

First, the then Secretary of State for Health said last year that direct payments would be limited to those able and willing to manage their care. What does that mean? Why is that not made clear in the Bill? The Government have become fond of putting as little as possible in a Bill, keeping back most of the important details and producing them from behind closed doors as regulations. Is the Bill another example of that? It is not a trivial matter. If the Government intend to make a distinction between those disabled people who are willing and able to manage their care and those who are not, we need to know how that distinction is to be drawn. I hope that we are not about to consider a measure that will introduce a new form of discrimination between one group of disabled people and another. It would seem that provision will be made for disabled people only if they can show a lesser degree of disability.

I have in mind the large group of people with learning disabilities. Those who attended the Mencap conference at Blackpool last week would as well. In drafting the Bill and defining who will be eligible to receive direct payments, let us have an assurance from the Government that the concept of able and willing will not be so defined as to exclude all those with learning disabilities. If Ministers intend to draft regulations in a way that discriminates against those people, let me remind them that many of the beneficiaries of independent living funds that are made available from central Government resources are people with learning disabilities.

Secondly, what of access to direct payments for frail elderly people? There is concern among those consulted by Ministers that it is intended to make direct payments available only to those aged under 65. In February, a Law Commission report on mental incapacity strongly recommended that there should be a presumption against lack of capacity. In other words, it recommended that people should be presumed capable unless shown otherwise on the available evidence. That approach should apply across the board. If direct payments are to liberate those with disabilities, there should be no blanket presumption of incapacity discrimination based on type of disability or on age. It should be open to all those people who believe that they are able or willing to manage their own care to seek direct payments to allow them to do so. There should be no presumption against them in advance of their applications being made.

Thirdly, let us consider the discretionary nature of what is being proposed. I hope that Ministers will reflect on the anomaly that will arise if direct payments are available to a disabled person in one area but not in another. We need to know that direct payments will be provided fairly and with adequate support. It is equally important that disabled people are not denied the right to choose not to receive direct payments and instead to continue to use services provided by local authorities if they wish to do so. Direct payments must not be allowed to justify the withdrawal of services now provided for disabled people. Many disabled people would be appalled if it transpired that all the fine words about choice and control were only rhetoric to disguise the usual Tory agenda of privatisation, cuts and closures.

[Mr. Clarke]

Disabled people have heard fine words from the Government before. They have no more reason than anyone else to trust the Tories. We have heard much this week about smoking out the Opposition. A Government intent on waging trench warfare instead of governing are not a pretty sight, as we have seen today. It is not surprising that their promises of good intentions are not trusted. We intend to smoke out the Government. We know better than to judge the Government on what they promise on direct payments, as on other commitments. We shall judge them on what they deliver, and the people of Britain will have the final say.

2.14 pm

The Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Peter Lilley): The debate was opened with a powerful speech by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health, who effectively demolished the Opposition spokesman and made a well-reasoned case for what the Government are doing and intend to go on doing for the rest of this Parliament and into the next.

We heard interesting contributions from a number of my hon. Friends and from a number of Opposition Members. My right hon. Friend the Member for Brent, North (Sir R. Boyson) made a number of interesting and important points, not least about the value of assisted places, which, he said, involve taking pupils from poor homes to send them to the best schools, as a result of which 90 per cent. go on to university. That, believe it or not, is opposed by the Opposition.

Unfortunately, I missed my hon. Friend the Member for Chipping Barnet (Sir S. Chapman) making his return visit after his period in captivity, which usually takes place at this time of the year. We are delighted to have his contributions.

My hon. Friend the Member for Finchley (Mr. Booth) asked me to pay particular attention to the importance of autism and the treatment of it. I entirely endorse what he had to say. He will be glad to know that there are now double the number of speech and language therapists working than there were 10 years ago. The amount spent on the problem has trebled since 1979.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall) endorsed the reforms that we are making in housing benefit. He was right to emphasise the impact that the present system has on driving up rents, and the importance of making the changes that we are making.

My hon. Friend the Member for Shoreham (Mr. Stephen) pointed out the nonsense and absurdity of the Opposition's policy in suggesting that one can manage a health service without any management.

I enjoyed, as always, the contribution from the hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing), for whom I have a high regard—indeed, I share his principles—but I believe that his approach and that of my Government can equally be reconciled with the Christian principles that he mentioned. The test is: which does better in providing good care and service for the patient? We believe that the evidence is overwhelming that our reforms achieve better results than they would were we to stick with an unreformed national health service that is run in the interests of the unions, which seemed to be what he wished.

Mr. Spearing: I am grateful for the Secretary of State's remarks—we could continue this exchange elsewhere—but does he seriously think that health service personnel run the health service for themselves?

Mr. Lilley: We are determined that it should be run for the patients. If I misinterpreted the implications of his remarks as involving a greater role, obviously I withdraw the point that I made.

The best speech from the Opposition, including those from hon. Members on the Opposition Front Bench, was made by the hon. Member for Woolwich (Mr. Austin-Walker). Although I do not agree with him, what he said was thoughtful, reasoned and contained facts that ornament the Opposition's speeches. He also did the honourable thing and obeyed the new rules; he declared his interest and told us how much he receives. I do not need to know that, because I know that all Members of the House are honourable, but if we have new rules, they should be adhered to.

The hon. Gentleman's remarks were in marked contrast to those of his hon. Friend the Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) on the Opposition Front Bench, who has kindly returned, having not listened to the debate in which she made an opening speech. She gave one of her better speeches—judging purely by her previous speeches—although she was unable to reconstruct the edifice that my right hon. Friend had systematically demolished. She put the traditional Labour view, which, of course, coincides with the traditional trade union view, but she was marred by her refusal to abide by the new Nolan code rules that were agreed by the House. Those rules are explicit. Anyone taking part in a debate must declare any interest. It is no longer good enough just to have it in the Register of Members' Interests. Worse still, she refused, even when challenged, to say how much Unison pays to sponsor Labour's Front-Bench health team. I will give way to her now if she cares to make good that defect and obeys the rules of the House. The Opposition turned what should have been an issue designed to improve the standing of the House into a partisan attack on the Conservative party. Now that the rules are in place, they refuse to adhere to them. That is monstrous. Has the hon. Lady the endorsement of her party's leader? No Conservative Member would have the endorsement of the leader of our party if he or she did not adhere to the new rules.

Mr. Tom Clarke: I do not understand why the Secretary of State is agonising so much. Given the clear decision made by the House last week, we shall of course consult the Commissioner for Parliamentary Standards; we shall apply the guidelines, take advice and implement the Commissioner's recommendations fully and openly. Will the Secretary of State do the same—and will he tell us who is contributing to the Conservative party, including those with an interest in today's debate?

Mr. Lilley: Of course I shall do the same. I have no interest to declare, and I shall not try to hide under the temporary opt-out that the Labour party has given itself.

This is the first opportunity that I have had to speak opposite the hon. Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke), and I am delighted to do so. I know that he has

a long-standing and distinguished interest in disability issues. He is strongly opposed to discrimination against disabled people—

Mr. John Marshall: My right hon. Friend says that the hon. Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke) is strongly opposed to discrimination. Has he not heard of Monklands?

Mr. Tom Clarke: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. An inquiry is being held in Monklands at this moment, and the Secretary of State for Scotland appointed the reporter. It is outrageous that an hon. Member should intervene at this point, and I ask for your protection on behalf of the decent citizens of Monklands.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): I am not sure that the hon. Gentleman needs my protection.

Mr. Tom Clarke: The point is, Madam Deputy Speaker, that the hon. Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall), not for the first time—along with other Conservative Members—has criticised people in Monklands who have not the right of reply. That is disgraceful, and the hon. Gentleman ought to withdraw what he said.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I think that the point has been made. We must now return to the subject of the debate.

Mr. Lilley: I never left it, Madam Deputy Speaker.

I am glad that the hon. Member for Monklands, West is criticising his hon. Friend the Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook), who makes outrageous accusations relating to Conservative Members in connection with issues involved in the Scott inquiry, although that inquiry is under way. Does the hon. Gentleman believe that the rules applying to the inquiry in Monklands should also apply to the Scott inquiry?

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I have given a warning about returning to the subject of the debate; it applies equally to both sides of the House.

Mr. Lilley: I return to the subject of discrimination, of which the hon. Member for Monklands, West is a connoisseur.

Mr. Tom Clarke: You would know.

Mr. Lilley: I return to the subject of disability, in which regard I pay tribute to the hon. Gentleman's interests.

The fact is that the Government have enormously enhanced provision for the disabled. In one respect, disabled people were not properly catered for by the Beveridge arrangements that were introduced at the end of the war. We now spend five times as much as the last Labour Government did; we help six times as many disabled people with the cost of care, and we help eight times as many people with their mobility needs. With the independent living fund, we help severely disabled people to live at home. We have also delivered the Disability Discrimination Act. Whatever objections Opposition Members may have to the Act, they must recognise that it constitutes the biggest legislative advance for disabled people since the war.

We are now adding to that with new legislation that will allow some disabled people more choice and control over their lives—the Community Care (Direct Payments) Bill. The Bill has been widely welcomed among the lobbies representing disabled people, but it has been comprehensively attacked by Opposition Members today. Although the hon. Member for Monklands, West told us that he supported the principle, he seemed rather worried about whether the legislation would undermine the provision of services by local authorities. What it will do is give greater choice and opportunity to disabled people where local authorities use the powers that we give them. Of course we shall make sure that in defining those who are able and willing we genuinely meet the real meaning of those words and do not use them artificially to restrict those who should not be restricted.

It was suggested that anomalies may arise as a result of giving local authorities discretion. Of course it is inevitable that when discretion is allowed arrangements will not be the same throughout the country, but we are in the business of increasing local government discretion while Labour now seems to be opposed to it.

Fundamental to our debates and especially to my concerns as Secretary of State for Social Security is the battle against unemployment and the Government's strategy to continue to reduce it. That is central to our approach. We should all be able to agree on three matters. First, we should agree that unemployment, especially among the young, is a scourge that we should do all in our power to reduce. Secondly, we all want to see more people in work and fewer out of work whatever their age. Thirdly, we should all welcome the latest figures which show, using the common International Labour Organisation definition of unemployment, that in Britain a higher proportion of people are in work than in any comparable country in the European Community.

In Britain the number of those in work is substantially above the average. In the average EU country only 60 per cent. of people have jobs but 68 per cent. of people of working age in this country have jobs. For the first time, the number of people out of work in Britain is lower than in any major country in western Europe, including Germany. Our policies are working in tackling the greatest scourge facing modern industrial countries. We should be proud of that and ensure that the success is reinforced.

The contrast with other countries is even greater in the battle against unemployment among the young. It is far too high everywhere. In the United Kingdom more than 13 per cent. of our young people are without jobs but in France the figure is 27 per cent. and in Spain it is 41 per cent. I mention those two countries because they are the only two with a statutory minimum wage, and they apply the full provisions of the social chapter. I have a question for Opposition Front-Bench spokesmen. If the cause of higher unemployment in France and Spain is not the national minimum wage or the social chapter provisions, what is it?

Ms Harman: One of the big burdens on business and an enormous tax on jobs that will inhibit job growth is if more and more people have to take out private health insurance and expect their employers to pay. In America people cannot rely on public health care and have to have private health insurance. That is the biggest burden on employers there and it is the same in all other countries that do not have a national health service. Employers have

[Ms Harman]

to pay the social costs for their employees. The Secretary of State invited me to intervene and I have enlightened him.

Mr. Lilley: I asked the hon. Lady to say whether she has an answer to the simple question: why do the Opposition think that these measures would reduce unemployment in this country when they have increased it in the only countries where they have been applied? What other explanation do the Opposition have for that high unemployment? The hon. Lady has none.

Early this week in a speech to the CBI the Leader of the Opposition tried to set business men's minds at rest about the social chapter. He said that it was not a matter of concern for business men and he continued:

"The social chapter is not detailed legislation. It is a set of principles. Each piece of legislation will be judged on its merits. (I have no intention whatever of agreeing to anything and everything that emerges from the European Union)."

That is simply false. The social chapter of the Maastricht treaty is not just a list of principles: it is a transfer of the power to make decisions from this country to the European Community institutions. It means that, once we have transferred such power, decisions made by a sufficient majority of Ministers voting in Brussels would become the law of the land, even if the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair), the whole Government and every hon. Member voted against them. That is a fact. It cannot be denied. It was tacitly admitted by the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) in debate with me on the "Today" programme. We demand that the Leader of the Opposition comes back to the House, sets the record straight and ceases to try and mislead this country's business men, who, reading the article by Stanley Kalms in *The Times*, are not misled by what the right hon. Gentleman has said.

Today, in addition we should be discussing welfare state reform because that is one of the key issues—

It being half-past Two o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.

Debate to be resumed on Monday 20 November.

Barnsley Crown Prosecution Service

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Ottaway.]*

2.30 pm

Mr. Eric Illsley (Barnsley, Central): I am grateful for the opportunity of this short debate to raise issues relating to the Crown Prosecution Service's actions and to my constituency. In the past 12 months, I have become increasingly concerned about complaints that I have received from constituents who have been the victims of crime, but who have seen the case against the perpetrator of that crime dropped by the CPS. In some of the cases, the charges were dropped or not pursued before a court hearing and the victim was informed by a standard letter, either from the CPS or the police. In other cases, the victims have never been informed.

Many people not only in my constituency but throughout the country are alarmed at the continual increase in crime. Many victims of crime have lost faith in the police service, which they view as powerless to prevent the increases. It is becoming apparent, however, that many people are losing faith in the Crown Prosecution Service and in the criminal justice system as the CPS drops cases where the police have successfully caught and identified the culprit and brought charges.

Some of the letters that I have received in the past 12 months bear witness to some people's despair at the actions of the Crown Prosecution Service and to my constituents' loss of confidence in it. I shall quote from three of those letters to show my constituents' depth of feeling, one of whom writes:

"Because we are pensioners the CPS must think we do not deserve justice".

Another writes:

"I am a British citizen and up to now had complete faith in the British system of justice—my faith in the justice system has gone".

The final one writes:

"By now I am dissatisfied and have no faith in the legal system."

Those quotations are alarming and sad. It is depressing that people are losing their faith in the criminal justice system and the CPS.

It is apparent that the police force is becoming increasingly frustrated by the action—or inaction—of the Crown Prosecution Service because, after all, its hard work in detecting crime and in prosecuting criminals is thrown away by the CPS when cases are not pursued in court. The police are criticised by the public for not being able to identify criminals and for rising crime. When they do identify criminals, they are criticised again when the CPS drops a case. It appears that the police force is between the devil and the deep blue sea.

In some cases, the decision not to pursue a case is justified. The two main areas are set out in detail in the code of conduct for Crown prosecutors: lack of evidence and cases where a prosecution would not be in the public interest. Some cases are impossible to prove—for example, because no witnesses are available or because their attendance would involve tremendous expense. Unfortunately, I am becoming increasingly convinced that some cases are dropped because it is convenient for the

Crown Prosecution Service to do so, because of the cost to the public purse or because of an unwillingness to pursue a case in court unless a conviction is assured.

A case has been brought to my attention that concerns a defendant who was due to appear in court on the same day as he was due to face charges for earlier offences. The two sets of charges were brought together at one hearing. The defendant agreed to plead guilty to the original charges but informed his solicitor, who then informed the CPS, that he would plead not guilty to the latter charges. The latter charges were then dropped. It was thought by the Crown Prosecution Service that the earlier charges gave a full range of sentencing options.

I do not see how the earlier charges could have provided a full range of sentencing options in relation to the latter charges, as the magistrates were not aware of those charges because they had been dropped on that day. The defendant could be charged only with the original offence, and therefore could be sentenced only for that. Because the two sets of charges were combined on the same day, the defendant walked out of court scot-free of the latter charges. Had there been two distinct court hearing dates, by the time the second charges were brought and the court appearance made the defendant could have faced even more serious penalties—perhaps imprisonment—because of the earlier conviction. In the circumstances, however, he walked from court entirely free of the latter charges. I fear that the Crown Prosecution Service simply could not be bothered to pursue the latter charges.

I suspect that cases are also being dropped because it is too costly to pursue them through the courts. Whether they are of a complex or minor nature, the question arises whether the CPS should pursue them because of the cost involved.

Certainty of conviction is an issue that is beginning to worry me substantially. The code of practice states that the test on certainty is that a jury or bench of magistrates properly directed in accordance with the law is more likely than not to convict a defendant of the charges alleged. I fear that the Crown Prosecution Service is interpreting that definition to mean that it should pursue cases only if there is certainty of conviction.

Cases that pass the evidentiary and public interest tests, but where the evidence is finely balanced, are not pursued because there is no certainty of conviction. It is up to the magistrates or the jury to decide on the evidence and weigh up the pros and cons of a case. It is not for a jury or bench merely to concur with the certainties referred to it by the Crown Prosecution Service in cases where a conviction is assured. The idea of a criminal justice system is that a magistrate or jury has the right to judge each case on its merits.

I shall illustrate one or two of those points by reference to actual cases and to the code itself. I am unable to raise one case because of the sub judice rule, but the Solicitor-General is aware of the case and of my concern.

A constituent of mine, Mr. S. Doherty, was involved in the case, where two charges were brought. A man was charged with criminal damage and theft from Mr. Doherty's vehicle. The man had been arrested after being chased by a police constable at 4 o'clock in the morning. As luck would have it, the incident occurred less than a quarter of a mile from Barnsley police station and the police constable was on duty in the vicinity and was able to apprehend the defendant. The police constable was alerted by the alarm from Mr. Doherty's car or from his neighbour's car.

The culprit was caught in possession of stolen property from the vehicles and in possession of tools for breaking and entering. He was charged to appear in court on the same day as he was due to appear on other charges for driving with a forged instrument and driving without insurance. The defendant agreed to plead guilty to the charges of driving without documents and insurance, but not guilty to theft and criminal damage. The guilty plea was accepted and the theft and criminal damage charges were dropped. The Crown Prosecution Service says that the prosecutor decided that it was right for him to accept the guilty plea because he was aware that the magistrates had a full range of sentencing options. I do not agree. The court had not heard the charges of theft and criminal damage, because they had been dropped, and it could not pass a sentence to reflect those charges. The full range of sentencing options was available only in relation to the earlier charges.

The evidential and public interest tests were satisfied, but the reason given for dropping the theft and criminal damage charges was that

"the prosecutor was rightly conscious of the public interest in securing the defendant's disqualification from driving at the earliest opportunity."

However, I do not understand the public interest in disqualifying him from driving when he had been charged with theft and criminal damage. That is equivalent to saying that it is okay for the defendant to steal what he wants as long as he does not drive to do it. He was on foot when he was caught. How disqualification from driving has any relation to the theft charges is beyond me. Why was it in the public interest for the defendant to be merely disqualified for driving with a forged instrument—I presume, a forged driving licence—and with no insurance. It is beyond me that anyone can believe that a disqualification order for two years will stop that individual driving in defiance of the ban. He has walked away from court scot-free on the charges of theft and criminal damage because they were dropped.

What about the public interest in deterring theft? Car crime is as bad in Barnsley as anywhere else in the country. In Barnsley, car thieves are called the "twoc" squads—taking without the owner's consent. Young guys wearing full-face crash helmets steal vehicles solely for the purpose of racing against police cars. A constituent of mine stole the Home Secretary's car while he was visiting a police conference in Sheffield—that is how rife car theft is in my area. Paragraph 6.4(n) of the code states that

"the offence, although not serious in itself,"

can be classed as serious if it is "widespread in the area". My view is that car crime and theft from vehicles is widespread in my area. That factor should have been taken into account when the decision to drop the charges was made.

What about compensation for Mr. Doherty for the hundreds of pounds worth of damage to his vehicle and property? That was not even considered by the prosecutor when he took the decision in court. I believe that for reasons of convenience, cost and uncertainty, those charges were dropped, and no thought whatever was given to the victim of the crime. The defendant already had a court date for the charges of driving without insurance

[Mr. Eric Illsley]

and documents, but the magistrates were not aware of the theft charges and could sentence only on the earlier charges. So that chap has got away scot-free, which is disgraceful.

I shall briefly mention two other cases that have been brought to my attention. First, Mrs. Edith Clegg of Kendray was assaulted, but the case was not pursued; the individual concerned was not even cautioned. That was a weaker case than that involving Mr. Doherty, and it was dropped on the evidential criteria. None the less, it was another crime of violence not pursued by the Crown Prosecution Service—hence Mrs. Clegg's loss of confidence in the CPS.

Mr. Crossland intervened to try to stop another person assaulting a girlfriend. Unfortunately, the assailant turned on him, and beat him so severely that he was hospitalised. Despite the fact that there were witnesses—the offence took place in a public park—that case was dropped too.

Yet paragraph 6.4(b) of the code of practice refers to

"violence . . . during the commission of the offence",

and sub-paragraph (h) refers to someone's having "suffered personal attack". Those are given as reasons for a prosecution to be brought.

Finally, Mrs. Dunderdale of Royston made four separate inquiries about her case, which involved a dangerous dog. The dog's owner was to be prosecuted, but despite her many inquiries Mrs. Dunderdale was not informed about four different adjournments of the case. After about eight months, the case was dropped, yet Mrs. Dunderdale is still awaiting official confirmation that it is not to be continued.

The actions of the Crown Prosecution Service are demoralising the police and the public. I ask the Solicitor-General to consider a review of the code of practice to strengthen it or to give the CPS guidelines on interpretation, so as to allay some of the fears that I have mentioned. I hope that he will be able to reassure my constituents and me that the CPS is acting properly and in their interests, not in the interests of economy and convenience.

2.46 pm

The Solicitor-General (Sir Derek Spencer): I congratulate the hon. Member for Barnsley, Central (Mr. Illsley) on securing the debate, which raises an important matter for his constituents and for the public at large. It gives me the opportunity, which I intend to take, to explain in general terms how the Crown Prosecution Service approaches the decision to prosecute, after which I shall deal with some of the individual cases to which the hon. Gentleman has referred.

Since 1986, following the recommendations of the Philips royal commission, we have split the investigation of offences and their prosecution into two and allocated separate responsibility for the two processes. The police are responsible for investigating and charging; the Crown Prosecution Service is responsible for handling the prosecution.

In any case the decision to prosecute is a serious step. Fair and firm prosecution is essential to the maintenance of law and order, but in every case there are serious implications for all involved, especially for the victim and the defendant. Each case that the police send to the Crown Prosecution Service is reviewed by a Crown prosecutor to ensure that it meets the tests set out in "The Code for Crown Prosecutors"—the document to which the hon. Gentleman referred.

The hon. Gentleman is right to say that the code, 40,000 or 50,000 copies of which have been distributed to the various law enforcement agencies, contains two tests. The first is the evidential test and the second is the public interest test. The first one to be applied is the evidential test and, as the hon. Gentleman said, it means that a jury or bench of magistrates, properly directed in accordance with the law, must be more likely than not to convict the defendant of the charge alleged. By no stretch of the imagination can that test be converted into one of certainty. It means what it says. All lawyers in the Crown Prosecution Service are trained to apply it and the police know full well what the test is. The CPS in different parts of the country is engaged in training programmes to ensure that the test is applied by the police service.

The next test that has to be applied is that of public interest, which raises a variety of factors, many of which are set out in the code. In an ideal world it would be possible to identify the correct charge from the outset, but in practice it is often necessary to amend or add charges and even on occasion to withdraw proceedings completely. The most common cause for that is that the police are not always in full possession of the facts when they charge a defendant. Obviously, when the custody officer is in the custody suite deciding whether to prefer a charge, not as much will be known about the case as when, sometimes weeks after the event, the reviewing lawyer has the full file. It is to their credit that custody officers succeed in selecting the right charge in a high proportion of cases.

When the case comes to the CPS it is the first time that a qualified lawyer's mind is applied to it. If the hon. Gentleman considers for a moment, he will realise that it is no answer to say to a lawyer—who is bringing his professional judgment to bear on a case and who has said that there is no case—that an unqualified person, whether it be the victim, witnesses or even the police, does not think that the lawyer is right.

The crux of the matter—the division between responsibility for investigating and prosecuting—means that Parliament has allocated to the CPS, and to no one else, the exclusive responsibility for deciding whether cases are in a fit state to proceed. For the witnesses, the public, the defendants, and still less for the police, there is no point in allowing a case to proceed to its sure and certain demise in court when any lawyer can see that it is unsatisfactory. Such action would be a waste of everyone's time and an abuse of the procedures in court.

I shall remind the hon. Gentleman of the wise words of the Philips royal commission, which stated:

"A police officer who carries out an investigation, inevitably and properly, forms a view as to the guilt of the suspect. Having done so without any improper motive, he may be inclined to shut his mind to other evidence telling against the guilt of the suspect or to over-estimate the strength of the evidence he has assembled."

The hon. Gentleman may wish to keep that quotation in mind.

The idea that professionally qualified lawyers in the CPS do not care about their cases and are trying to save money is an affront. Such criticisms are insulting and abusive to them, especially when couched in general, vague terms.

The hon. Gentleman might like to have regard to the morale of the Crown Prosecution Service when it is subjected to such unjustified criticisms. Lawyers in the Crown Prosecution Service prosecute about 1.4 million cases in the magistrates court each year and there are complaints in only a tiny minority. It would be a very strange world if there were no complaints at all.

I turn now to the cases to which the hon. Gentleman referred. It is not usual to debate in public the decisions reached in individual criminal cases, especially when it has been decided not to proceed. It is usually unfair to suspects and witnesses to engage in such an activity because it tends to mean that they are tried at the bar of public opinion without the protection that is afforded by due process of law. However, the hon. Gentleman raised the cases, so I must deal with them.

The first case concerned the hon. Gentleman's constituent, Mr. Doherty. The defendant was charged, as a result of an offence involving Mr. Doherty's car, with stealing an inspection lamp valued at about £2. That was the sole charge preferred arising out of the incident. As the hon. Gentleman said, the defendant subsequently appeared in court on 18 July and the solicitor representing him offered to plead guilty to three offences of no insurance arising out of other facts and the offence of possessing a false instrument—a copy of a vehicle excise licence that the defendant knew or believed to be false, contrary to section 5(2) of the Forgery and Counterfeiting Act 1981.

The lawyer decided to accept the pleas because he judged that it would give the sentencing court a full range of options. In plain English, that means that it was open to the court to sentence the defendant—who had previous convictions—to a maximum of six months in prison on the charges to which he pleaded guilty. That is what we mean when we say that it gave rise to a full range of sentencing options. The defendant was fined £800, ordered to pay £50 costs and disqualified from driving for two years.

That was a difficult decision made under considerable pressure. I have read the correspondence between the hon. Gentleman and the Director of Public Prosecutions. I wished to discuss the case with her further, but, unfortunately, I have been unable to do so as she is absent from her office for two weeks. I can give the hon. Gentleman a categorical assurance that, on her return, we shall examine the matter further to see what lessons can be learned. I shall then write to the hon. Gentleman about that.

The hon. Gentleman raised a second case involving a Mrs. Clegg. In summary, the evidence revealed a complaint by Mrs. Clegg and a flat denial by the other party. Two witnesses to the incident were interviewed and they did not confirm Mrs. Clegg's account. Accordingly, the CPS discontinued the proceedings with the consent of the police.

The hon. Gentleman referred to two other cases, the first of which involved his constituent, Mr. Crossland, and an assault in a recreation ground—in many respects, it was very similar to the case involving Mrs. Clegg. The opposing parties gave two quite conflicting accounts and the CPS decided to discontinue the case—again with the consent of the police.

The case to which the hon. Gentleman referred involving a stolen car is sub judice, but the initial discontinuance had the consent of the police. In three out of the four cases there was no dispute between the police and the CPS. I believe that it is quite wrong for the hon. Gentleman to say that the police are disillusioned and demoralised by the judgments of the CPS in those and numerous other cases.

As I travel around the country, I meet police officers in police stations, administrative justice support units and so on. They are full of respect for the work of the Crown Prosecution Service. It is interesting to examine the level of discontinuance.

The motion having been made after half-past Two o'clock, and the debate having continued for half an hour, MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned accordingly at Three o'clock.

House of Commons

Monday 20 November 1995

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Association Football

1. **Mr. Betts:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what consideration she has given to the impact of the Bosman judgment on the future of association football in Britain. [480]

The Minister of State, Department of National Heritage (Mr. Iain Sproat): A final decision on the Bosman case has not yet been made by the European Court of Justice. I am monitoring the situation closely.

Mr. Betts: Does the Minister not recognise that the possibility of transfer fees and the transfer system ending in this country as a result of the Bosman judgment poses a real threat to many smaller league and non-league clubs that, without transfer fees, could go out of existence? I understand that, for some time, the Minister has been under pressure to take action from the Football Association. Will he set out precisely the Government's position, and say whether he is prepared to take the initiative on a Europewide basis, to ensure that the rights of individuals are protected and that transfer fees—without which they would go out of existence and the whole nature of the game in this country would be changed—continue to flow to smaller league and non-league clubs?

Mr. Sproat: The hon. Gentleman is right to say that this is a serious matter. However, so far we have heard only an opinion from the Advocate-General, not from the European Court of Justice—which is likely to reach its verdict next January or February. We shall see what that says. As to extending the European Union's competence to matters of sport in this country, that would not be a good idea.

Mr. Anthony Coombs: While acknowledging that only an opinion, not a judgment, has been given, I wish to add to the comments of the hon. Member for Sheffield, Attercliffe (Mr. Betts). Many smaller league clubs, especially Vauxhall Conference clubs, would not be viable were it not from the transfer fees that they can obtain by acting as a nursery for players. Transfer fees are immensely important for league and non-league football. If the Government would take cognisance of that fact, I am sure that those clubs would be most grateful.

Mr. Sproat: I know that my hon. Friend takes a close interest in the Vauxhall Conference. I saw Mr. Garth Crooks and Mr. Gordon Taylor last week, and on 29 November my right hon. Friend and I will be seeing representatives of the Football Association, the Football League and the Premier League. I am sure that the matter will be taken carefully into account at that meeting and at others.

Mr. Pendry: In view of the serious implications for British soccer were Bosman to be enacted, why did not the Government join the German, Italian, French, Danish and other Governments in making representations to the European Court in defence of our transfer system? To make amends, when the Minister next meets representatives of the Football Association, will he agree to join other European Union countries in pressing for football to be included as an activity of cultural importance under article 128, so that football-related matters are taken into account within that article?

Mr. Sproat: We did not go to the European Court of Justice because we think that it would be wrong to badger the court when it has not delivered its decision. When it has done so, we shall continue to monitor the matter closely. We are opposed to extending competence—and when the football authorities look closely at the possible consequences of extending EU competence to British sport, we think that they will agree.

National Lottery

2. **Sir David Knox:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will make a statement about the effect of the national lottery. [481]

The Secretary of State for National Heritage (Mrs. Virginia Bottomley): The national lottery is an outstanding success. More than £1.2 billion of new money has been raised for the five good causes, with awards to more than 3,000 projects throughout the country so far. We are investing unprecedented sums in sport and culture. It will provide a huge boost to regeneration, jobs and prosperity.

Sir David Knox: My right hon. Friend will be aware of concern about the national lottery's impact on charities. Does she think that that concern is justified?

Mrs. Bottomley: It is early days to form a judgment. The Home Office is undertaking its long-standing commitment to research the lottery's effect on charities, but there are examples of charities that have had a very good year. They include the Marie Curie Cancer Centre, the Cancer Relief Macmillan Fund and the British Red Cross—all of which report a favourable year. In a recent MORI survey, while 2 per cent. of those questioned said that they might reduce the amount of money that they gave to charity while playing the lottery, 4 per cent. said that they intended to increase the sum.

Mr. MacShane: Will the Secretary of State join me in congratulating the *Daily Mirror* on its crusade against people under the age of 18 betting on the national lottery? One third of 11 to 14-year-olds to whom I recently spoke at a school in Rotherham said that they bet on it. Is the right hon. Lady not concerned that, unless the age limit for the lottery is raised to the same as it is for other

institutions on which people bet, she will go down in history as the woman who turned a nation's pre-adolescent schoolchildren into gambling junkies?

Mrs. Bottomley: Our lottery, like others around the world, forbids children under 16 to play. I was delighted recently when Camelot withdrew the licence of a retailer who was knowingly selling to children under 16. It is vital that retailers who enjoy the huge benefits of the lottery understand the rules.

The suggestion that children over 16 should not be able to play the lottery when they can get married at that age seems to me to take nannying to ludicrous heights. I am delighted that a great number of children's projects throughout the country have benefited greatly from the lottery. If the hon. Gentleman thinks that it is all right to buy cigarettes when over 16 but not to buy a lottery ticket, his judgment needs examining.

Mrs. Lait: Does my right hon. Friend accept that large jackpots and rollover jackpots sell more tickets, so more money goes to good causes? Is she also aware that some local charities raising money for revenue causes are finding it difficult to compete with some of the Camelot products? Will she please take revenue spending into account when looking at future developments for the lottery?

Mrs. Bottomley: My hon. Friend is right to say that large jackpots result in even more for good causes. Oflot is instructed to ensure that we maximise the return for good causes. The £1.2 billion already raised shows just how successful our national lottery has been. In some circumstances, the distributing bodies can give a revenue grant. My hon. Friend will know that, with the distributing body chairmen, I am looking at the unfolding of the lottery to see whether any modifications of the rules would be appropriate.

Mr. Alan Howarth: As the Secretary of State confers with the Home Secretary on the impact of the national lottery on charities, will she bear it in mind that four NOP surveys commissioned by the National Council for Voluntary Organisations have shown that members of the public have a greatly exaggerated view of the proportion of lottery turnover that goes to good causes? They think that about 20p in the pound, rather than the real figure of 5.6p, goes to them. The surveys also show that, by June of this year, 14 per cent. fewer people were giving to charity than in 1993, and that there has been a 10 per cent. fall in the number of people buying charity lottery and raffle tickets. Will she ensure that, while the national lottery continues to contribute importantly to good causes, any damaging features of its impact are remedied?

Mrs. Bottomley: I regret that the hon. Gentleman's figures are inaccurate: 28p in the pound of lottery money goes to good causes—

Mr. Howarth: Charities.

Mrs. Bottomley: And the vast majority of that goes to charities, through the good causes, because most of the arts and sports money goes to good causes, supporting many disabled people's projects and extending access. In addition, the hon. Gentleman will be aware of the UK Charities Lottery, which says that this year it has enjoyed a fivefold increase in the amount that it raises for charity. That is another demonstration of the lottery producing more money for good causes and having a good effect on the country at large.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: Will my right hon. Friend highlight the beneficial effect of the national lottery on teenagers—contrary to what the Opposition have said? For instance, a gymnastic club in my constituency which caters for many talented teenagers, Meapa, has received nearly one third of a million pounds towards the building of a gymnasium, to be installed in a school in a deprived area of my constituency. It will be of immense value to teenagers there.

Mrs. Bottomley: My hon. Friend is right. Young and old throughout the country are benefiting from our successful lottery. The Labour party can only carp and criticise; it cannot abide success. There have been over 900 awards to sporting groups throughout the country, and an excellent number of arts projects have been supported. The success of the lottery has exceeded all expectations.

Dr. John Cunningham: Given the large disparities in the allocation of awards and the disturbingly low level of awards to the northern region of England, including Merseyside and Cumbria, is the Secretary of State satisfied with the way in which resources are being distributed? Is she not concerned, for example, that the requirements for matching funding may be militating against some of the most disadvantaged regions and preventing them from obtaining a reasonable share of the very successful lottery proceeds? Will the right hon. Lady undertake to examine those problems and report to the House?

Mrs. Bottomley: I am pleased that the right hon. Gentleman recognises the great success of the lottery. It is early days to measure the effect of lottery awards on different parts of the country. The right hon. Gentleman will be aware that I wrote recently to all hon. Members inviting them explicitly to encourage good projects in the area that they represent to apply for lottery awards. As the year progresses, we shall examine the way in which different funding bodies have achieved successful awards in different areas. We shall then build further on the success of our remarkable lottery.

Digital Terrestrial Broadcasting

3. **Mr. Dafis:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what proposals she has to safeguard the position of S4C on digital terrestrial broadcasting. [482]

Mr. Sproat: Like the other terrestrial television channels, S4C will be offered a guaranteed place on one of the new digital multiplexes.

Mr. Dafis: Will the Minister recognise that there will be fierce opposition in Wales to any failure to give S4C equality of treatment with all the other providers and channels on the digital system? Will he also recognise that to give parity to S4C would enable Channel 4 to be available in Wales in its entirety, which is what many people want, and enable the development of S4C services in many important, beneficial and positive directions? Would it not be ironic if an increase from four to 14 in the number of channels available led to a diminution, rather than an enhancement, of the service in Welsh? Will

the Minister give an undertaking that S4C will be given equality of treatment with all the other services in the digital system?

Mr. Sproat: The hon. Gentleman raises some important issues for Wales. I can assure him that it is our policy to ensure that there is an even better service in Wales from Channel 4 and from S4C. Those, and other detailed, matters will be happily debated during the passage of the forthcoming broadcasting Bill.

Mr. Jessel: Will my hon. Friend insist that Channel 4 in Wales, whether digital, terrestrial, or any other form of broadcasting, always upholds the highest standards and is never allowed to behave like the BBC, which has begun to act like a tabloid newspaper?

Mr. Sproat: I am sure that both Channel 4 and the BBC will take note of my hon. Friend's wise words.

Mr. Hain: May I press the Minister more strongly on a widely shared demand throughout Wales that people should be entitled to see both S4C and Channel 4, there being a growing interest in Channel 4? As the hon. Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North (Mr. Dafis) said, digitalisation allows for many more channels. There will be plenty of scope to offer both S4C and Channel 4 to the people of Wales. I ask the Minister to be much more generous in his response, so as to reassure people in Wales that they will have that advantage.

Mr. Sproat: At this stage, it would be appropriate only to say that I hope that both Channel 4 and S4C will, as a consequence of digitalisation and for other reasons, offer an even better service. The details will have to wait until the broadcasting Bill.

National Lottery

4. **Mr. Merchant:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what plans she has to review the funding of medical charities from the national lottery. [484]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: All the independent distributing bodies will consider applications from medical and caring charities. The National Lottery Charities Board, for which my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary is responsible, has decided to give a high priority to applications from charities working in health, in disability and in care. People suffering from long-term ill health; those with disabilities; people who care for the sick and elderly; and medical charities all stand to benefit from this programme.

Mr. Merchant: Does my right hon. Friend accept that, although many excellent charities have received generous awards from the lottery, nevertheless some of the beneficiaries that have been chosen have been remarkably strange? Would the public not benefit far more from popular awards to medical charities and other mainstream charities of that nature, which would help to give greater confidence in the lottery?

Mrs. Bottomley: My hon. Friend is right to say that many popular charities should receive help. That is why I am delighted today that the National Lottery Charities Board has announced a further 548 charities to be supported, to the tune of £35 million. They include a rehabilitation service for people with mental health problems in Birmingham; there is £384,000 for Arthritis Care; money for playgroups; and awards for Samaritans, Age Concern and self-help groups. I hope that when my hon. Friend has time to study the detail of those awards, he will find that a great number of them meet with his approval.

Television Without Frontiers Directive

5. **Mr. Whittingdale:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what representations she has received concerning the proposals to amend the television without frontiers directive. [485]

Mr. Sproat: The Government consulted extensively with audiovisual and advertising interests and are taking careful note of the views expressed.

Mr. Whittingdale: Does my hon. Friend agree that any tightening of the directive would be damaging to the broadcasting industry and would be likely to deter investment and further restrict the choice of the viewers? Can he therefore give me an assurance that the Government will vigorously oppose it at the Council of Ministers?

Mr. Sproat: The answer to my hon. Friend's first question is yes. Even as we have this Question Time, the Culture Council is meeting in Brussels, and the Government are opposing strongly any decrease in the flexibility that the current directive allows.

Mr. Maxton: When the Minister meets his colleagues in Europe to discuss the directive, will he raise the question of sports broadcasting, and in particular the increasing anger and dismay among a vast number of people in this country at the number of major British sporting events that are now shown only on satellite and cable television? As a result, those events are not available to the majority of people who do not have those broadcasting outlets, and they cannot watch the major sporting events that they were able to watch in the past.

Mr. Sproat: The hon. Gentleman raises a difficult and important question. I am not sure that it would be particularly appropriate to talk to other Ministers in Europe about it, but, as he will know, the Select Committee looked at it and the Government responded to it. Basically, the problem is to find a way in which those who previously watched sporting events on BBC or ITV for nothing, as it were—apart from the licence—are able to continue to do so, while also ensuring that sport greatly benefits from the money that the broadcasters pay, which is then ploughed back into youth sport. That is a difficult balance to keep. However, we shall look at it. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will not forgo the opportunity of the broadcasting Bill to raise the matter powerfully in the House and in Committee.

Overseas Visitors

6. **Mr. Simon Coombs:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what are the latest statistics on overseas visitors to the United Kingdom, and the income that they generate; and if she will make a statement. [486]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Britain earns more from international tourism than from financial services or North sea oil. More than 21 million overseas visitors—a record number—came to the UK in 1994. In the first eight

months of this year, 15.7 million overseas visitors came to this country—an increase of 11 per cent. on the same period last year. Their spending amounted to £7.5 billion—up 12 per cent. on the same months in 1994.

Mr. Coombs: It seems clear from those figures that we are heading for a record year for tourism in 1995. Does she agree that the remarkable turnaround in the British weather may have something to do with it? Will she take this opportunity to pay tribute to the work of the British Tourism Association and the English tourist board for the way in which they have responded to the challenges set them by the Government in reorganising themselves and the excellent work that they are now doing to boost tourism?
Does she further agree that it would be a disaster for tourism in the United Kingdom if we were to sign up to the European social chapter, which the Leader of the Opposition seems to think is an à la carte menu but which would be a set of manacles around the ankle of every small business in the tourism industry—an industry that depends on easily obtained labour to be successful?

Mrs. Bottomley: I strongly share my hon. Friend's view, and commend his work in promoting the tourism industry, which is one of the most crucial industries not only in Britain but in the world today. He is absolutely right to say that that of all industries would stand to lose from the mad idea of signing up to the social chapter.

According to Sir Rocco Forte, chairman of Trust House Forte and a member of the British Tourist Authority:

"Social security costs make labour 50 per cent. more expensive in France and Germany, and 100 per cent. more expensive in Italy. The introduction of the Social Chapter and the imposition of a national minimum wage would have a devastating effect on the flexibility and competitiveness of this industry, which is one of the largest providers of employment in the UK."

Mr. Pike: Does the Secretary of State recognise that our companies selling package tours are probably the best in Europe? If they operated in Europe bringing tourism into this country—on the basis on which we send tourism abroad—the figures that the right hon. Lady gave a moment ago would be considerably better.

Mrs. Bottomley: That is an example of Labour's inability to learn anything, despite all its many years in opposition. Tourism, of all industries, involves seasonal and part-time work, and the part-time work, parental leave and works council directives would inflict damage and job losses on it. As has been pointed out, Butlins would become self-catering overnight. I am delighted to welcome tourists from the rest of Europe, and the fact that so many visit our wonderful heritage and arts facilities, which have benefited so greatly from our wonderful national lottery.

Mr. Sykes: My right hon. Friend knows full well the adverse impact that badly run Department of Social Security hostels have on constituencies such as mine, in Scarborough and Whitby. Does she therefore welcome the new housing Bill, which would deal effectively with the problem once and for all?

Mrs. Bottomley: My hon. Friend knows that I strongly support the campaign that, together with a number of our colleagues, he has been running. It is vital for our British tourist resorts to go from strength to strength. I, for one, always spend my holidays in the United Kingdom; I go abroad to work, and stay at home to have a holiday. My hon. Friend is entirely right to identify the damage that DSS hostels are doing to the tourist industry.

Dr. John Cunningham: Is not Britain losing out in the tough international battle for a greater share of world tourism—as evidenced by the fact that last year our share of international receipts from tourism fell by 2 per cent.?

The right hon. Lady may take her holidays in Britain, but she certainly seems to work in cloud cuckoo land. The fact is that other European Union countries, in which the social chapter applies—Italy, France, Germany, Austria and Greece—are not at all put off by the "damaging" provisions of the social chapter; on the contrary, they believe that those provisions help their tourist industries.

Given that one of the keys to future success is the stronger and more effective promotion of Britain abroad—particularly in the European Union—will the right hon. Lady increase the budget of the British Tourist Authority in real terms next year for that purpose?

Mrs. Bottomley: I think that that constitutes a spending pledge from the Labour party. As we know, Labour's answer to every question of endeavour is to increase spending—but somehow we never hear about the taxes that they are going to increase, which would clearly impose a burden on industry.

I shall, of course, examine the Department's priorities for the year ahead, but what would undoubtedly damage our tourist industry more than anything else would be the folly of signing up to the social chapter and the imposition of a statutory minimum wage. I am determined that we should do more to promote and encourage the tourist industry, and I was delighted that, last week, for the first time, the CBI chose to hold a session on the industry at its conference. That demonstrates the seriousness with which it—like the Government—takes this vital industry.

Mr. Brandreth: Is my right hon. Friend aware that more than 5.5 million people now visit Britain's premier tourist city—the city of Chester? One of the reasons for that is the expansion of Manchester airport. Will my right hon. Friend and her colleagues do everything they can to ensure that airports away from London continue to expand in the way that they have been expanding so that they will attract international visitors directly to the regions of the United Kingdom that are so enormously attractive to tourists?

Mrs. Bottomley: I had thought that tourists also visited my hon. Friend's distinguished city because of the quality of its democratic representation by my hon. Friend. He speaks about the importance of transport. As with so many other policies, the work of my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary to improve law and order and to fight crime on the streets affects tourism. Transport policies and Department of the Environment policies also affect it, and our job is to maximise co-operation between local government and central Government Departments to promote this vital industry. I shall certainly pursue my hon. Friend's point about regional airports.

7. **Mr. Bayley:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what new initiatives she proposes to take to encourage a greater proportion of overseas tourists to Britain to visit English regions outside the south-east. [487]

Mr. Sproat: The whole of Britain, including the English regions, will benefit from the Government's new

initiatives to assist the tourism industry to become more competitive, which were announced in the document, "Tourism: Competing with the Best", published by my Department earlier this year.

Mr. Bayley: Has the Minister seen the figures in the British Tourist Authority's latest report, which show that more than half of all overseas visitors to Britain come to London and that barely 40 per cent. visit the whole of the rest of England? Does he agree that a much more radical Government policy is called for to spread over the whole country the £10,000 million a year that overseas visitors spend and the 1.5 million jobs that they create?
Will the Minister consider abolishing the airport tax for northern airports and consider something that the hon. Member for City of Chester (Mr. Brandreth) implied—the need to build fast rail links from airports in the north to London, and the possible development of northern airports as an alternative to terminal 5 at Heathrow? Does he realise that every plane using Heathrow after crossing the north Atlantic has flown directly over Manchester and that it would save some 5 per cent. of its fuel, with environmental advantages, if it were to land at Manchester airport and people were to travel down to the south, if they wanted to visit it, by train?

Mr. Sproat: I agree that it is extremely important that the 55 per cent. of tourists who come to London only are encouraged to travel as widely as possible throughout the United Kingdom. I hope that the new market segmentation initiative that the British Tourist Authority is implementing in the United States will contribute to that. I shall draw the hon. Gentleman's point about taxation to the attention of my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer, and I shall draw his point about airports to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport.

National Lottery

8. **Mr. Congdon:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how many charities which assist the elderly have been awarded funds from the national lottery. [488]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The lottery is for everyone; the silver generation will have access to facilities made possible by lottery funds including the arts, sport and heritage and community and environmental projects which are the focus of millennium funding. So far, 77 caring charities for elderly people, such as Age Concern, have benefited from total lottery grants of over £5 million.

Mr. Congdon: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the national lottery is stimulating many innovative ideas in the voluntary sector as well as providing a valuable source of extra funding for it? What steps can be taken to ensure that local authorities do not use it as an excuse to cut their grants to the voluntary sector?

Mrs. Bottomley: My hon. Friend is right to ask us to ensure that the excellent lottery awards are not exploited by local authorities. All the distributing bodies are having discussions about precisely that. The lottery has led to the opportunity for regeneration and community involvement, and for participation in the arts, sport and heritage and in a range of caring projects. It has quite exceeded expectations, and it is making a lasting difference to life in this country.

Mr. Fisher: Of course the lottery is a great success, but should not the Secretary of State temper her complacency about that? Would there not be more money to distribute to the elderly and other good causes if she acted more decisively on the distribution of lottery funds? Camelot has taken £392 million. That is 9 per cent. of the total and almost twice as much as the 5 per cent. that it is pledged to take.
The boards are sitting on hundreds of millions of pounds undistributed. Apart from the millennium board and the arts board, the record of boards is appalling. The heritage board is holding back nearly £200 million and the charities board, which should concern the hon. Member for Croydon, North-East (Mr. Congdon), has distributed only £75 million out of the £253 million it has received—less than 30 per cent. Should not the Secretary of State be a deal less complacent and galvanise herself into action to ensure that the boards distribute their money?

Mrs. Bottomley: The hon. Gentleman speaks, as always, with the spirit of the Labour party: in tones of the politics of envy. The operator has organised the most efficient lottery in the world. After an open competition, it gave the best return for the good causes at the lowest cost. As ever, he cannot resist attacking the profit made by the operator, even though it is maximising return for good causes.

It is important that all distributing bodies make urgent progress in ensuring that they continue to make their awards. The caring charities board had to start from scratch. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will welcome today's extra announcements of the 548 charities that will benefit. He will be reassured to know that, while the money is waiting to be distributed, it is earning interest, which goes precisely to those good causes.

Mr. Robathan: Will my right hon. Friend confirm the report that I heard on Radio Leicester as I was driving south this afternoon, which said that Age Concern, Leicester—a charity that certainly assists elderly people—has today received £100,000 from the charities board? Along with Lutterworth tennis club, which received £65,000 two weeks ago, and Cosby sports club, that shows that my constituents, both aged and younger, are certainly benefiting from charity.

Mrs. Bottomley: I can confirm that today's announcements have been supported not only by Age Concern, Leicester, but by Age Concern, Durham, and that many projects—for guides, scouts, Samaritans, MIND and Mencap—have received substantial awards today. I urge hon. Members to ensure that charities in their constituency are aware of the opportunities of the lottery and apply for awards wherever they have a popular cause that should be supported.

Scratchcards

9. **Mr. Heppell:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage when she next plans to meet representatives of Camelot to discuss problems arising from scratchcards. [489]

Mr. Sproat: I have no current plans to meet Camelot. The director general has licensed it to run the national lottery and he regulates its operations.

Mr. Heppell: I hope that the Minister is aware that a quarter of children under 16 are purchasing scratchcards

and that the Secretary of State is on record as saying that she supports such gambling. What is the difference between gambling on scratchcards and on horses, dogs or the football pools?

Mr. Sproat: I make two responses to the hon. Gentleman's question, which I take as a very serious one. First, the House has regarded the lottery as the softer end of gambling and not the same as betting on dogs or horses or in casinos. Secondly, I agree that it is worrying if under-age children are playing scratchcards. I saw the figures that Mr. Peter Davis of Oflot is considering to decide whether further action needs to taken. Three retailers have been reported for selling to under-age children. One has lost its agency; the other two have been warned by trading standards.

Lottery Distributions

10. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what are the latest figures for lottery distributions per head of population in respect of each category on a regional basis. [490]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: A full reply will be published in the *Official Report.*

All the distributing bodies are required to comply with the directions under the National Lottery etc. Act 1993. We want to ensure that the spread of rewards reaches all parts of the country. We are keeping arrangements under review.

Mr. Skinner: How can the Minister accept that it is right for people in central London to get 600 times more per head from the lottery than, say, people in the east Midlands—£2.50p a head compared with £1,500 a head? Why should Sadler's Wells, the Royal Opera house, the Royal Court theatre and the Churchill papers get well over £100 million, while brass bands in the coalfields do not get anything?

Will she put a stop to the suggestion in the press and elsewhere that there will be a fix in the run-up to the general election—that the Government intend to ensure that Tory marginals get more than their fair share of lottery funds? It is a scandal, and she should deny it or put a stop to it.

Mrs. Bottomley: The hon. Gentleman speaks from complete ignorance. He is wrong to think that the majority of lottery awards go to Conservative marginal constituencies; in fact, the vast majority go to regeneration projects in inner-city areas. I urge him to consult the list of awards, which is published every month and is available in the House.

I hope that the hon. Gentleman will commend the grant of £2,397 to the Bolsover Elderly Self Help Group, although it may be a little premature for him. Alternatively, he may wish to get on his bike and try the 2,400 cycle tracks being built throughout the country.

Mr. Skinner: Not in Bolsover.

Mrs. Bottomley: All parts of the country are benefiting from the lottery. In the east midlands, so far there have been 163 awards amounting to £17 million. I understand that the hon. Gentleman does not have an especially low profile. I suggest that he takes the opportunity of his own personality to go around the east midlands and ensure that people apply to benefit from the lottery.

Sir Sydney Chapman: Is it not natural that many national institutes are based in London? Would it not be quite wrong to include them, on a regional basis, in the amounts of money going to London? Can my right hon. Friend confirm that and also that she—or the various distributing charities—is giving fair consideration to London bodies that are not national and are not situated in central London but deserve equal consideration?

Mrs. Bottomley: My hon. Friend will be aware that a third of the population lives in the Thames region and that many of our national institutions are situated in London. Those institutions give a good name to Britain, promote the tourist industry and are centres of excellence. The challenge is to have a tapestry of provision, including the flagship projects, spreading throughout the country. So far, 90 bowling clubs have received support, but they are not all in London; 86 theatres have received support, but they are not all in London; and more than 40 museums and galleries have received support. As the lottery unfolds, there will be plenty of opportunities to revise the distribution to ensure that all parts of the country benefit.

Following is the information:

National Lottery: Distribution of funds by region

	Population	*Per cent. of (UK) population*	*Number of awards*	*Total amount awarded* £	*Amount per capita* £
England Region					
London	6,933,000	12	204	199,263,132	28.74
South East	7,813,949	13	308	74,708,086	9.56
East Midlands	4,114,069	7	163	17,206,396	4.18
Eastern	5,259,958	9	181	43,704,513	8.31
Merseyside	1,441,000	2	29	9,707,029	6.74
North East	2,607,991	4	111	23,423,202	8.98
North West	5,478,725	9	253	39,076,376	7.13
South West	4,816,084	8	226	36,035,486	7.48
West Midlands	5,311,676	9	139	31,744,219	5.98
Yorkshire and Humberside	5,035,194	9	229	71,541,712	14.21
Total England	48,811,646	83	1,843	546,410,151	11.19
Scotland	5,120,200	9	468	76,927,343	15.02
Wales	2,906,500	5	250	26,847,888	9.24
Northern Ireland	1,632,000	3	190	12,424,653	7.61
United Kingdom wide	58,470,346	100	269	64,816,995	1.11
Total United Kingdom	58,470,346	100	3,020	727,427,030	12.44

Boxing

11. **Mr. Cox:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage when she last met the members of the British Boxing Board of Control to discuss regulation of the sport. [492]

Mr. Sproat: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has not met the members of the British Boxing Board of Control. The regulation of boxing is a matter for the board.

Mr. Cox: I note the Minister's reply, but is he aware of what has happened in British boxing in the past year? There has been death, serious injury, violence by spectators outside the ring and the continuing habit of many boxers, prior to contests, to say what they intend to do to their opponent once the fight begins. Is it not time that the Minister told the BBBC to begin to put its house in order, before the demands to ban boxing become even stronger?

Mr. Sproat: I am aware of the background facts that the hon. Gentleman mentioned. On the question of the BBBC putting its house in order, in the past few weeks it has announced measures to strengthen safeguards—for example, new dehydration laws, an new annual scan and doctors being given easier access to the ring. In fact, British boxing is more stringently controlled than boxing anywhere else in the world.

Mr. Harry Greenway: Does my hon. Friend agree that there is no room for complacency but that the people who seek to attack or abolish boxing will not succeed, that the sport is popular and that it gives many boys an opportunity to progress in life that they would not otherwise have? Does he further agree that it would be a disaster and extremely dangerous for such individuals if the sport were forced underground?

Mr. Sproat: My hon. Friend is absolutely right on that count. Countries such as Iceland have banned professional boxing but Icelandic boxers simply go elsewhere to practise the sport.

Tourism

12. **Mr. David Atkinson:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what recent representations she has received from the tourist industry in support of the greater harmonisation of policies on tourism in the European Union. [493]

Mr. Sproat: We consulted a number of trade associations and others on the recent European Green Paper on tourism. Most wanted to see increased awareness by European institutions of the needs of the tourism industry, but the overwhelming view was that greater harmonisation was neither necessary nor desirable.

Mr. Atkinson: Is my hon. Friend aware that one of the most vulnerable sectors of the English tourist industry—most notably, small guest houses and hotels—feels especially aggrieved at having to compete unfairly with the much lower VAT rates levied in other member states of the European Union and without the benefit of development grants, which continue to be enjoyed by competitors in Wales and Scotland as well as in France and elsewhere? What representations will he make in favour of fairer competition between the tourist industries of the member states of the European Union, not least at the forthcoming intergovernmental conference?

Mr. Sproat: A reduction in VAT for the tourist businesses to which my hon. Friend refers is a matter for my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor. As for European funds, however, we have allocated some £200 million of European regional development fund money to tourism projects for the next five years. I very much hope that my hon. Friend's constituents will try to take advantage of that.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Legal Aid

27. **Mr. Merchant:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans he has to reform the legal aid system. [513]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (Mr. John M. Taylor): The Lord Chancellor published a Green Paper on the future of legal aid in May. More than 180 responses have been received and are being analysed. A series of meetings is being arranged with some of the major respondents to allow them to expand on their views. The Lord Chancellor intends to make an announcement on the outcome of the consultation process in the new year.

Mr. Merchant: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his reply. Is he aware how popular many of the measures outlined in the Green Paper are? Would he be prepared to outline some of the main improvements in the operation of the legal aid system which will flow from the Green Paper and which will be welcomed by the people of this country?

Mr. Taylor: I am very grateful for my hon. Friend's typically constructive question. The main features of the Green Paper that commend themselves to me are the expectation of developing franchising, standard fees, a wider range of providers of legal services, targeting legal aid on those whose need is greatest and achieving more control of overall expenditure.

Mrs. Dunwoody: Will the Minister consider carefully, however, those cases in which solicitors receive legal aid payments for well over a year, whereas the claimant receives no support and is told simply at a certain point that the case cannot be continued? There is clear evidence that that happens in a number of areas, and it undermines belief in British justice if my constituents are continually given legal aid certificates but are not allowed to pursue their cases.

Mr. Taylor: I thank the hon. Lady for her question, for which I am not completely without sympathy. The sort of difficulty to which she refers has occurred in what are sometimes called multi-party actions. I agree that multi-party actions must be dealt with more efficiently and cost-effectively. The Green Paper suggests that such actions should be funded from a national reserve fund for very high-cost cases. I realise, however, how frustrating it must be for a litigant to be told halfway through the conduct of a case that the balance of advantage between cost and yield does not sustain the case further.

Mr. John Marshall: Does my hon. Friend agree that it sticks in the gullet of most taxpayers that some

apparently very wealthy individuals seem to be able to get legal aid? Why should Mr. Ernest Saunders, Lord Brocket and Mr. Roger Levitt receive legal aid when their life styles are the envy of most taxpayers?

Mr. Taylor: My hon. Friend returns with consistency to this subject. Although I do not normally comment on individual cases, I should tell him that the granting of legal aid to Lord Brocket is a matter for the court hearing the case, and, in the case of Mr. Picarda, is a matter for the Legal Aid Board. My hon. Friend will remember that we issued a consultation document on legal aid for the apparently wealthy. We have received the results of the consultation, we are measuring the various proposals that are in hand and action must and will be taken.

Civil Appeals

28. **Mr. Donald Anderson:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans he has to reduce delays in civil appeals. [500]

Mr. John M. Taylor: Three additional lord justices were appointed earlier in the year and other measures intended to improve efficiency have been introduced in the civil appeals division. The Lord Chancellor is considering making further additional appointments.

Mr. Anderson: Even in the light of those welcome developments, the Minister will know of last week's warning by the Master of the Rolls in his annual review that delays are an affront to justice. Does the hon. Gentleman not find it scandalous that the process takes perhaps an average of three years in London from the time of setting down to trial, and thereafter perhaps another 18 to 19 months for more than 70 per cent. of cases to reach a hearing in the Court of Appeal?

Mr. Taylor: For 70 per cent. of appeals, the period from setting down to hearing is 18 to 19 months. The hear-by period for cases involving children, which are given higher priority, is now five months. Having said that, I am not at all complacent about the figures. My Department naturally pays the most careful and respectful attention to the observations of the Master of the Rolls. The Lord Chancellor keeps the situation under review. It is under review; we are not content.

Mr. Hawkins: Does my hon. Friend agree that to everyone concerned with the legal process justice delayed is justice denied? Will he take this opportunity to comment on the progress with Lord Woolf's reviews and recommendations to see whether some of them may assist in reducing delays in civil appeals?

Mr. Taylor: I thank my hon. Friend for that observation. Lord Woolf's second and final report, which is keenly anticipated, will, I hope, give us the full range of guidance that we have looked forward to resulting from Lord Woolf's admirable work. My hon. Friend will know that one of the recommendations is already in place: the increase in the small claim limit from £1,000 to £3,000 in non-personal injury cases.

Mr. Maclennan: Why is the Master of the Rolls so angry?

Mr. Taylor: I am not sure that the hon. Gentleman is the least petulant Member of the House. I do not think that those words lie very well on his lips at all.

Mr. Boateng: What is the Minister's response to Lord Woolf's concern at the increasing back-door privatisation of the Court Service through the private finance initiative? Why has he not responded to Lord Woolf's challenge to consult the judiciary on that issue? What is the benefit to the consumer and the citizen of hiving off large chunks of the Court Service—its administrative and quasi-judicial functions—to multinational companies? Is it not right to say that British justice should be in the hands of the British public and that market forces have no role to play in the fair and proper administration of justice?

Mr. Taylor: The judiciary will be consulted. The trade unions will be consulted, and at their request the consultation period has been put back from 17 November to 21 December. Having the best possible modern kit in the courts to help with their administration is not inimical to good justice; it will help good justice.

Family (Definition)

29. **Sir Michael Neubert:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what definition is given to the term family in its use by his Department. [514]

Mr. John M. Taylor: I share with my hon. Friend the fact that there is no one legal definition of "family". Even in its general sense, it is a word that is capable of many applications.

Sir Michael Neubert: Will my hon. Friend concede that the term "family" is ordinarily associated with the institution of marriage, the mainstay of our society? Does he agree that to use it in other than a strict defined sense, as in the Family Homes and Domestic Violence Bill, further undermines our most important institution, and aids and abets those on the left and elsewhere who are dedicated to its downfall? Will he undertake to ensure that his Department does not use the term inadvisedly, lightly or wantonly in future?

Mr. Taylor: I am quite sure that my Department will not use the word lightly. I do not believe that the legislative proposals undermine marriage. If they discriminate at all, they discriminate against violence and they provide the courts with a range of remedies. Furthermore, they simplify the rules of the magistrates court, the county court and the High Court so that on this subject all the procedures are the same.

If my hon. Friend wants me to make a comment about marriage, I shall. I quote my noble Friend the Lord Chancellor, who said the other day:

> "A successful marriage is surely the most satisfying of all relationships between human beings. To have such a marriage is a precious privilege".

Mr. Gunnell: Does the Minister agree that the law should provide equal protection for all children, irrespective of the marital status of their parents?

Mr. Taylor: Yes, the welfare of children, irrespective of the marital status of their parents, is the absolute paramount consideration that should govern the judgment of any court of law.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Does my hon. Friend agree that it is important that, when things go wrong, people have others to turn to? They can often turn to their families. Some who get into trouble with the law can turn to the probation service. Will my hon. Friend join me in paying tribute to its work of trying to help people to get back on the straight and narrow?

Mr. Taylor: With the greatest of pleasure, and wholeheartedly.

Probate Service

30. **Mr. Jim Cunningham:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many probate service offices will be closed following implementation of the report on the structure of the probate service. [515]

Mr. John M. Taylor: I cannot comment at this stage, because the recommendations contained in the report to which the hon. Gentleman refers are the subject of an extensive public consultation exercise that does not close until 21 December.

Mr. Cunningham: As the Minister cannot answer the question, will he tell me when the cuts in the legal aid system will stop? Legal aid has been cut and the probation service has been cut. There is now the threat of cuts to the probate service. When will this stop?

Mr. Taylor: The probate service believes that the proposed closures strike the right balance between meeting the needs of customers and ensuring that the service is run in the most efficient and economical way. New probate offices will be established in place of almost all probate sub-registries.

Domestic Violence

31. **Mr. Canavan:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what recent discussions he has had about legislation to deal with the problem of domestic violence. [517]

Mr. John M. Taylor: I have had a number of discussions with colleagues and others. It is not, however, my practice to disclose consultations with other members of the Government.

Mr. Canavan: In view of a report that the Lord Chancellor recently met a group of Tory Back Benchers, who apparently tried to pressurise him into diluting or dropping legislation to stop domestic violence, may we have an absolute assurance that the legislation will give top priority to the protection of victims of domestic violence, rather than give in to the prejudices of a few unrepresentative Tory right wingers?

Mr. Taylor: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will understand that I do not accept his question in exactly those terms. The truth, stripped of some of the more exciting passages of his question, is that at a late stage in its progress and close to Prorogation, a Bill that had been seen to be uncontroversial attracted controversy. It has been brought back so that it can be debated on the Floor of the House—here it is.

Lady Olga Maitland: Does my hon. Friend agree that at no time during our meeting with the Lord Chancellor and his Department did my colleagues or I apply pressure for any dilution of measures to help the victims of domestic violence? Will he confirm that our concerns were that the Bill's provisions would result in co-habitees being given the same rights as married people—a matter about which we have grave concerns?

Mr. Taylor: I did not hear all of my hon. Friend's question clearly, but as a consequence of the meeting to which she referred, other considerations and advice from other quarters, four amendments have been tabled to what was the Family Homes and Domestic Violence Bill. The first proposes a general instruction to courts that when they are considering making any occupational order in favour of a co-habitant, they must consider the fact that the co-habitant has not entered into the same commitment as a married person. I will not give a litany of all four amendments this afternoon, but I will be very surprised if that amendment does not commend itself to my hon. Friends who are concerned with these matters.

Asylum and Immigration

3.30 pm

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Michael Howard): I beg leave to make a statement about asylum and immigration. We debate home affairs tomorrow. In order that the debate should be better informed, it seems right that I should explain to the House today the proposals in the Bill which I shall be introducing shortly.

During the debate on the Address last week, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said:

> "While I lead it, the instincts of my party will not be to play race at any time, in any way, on any occasion or upon any provocation. That will not be our policy".—[*Official Report*, 15 November 1995; Vol. 267, c. 39.]

I wholeheartedly support and endorse my right hon. Friend's statement. The Government have always attached the very greatest priority to preserving good race relations in this country, and it has consistently been our policy that fair but firm and effective immigration control is a necessary condition for doing so.

We must be prepared to respond quickly when new threats to that control emerge. This is something that successive Governments have done over the years. I have a number of proposals to announce today. All are consistent with our international obligations under the 1951 refugee convention. None will reduce in any way the rights of those who presently qualify to come to this country to live.

This country has a long and honourable tradition of providing refuge to those who really are fleeing persecution. We were one of the first countries to respond to a request from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees for additional temporary protection places for people from the former Yugoslavia, when in August I agreed to provide an additional 500 places on top of the existing scheme for 1,000.

But our asylum procedures are increasingly being abused. The scale of the problem is alarming. Asylum applications have been rising sharply. They have grown from 2,000 a month at the beginning of 1994 to 4,500 last month.

The trend here is in marked contrast to the position in the rest of western Europe. Other countries have strengthened their defences against abusive asylum claims and have experienced substantial reductions. Asylum claims fell by more than 40 per cent. in the main western European countries in 1994, but rose by 45 per cent. here.

Moreover, only 4 per cent. of applicants are initially granted asylum, and only 4 per cent. of appeals against refusal are allowed by the independent adjudicators. Seventy per cent. of claims are made, not on arrival in this country—as one would expect of any genuine refugee—but after gaining entry on another basis, and often only when leave is about to expire or removal about to take place.

The Asylum and Immigration Appeals Act 1993 initially helped us to bring down decision times dramatically, from 18 months to four for a new claim. But the relentless rise in claims has outstripped the improvements in our ability to process them. By claiming asylum, those who have no basis to remain here can not only substantially prolong their stay, but gain access to benefit and housing at public expense. The population of asylum applicants has now reached 75,000. The annual cost in benefit alone is more than £200 million.

Over the years, we have increased asylum resources very substantially. The number of asylum case workers has risen 700 per cent. since 1988. We took 25,000 asylum decisions in the 12 months to last June, compared with 15,000 during the preceding year.

In February, I announced that we were investing a further £37 million over three years in extra asylum case workers and adjudicators. This will make it possible to deal with at least 37,000 claims a year from 1996 onwards. If applications had remained stable, backlogs and decision times would have started coming down from next year. But 1995 is already heading for an even higher intake. We risk becoming trapped in a vicious circle, with growing delays attracting more abusive claims. It is now clear that we need action across the board to strengthen the legislation, streamline decisions and appeals, and discourage unfounded claims.

The present benefit rules are an open invitation to persons from abroad to make unfounded asylum claims. Of the 40,000 asylum applicants currently being supported on benefit, very few will be found to merit asylum or exceptional leave to remain. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security has therefore been consulting on proposals to limit the availability of benefits to asylum applicants. We propose that child benefit should be restricted in the same way.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment has concluded that the same arguments apply in relation to social housing. Proposals for legislation will be brought forward to restrict the housing entitlement of asylum applicants broadly in line with the benefit restrictions.

However, this action is not enough. That is why the Asylum and Immigration Bill is necessary. The asylum part will have three main elements. First, it will enable me to designate selected countries of origin as not giving rise to a serious risk of persecution. Some countries generate large numbers of asylum applications but hardly any genuine refugees. Refusal will not be automatic, but there will in effect be a rebuttable presumption against claims from designated countries and these claims will be dealt with speedily.

The list of countries to be designated will be laid before Parliament. I intend to inform the House of the likely candidates at an early stage during the passage of the Bill, but I can say now that Nigeria is not and never has been among them. Germany and Holland have recently introduced lists of precisely this kind. We are not setting a precedent. We are following their example.

Secondly, the Bill will make appeals against return to a safe third country exercisable only after removal. This will apply to a person who claims asylum after travelling from his country of origin through a third country—usually one of our neighbours, such as France or Germany—in which the application for asylum should have been made. What frequently happens now is that removal is delayed while appellants seek to dispute the safety of such countries. By the time the appeal is over, the third country often refuses to take them back, and we have to admit the applicant here. That is not acceptable.

Thirdly, the Bill will remove a number of obstacles to the effective operation of the 1993 Act. For example,

it will enable us to extend the existing accelerated appeal procedure to a wider range of cases, such as those from designated countries, and those in which asylum is claimed at the last minute in order to fend off removal.

I also intend to make a radical improvement in the way in which asylum claims are handled in the Home Office. This does not require legislation. A new procedure which we have been piloting since May has confirmed that it is possible to decide straightforward cases within a much shorter time scale than previously—usually within a month. Applicants are interviewed quickly, and given a deadline for submitting further representations. The normal level of consideration and appeal rights still applies. I now propose to extend the use of that procedure.

We also need to do more to speed up asylum appeals. A consultancy report last year found evidence of deliberate time wasting. We need to strengthen the powers of adjudicators—for example, by enabling them to make directions and impose deadlines for preparation of cases. The Lord Chancellor has been consulting the Immigration Appellate Authority, and will invite comments from interested organisations on proposed rule changes as soon as possible.

In addition, there are other threats to immigration control that we need to address. We need to act to deter employers from giving jobs to people from abroad who are here illegally or are subject to a provision prohibiting them from working. The fact that those people can get jobs quite easily—at the expense of those who are entitled to live and work here—is one of the main reasons why the United Kingdom is seen as such an attractive destination to asylum seekers. Other European countries have recognised those risks and responded to them. The Irish Republic is the only other member state of the European Union that does not have controls of that kind in place.

The Bill will therefore make it a criminal offence to employ a person not entitled to work in the United Kingdom; but there will also be a range of defences available to employers. Any employer who has taken one of the prescribed steps will be sure that he is not committing an offence.

One of those defences will be based on national insurance numbers, but other documents could also be used. I am confident that my proposals will not impose significant new burdens on employers. I am today issuing a consultation document to employers' organisations and others. If the responses suggest that changes are required to the detail of my proposals, I will bring forward appropriate amendments.

I know that concerns have been expressed that my proposals would lead to employers adopting discriminatory recruitment practices. In developing my proposals, I have been concerned that that should not be the case.

I believe that most employers want to ensure that their selection processes are fair and lawful. My Department will therefore provide advice and guidance on how to carry out checks on applicants in ways that will not discriminate against any group.

My objective in bringing forward these proposals is not to make life difficult for responsible employers. The target is people who work here without authority, and who take jobs from others. But just as it is an offence to work here illegally, so it must be an offence to employ someone who is not entitled to work here.

The Bill will also strengthen the enforcement of immigration control in a number of detailed but important respects. In particular, I intend to take firm action against racketeers who encourage the use of deception to circumvent our controls. Those activities will be punishable with up to seven years' imprisonment.

For far too many people across the world, this country is far too attractive a destination for bogus asylum seekers and other illegal immigrants. The reason is simple: it is far easier to obtain access to jobs and benefits here than almost anywhere else. That is the problem that these measures are intended to remedy. They are fully compatible with our international obligations, they are fair, and they are very necessary.

I have clearly identified the problems. I have shown how we intend to deal with them. If there are those who deny that there are problems, I hope that they will say so. If there are those who accept that there are problems but have other ways of dealing with them, I hope they will tell us what they are. Much has been said about the desirability of taking this issue out of party politics. I agree with that view.

There is one very simple way in which that can be achieved. These measures represent a balanced response to a clear and serious problem. They deserve support on both sides of this House. I invite the Opposition to take this issue out of party politics by indicating today that they support these measures, and will assist in their passage through Parliament.

Mr. Jack Straw (Blackburn): Will the Secretary of State acknowledge that we believe that fraudulent asylum seekers must quickly be weeded out, and that the whole process must be speeded up—but that it must work in a way that is fair and just to any genuine applicant? Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman accept that the issue has so far proved controversial because of widely shared concern, as acknowledged by the Prime Minister last week, that the proposals may damage race relations and may not work effectively?

If the Secretary of State now accepts that the issue should be taken out of party politics, surely it should be the subject of cool examination by a Special Standing Committee of the House, with the intention of removing controversy? Is not the fact that the right hon. and learned Gentleman had to publish today two lengthy and complicated documents about just part of his proposals further evidence of the need for such examination?

Is the Secretary of State aware that he was misinformed when he said on radio this morning that the Special Standing Committee procedure was never designed for such measures? The right hon. and learned Gentleman, to support his claim, bizarrely quoted a 1993 White Paper, which turns out to be one on Scotland and the Union. The scrutiny of Bills is the responsibility not of the Government but of the House.

Does not the Secretary of State recall that, in 1986, the House accepted a recommendation of the Procedure Committee that the Special Standing Committee process should permanently be incorporated into the Standing Orders of the House? The Procedure Committee stated that a "wider range of Bills" should be examined by such

[Mr. Jack Straw]

a process. The House defeated an attempt by the Government to control the circumstances in which that procedure could be used.

Does not the right hon. and learned Gentleman appreciate that careful scrutiny is one of the best guarantors of good legislation? Its absence explains the failure of the Asylum and Immigration Appeals Act 1993. The then Home Secretary told the House that his 1992 Bill, which became the 1993 Act, would protect against fraud, provide a quicker system to deal with manifestly unfounded claims, and achieve a way of reaching prompt and fair decisions.

Is the Secretary of State aware that his predecessor set an explicit time limit of three months from initial application to the disposal of the appeal, in the full expectation that the total number of applications would rise in future? Instead of applications and appeals being dealt with in three months, they are now taking an average of 19 months. How much have efforts by the Home Office to short-cut delays by predetermining applications from allegedly safe countries complicated procedures still further, and extended delays?

The right hon. and learned Gentleman has made it clear that Nigeria has not been, and will not be, on any so-called "white list". How can he explain the fact that, last year, of 1,495 applications for asylum from Nigeria, only one was accepted? How can that happen, when the whole world knows of the appalling brutality of the Nigerian regime—not least through the judicial murder of Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight other Ogonis?

The Secretary of State also claimed on radio this morning that his Bill has "absolutely nothing" to do with race. How does he square that statement with the opposite view of many organisations that normally support the Government? How does the right hon. and learned Gentleman respond to the comments of the Confederation of British Industry, British Chambers of Commerce and Institute of Directors, which stated that it was

"very uneasy about the effect of his proposals . . . upon community relations"

and that they could lead to businesses

"being branded as racist by the popular press"?

What has the Home Secretary told the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, who as recently as September said of the right hon. and learned Gentleman's plans for employer checks that they could result in "racist discrimination"? If those concerns are unfounded, what on earth has the Secretary of State to fear from their examination by a Special Standing Committee?

Should not a Special Standing Committee also be able to examine the Secretary of State's proposals in respect of national insurance numbers—which he has mentioned today—as the Lord Chancellor, in a letter to the Secretary of State in September, described these proposals as having "unlikely viability"?

If the Secretary of State wishes to reassure the public that the proposals have nothing to do with race, is it not time for him to do what so far the Prime Minister has refused to do—to repudiate that chilling and incriminating statement from Mr. Andrew Lansley, the former head of the Conservative research department and now a Conservative candidate for South Cambridgeshire, who said in September that immigration is an issue

"which has more potential to hurt"?

If that was not an invitation to play the race card, what is?

It is the delay in dealing with applications, appeals and removals that is the cause of asylum problems, and of the mounting benefit bill. Those delays have to be tackled; but, given the failure of the 1993 Act, the most serious questions must be raised about whether these proposals will work any more effectively or fairly. If the Secretary of State shares our aim, he will be helped, not hindered, by an examination of the proposals by a Special Standing Committee. If he does not, will he tell the House why?

On the other hand, if the Secretary of State has changed his mind and will now accept this proposal, let me give him an assurance and a guarantee here and now that the House will have our full co-operation in making the process work.

Mr. Howard: If the opening suggestions of the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw)—that the Opposition were determined to deal with bogus asylum seekers—had any credibility at all, he would have expressed his support for these measures. The truth of the matter is that, although I listened very carefully to every word that the hon. Gentleman said, we still do not know what the attitude of the Opposition is to these measures.

The hon. Gentleman has travelled a considerable way in his attitude to these measures. At his party conference, he said:

"We shall oppose the promised Bill on Asylum and Immigration".

On 26 October, he said that Labour would have "no truck" with these proposals. He has since been forced to backtrack, publicly humiliated by the leader of his party. Last week, the hon. Gentleman said of the Bill:

"we will finally make our decisions on how we are going to vote when we see its terms".

Now they know the terms—when will we hear what they think about these proposals?

A Special Standing Committee is a procedure suitable for non-controversial, technical Bills. We have had six immigration Bills since that procedure was introduced, and it has been used for none of them. There is no more reason why that procedure should be used for this Bill than for any other controversial measure. The Bill will receive full and cool scrutiny in Standing Committee in the normal way, and the Government will, of course, listen to the proposals that are made in that Committee.

The 1993 Act has made a contribution to solving the problem, but we did not anticipate at the time that that measure was enacted that the increase in the number of applications would be on such a scale—at a time, I repeat, when the number of applications for the rest of Europe is falling.

It is true that the time limits that were set are not being kept. They are not being kept for the reason that I cited in my opening statement. It was found by the independent consultants who looked at the matter that the procedures are being abused, exploited and manipulated, so that the time limits cannot be adhered to.

The hon. Gentleman referred to the number of applications from Nigeria that are accepted. Those decisions are not made by Ministers. In the first instance, they are made by immigration officials, and they are then subject to appeal to adjudicators. Every applicant has to establish a well founded fear of persecution. It is on that basis that applications have not been accepted.

I dealt with racism in my opening statement. There is no question of racism in my proposals. I have never discussed the matter with Mr. Lansley. The proposals that I have put forward are a measured response to a serious problem. It is on that basis that I commend them to the House.

Mr. Douglas Hurd (Witney): I think that my right hon. and learned Friend said that he has no intention of watering down in any way the United Kingdom's compliance with its international obligations under the 1951 convention. He said also that we are following other notable liberal countries with the designated list idea. Am I right in saying that, if an individual from a country on the designated list can, against expectation, establish that he or she has a well founded fear of persecution, he or she could be admitted?

It seems that my right hon. and learned Friend has listened carefully to points of view put to him in the past and has shown in the procedure which he has described a willingness to listen in future on particular issues which he outlined.

We have heard the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw)—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. The statement appeared to me to be one that should have been made on Second Reading. I shall not allow many questions, because we shall have a debate on the issue tomorrow. We shall also have a Second Reading debate on the Bill. I want direct questions to the Home Secretary, so that we might get on with our business.

Mr. Hurd: May I ask my right hon. and learned Friend to do his utmost to encourage the many people outside the House who feel genuinely about the refugee question to study the worsening problem which he has described and the reasonable remedies that he has proposed? They should not be misled into immediate and ill thought out opposition to what my right hon. and learned Friend says.

Mr. Howard: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for his words of support. I can confirm that all my proposals are consistent with our international obligations under the 1951 refugee convention. I can confirm also that, if individual applicants from countries on the designated list, all of whom will have their applications individually considered, establish a well founded fear of persecution, their applications for asylum will be granted.

I agree with what my right hon. Friend said about the importance of those organisations that understandably and rightly feel strongly about these issues studying carefully the details of my proposals, which I am convinced should reassure them.

Sir David Steel (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale): Buried in the Home Secretary's lengthy statement was the phrase, yet again, that our immigration regulations are "firm and fair". Will he accept that, for many individuals, the regulations turn out, because they divide their families, to be harsh and draconian? That is the effect that they have on individuals.

If the right hon. and learned Gentleman is arguing that the proposals are uncontroversial, and if they are really to deal with racketeering and bogus asylum seekers—on that basis, they would be met with agreement across the Floor of the House—why does he not accept the case for a Special Standing Committee? Surely that would make the proposals uncontroversial.

May I ask the Home Secretary yet again—this is the third time that the point has been made—to accept that he must repudiate Mr. Lansley's words? He is not merely a former director of research at Conservative central office. Mr. Lansley will be a candidate at the general election. Two months ago, he was reported in *The Observer* as saying:

> "Immigration, an issue which we raised successfully in 1992 . . . played particularly well in the tabloids and has more potential to hurt."

As the son of an immigrant, the Home Secretary should specifically repudiate what Mr. Lansley said. Only then can we accept that the Government are not playing the race card.

Lastly, as the Home Secretary asked for some alternative proposals, may I plead with him to use his position in the Cabinet to ensure that Her Majesty's Government's policy of good governance overseas is not just left to occasional statements from Lady Chalker but is applied across the board with greater diligence so that those despotic regimes, particularly on the continent of Africa, are disposed of, in concert with our allies in France and Belgium, and replaced by regimes that have a sense of democracy and accountability, and put pressure on those Governments instead of individuals?

An hon. Member: That is too long.

Madam Speaker: Order. I need no instructions from the Whips on the Front Bench.

Mr. Howard: The right hon. Gentleman—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. I will have no insolence either from the Whips on the Front Bench.

Mr. Howard: The right hon. Gentleman's last question went some way beyond the scope of this statement. He knows that we share his concern on these issues. I hope that he will share a recognition of the limited powers that we have over regimes of countries in other parts of the world.

The other points that he raised were really not new. I gave, in answer to the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw), a full explanation of why the Special Standing Committee procedure would be quite inappropriate for legislation of this kind. It has never been used for such legislation, and it is not necessary.

As for what was said by Mr. Lansley, again I repeat what I said to the hon. Gentleman: I have never discussed this matter with Mr. Lansley. I made these proposals as a measured response to a serious problem. We want to know from the Opposition parties whether they agree that there is a problem, and that this is the way to deal with them.

Sir Trevor Skeet (North Bedfordshire): Will my right hon. and learned Friend place in the *Official Report* a list of the countries in western Europe that have tried to strengthen their defences, and also indicate in the table the way in which that has been effected? Will he give a further assurance, which would clear up the matter for the House, that genuine cases will not be affected?

Mr. Howard: I shall do my best to comply with my hon. Friend's first request. So far as the second is

[Mr. Howard]

concerned, I have borne in mind throughout the preparation of these proposals the importance of doing nothing to imperil this country's honourable tradition of offering sanctuary to genuine refugees. We should be a haven, not a honey pot.

Mr. Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton): Is the right hon. and learned Gentleman aware that my parents came to this country from eastern Europe in the first half of this century, seeking refuge from political and religious persecution? Does he recollect that I was for a period shadow Home Secretary? If I had become Home Secretary, would he have regarded it as seemly of me if, to the detriment of others in the predicament that my parents were in, I had changed the law that enabled them to obtain refuge here, which enabled me to be born here and enabled me to be elected to the House and to hold office in the Government?

Mr. Howard: The right hon. Gentleman's question is entirely misconceived, for the simple reason that nothing that I have suggested today in any way changes the entitlement of people to come to this country. Everyone who is entitled to come here to live today will continue to be entitled to come here to live when the proposals become law. So the right hon. Gentleman's question is utterly irrelevant, and has nothing whatever to do with the proposals, which are designed solely to deal with bogus asylum seekers and illegal immigrants who are not entitled to come to this country to live.

Mr. Jim Lester (Broxtowe): My right hon. and learned Friend and I agree that there is a problem. After the passage of the 1993 Act, which was intended to deal partially with the problem, many people gave evidence and made suggestions about how it could be improved. Those suggestions were not taken into account, and one of the reasons why the Act has failed, I suspect, is that people who are practitioners did not have that opportunity.

Surely there can be some mechanism whereby people can give evidence on what my right hon. and learned Friend is seeking to do, before the passage of the proposed legislation, in an attempt to make it work, and therefore to prove to all that what we are seeking to do is fair and effective, and fulfils our international obligations.

Mr. Howard: I assure my hon. Friend that I shall listen carefully to any representations that are made. That is one of the reasons why we are publishing a consultation document today on the provisions relating to employers. I am sure that we will receive representations from many sources, and they will all be considered carefully and taken into account.

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): May I appeal to the Home Secretary to exercise—unusually—some modesty in this context? He has admitted that the Government have introduced six immigration Bills since they came to office; indeed, I had the misfortune to serve on three of the Standing Committees that considered the legislation. He must also be admitting, in presenting yet another Bill, that those earlier Bills failed to address the issues that they were introduced to tackle.

May I therefore urge the Home Secretary to give careful consideration to the suggestion that a Special Standing Committee—or a special inquiry by the Select Committee on Home Affairs—be established to weigh the issues before the Standing Committee deals with the Bill? Time cannot be an issue: it could be done within a month if the political will existed. I urge the Home Secretary to consider such action, which would remove the suspicion among ethnic minorities that the legislation is unjust and discriminatory, and the feeling among many employers that it is totally unfair and unenforceable.

Mr. Howard: I do not accept for a moment that the earlier Bills failed. We must be prepared to view the problem afresh, in the light of changed circumstances. Anyone who thinks that circumstances of this kind do not change, and that it is possible to legislate once and for all and then forget about the matter, is living in a dream world. We must be prepared to examine such matters on a continuing basis, so that, when new problems occur, we can deal with them afresh.

The proposal for a special procedure is nothing more or less than a diversionary tactic. What we expect, and what the country expects, is examination of our proposals on their merits; and we want the Opposition to tell us whether they agree with them.

Mr. Nirj Joseph Deva (Brentford and Isleworth): Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that the only people who have anything to fear from the Bill are those who are not genuine asylum seekers, but are merely trying to exploit a loophole in the law for their own economic advantage? Is not the Labour party now supporting those exploiters in their attempts to rip off this country and its people?

Mr. Howard: I agree with my hon. Friend: in the absence of any indication of Labour's attitude to our proposals, that is rapidly becoming the only sensible inference to be drawn.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): Is the Home Secretary aware that, for 40 years before the last war, Select Bill Committees were set up specifically to deal with matters of technical and social complexity? Two Select Committees—Mr. Turton's Committee of 1970-71 and Mr. Williams's Committee of 1977-78—recommended a procedure similar to the special Bill procedure. Such a procedure would allow alternative methods to those proposed by the Home Secretary to be exercised by those who know and understand.

Would not the desire of both the right hon. and learned Gentleman and the Prime Minister for the matters involved to be dealt with without party controversy be fulfilled only if such a Committee met and took evidence? Without that opportunity, what the Home Secretary wants—as do I, and as do many other right hon. and hon. Members—would not be seen to be done.

Mr. Howard: I must confess that I do not recall what was done 40 years before the last war. The fact is, however, that this afternoon the Opposition are demonstrating a readiness to talk about anything and everything except the merits of our proposals. They are serious proposals, and we want a serious response from the Labour party, rather than a series of diversionary tactics.

Mr. Charles Wardle (Bexhill and Battle): My right hon. and learned Friend's proposals are most welcome, provided that they can deliver practical results. Does he

accept that a Bill by itself will not deter bogus asylum seekers, any more than Canute could stop the tide? Therefore, will he apply even more resources than he has announced so far to process the backlog of thousands of asylum applications, thereby saving the taxpayer hundreds of millions of pounds?

Mr. Howard: I pay tribute to my hon. Friend for his work on the 1993 Act, which has helped, although not as much as we had hoped and anticipated, to deal with this problem. I entirely agree with my hon. Friend about the legislation: of course a Bill alone cannot and will not be enough. My hon. Friend asked about resources. He will have heard me say that we are to spend £37 million more over the next three years to ensure that our capacity to deal with applications increases. I shall bear his request for even more resources firmly in mind.

Mr. Piara S. Khabra (Ealing, Southall): I challenge the Secretary of State's remark that this has no race implications at all. I have been in this country since 1959, and no legislation—

Madam Speaker: Order. This is a time for questions.

Mr. Khabra: I will go on to a question.

Madam Speaker: No, we do not go on to questions: we begin with questions.

Mr. Khabra: Does the Secretary of State agree that none of the legislation over the past 30 to 40 years has had racial implications for the racial minorities in this country?

Mr. Howard: I do not think that any of this has racial implications. I say as clearly as I can that this country will not have good race relations unless it also has firm, fair immigration controls. The two are absolutely inseparable. They march together, and we ignore that combination at our peril.

Mr. Roger Gale (North Thanet): My right hon. and learned Friend will know that those of us who served on the Committee that examined the 1993 Bill are particularly gratified by his efforts to plug the loophole and stop the abuse that has occurred as a result of that legislation through entrants from third countries. Could he reassure those of us who have an interest in the channel ports that the immigration service will have the resources and the powers it needs immediately to return those who seek to abuse our benefits system?

Mr. Howard: As my hon. Friend knows, I share that concern. As I said to my hon. Friend the Member for Bexhill and Battle (Mr. Wardle), we recently increased resources precisely to achieve the objective that my hon. Friend identifies.

Mr. Greville Janner (Leicester, West): Is the Minister aware that, as the proud grandson of four people who came to this country from Lithuania and Latvia, I am worried about how the new rules will be applied? The important consideration is not just the rules but the way that they are applied. I wonder whether my grandparents would have been accepted as having a well founded fear of persecution.

Will the Home Secretary please accept the sincerity of those of us who are anxious about the new rules, and look at them to see whether we may not be right in fearing that their effect could be to allow in terrorists and others who are wealthy and do not need benefit, while excluding the people who really need asylum from their own country?

Mr. Howard: With great respect to the hon. and learned Gentleman, it is frankly absurd to suggest that anything in these proposals would help to let in terrorists. In the context of well founded claims, I repeat what I said to the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman), who is sitting beside him: that there is nothing in the proposals to change the entitlement of anyone to come to live in this country.

The proposals do not affect the categories of people who are entitled to come to live here: they are designed entirely to deal with and to remedy abuse of our procedures, to deter bogus asylum seekers and illegal immigrants. That is why they deserve support from all parts of the House.

Mr. Hugh Dykes (Harrow, East): Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that the family origins and background of himself or anyone else have no intrinsic connection with this matter anyway? [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh, yes it has."] No—although I have the pleasure of having the Home Secretary's mother as a distinguished constituent of mine.

Does he agree, however, that understandable arguments faced thousands of refugees facing horrendous emergency before the war and, in more recent years, Ugandan Asian refugees coming from Idi Amin's tyranny? That is one situation where a large number of people must be helped under emergency provisions, and has nothing to do with the growing number of phoney individual asylum applications that come to all Members of Parliament of all parties at their repeated surgeries, as I know from my experience—and I am sure others do, too.

Will my right hon. and learned Friend confirm that, provided the basis of the application seeks out, supports and succours a genuine refugee and political asylum seeker, the legislation is capable of being considered in a prolonged Standing Committee procedure, as all Bills normally are?

Mr. Howard: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. He is right about the extent to which this measure can be properly scrutinised in Standing Committee. That will be an important part of the process that will enable to us achieve the highest possible quality in this legislation, so that it will properly do the task that we want it to do.

Mr. James Couchman (Gillingham): May I assure my right hon. and learned Friend that he has my absolute support on his measures to deter bogus asylum seekers, but, as a former employer, may I express some concern over his expectations of particularly small employers being able to discern whether they are taking on someone who is in fact an illegal immigrant? Will he give us a little more information about what he expects of employers, and will he assure me that he will communicate directly to employers, and not simply through the major employing organisations, what he is expecting of them in trying to discern illegal immigrants?

Mr. Howard: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his support for the asylum provisions in these measures. I note what he says about the employer provisions, and I hope that his concerns will be allayed when he reads the consultation document that I am publishing this afternoon.

[Mr. Howard]

It will say that, for the most part, employers will have to do very little more than they have to do now to establish one of the defences that will be provided. I will take seriously and give serious consideration to his suggestion that we communicate with employers directly, and not simply through their organisations.

Mr. Neil Gerrard (Walthamstow): How can the Secretary of State claim that his proposal is consistent with the UN convention on refugees, which this country signed, which clearly states that group presumptions affecting a group of people from one country should be made only in emergency, and then only in relation to a positive decision, when it is necessary to accept those people? That is the complete opposite of his proposal, and article 1 of the convention says that it should be applied without discrimination in relation to race, religion and country of origin.

Mr. Howard: There will certainly be no discrimination of any type in the way in which we apply these provisions. On the convention, as I said in my statement, we will consider each application from any of the countries designated individually and, as I also said in that statement, we are not alone in introducing a designated list: Germany and Holland have recently done exactly the same.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): In view of what has been said, is the Home Secretary now repudiating the words of the person who, until recently, was the Conservative party's research director and is now a Conservative candidate—that race was an issue, and that immigration could be raised as an issue before and during a general election?

Does not the Home Secretary recognise that, although there are undoubtedly genuine difficulties—no one doubts that for one moment—Labour Members have every reason to believe, especially in view of what was written by the former research director of Conservative central office, that the right hon. and learned Gentleman is raising these matters in such a way to try to gain as much electoral advantage as possible? He is worried not about refugees, immigration or good race relations, but only about gaining as many votes as possible for the Tory party at the next election.

Mr. Howard: I entirely refute that suggestion. It is another example of the Opposition being ready to talk about anything and everything except the merits of the proposals. Let us have a sensible debate on the merits of the proposals—that is what a responsible Opposition would do.

Sir Dudley Smith (Warwick and Leamington): Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that any sensible, fair-minded person could do no other than support all his proposals? Is he further aware that, contrary to the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) said about the ethnic minority communities, many of them have been worried about employment because illegal immigrants impinge on their employment prospects? I am sure that many members of those communities will welcome my right hon. and learned Friend's proposals.

Mr. Howard: I agree with my hon. Friend, who has made an important and pertinent point. There is no doubt that many members of ethnic minority communities recognise the importance of firm, fair immigration control, want the loopholes to be block, and want proper action taken. My hon. Friend is entirely right.

Mr. Doug Henderson (Newcastle upon Tyne, North): The Secretary of State said that he did not believe that a genuine case for political asylum would be deterred by his proposals. How can he assure a genuine refugee from a country on the white list that he will be guaranteed fair treatment, if all cases are not considered on their merits? If all cases are considered on their merits, what is the point of having the white list? Is it not the case that this sort of issue should be considered by a Special Standing Committee, which would reduce racial tension and promote good race relations?

Mr. Howard: The Opposition persist in their diversionary tactics of trying to discuss anything and everything but the merits. There is no reason to suppose that any genuine asylum seeker from a country on the designated list would be disadvantaged or would not be able to have his application properly considered—and, indeed, as pointed out by my right hon. Friend the Member for Witney (Mr. Hurd), have it accepted.

The designated list will create a presumption, and will change the appeal procedures so that we can make greater progress with, and have more speedy processing of, applications from those countries. The Labour party must face the fact that other countries are introducing tough but fair procedures to deter bogus applicants, and that we must match them and take similar action. We need firm but fair immigration control if we are to maintain our record of good race relations.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. *[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. Hon. Members must resume their seats. I have a point of order.

Mr. Dalyell: I have been in this House for a great number of years. What we have witnessed this afternoon is, quite honestly, unprecedented in the procedure of the House. Whenever before, during debates on the Queen's Speech, has a Secretary of State made what he must have known would be a highly controversial statement on a subject that is not being debated that day? Has it been done for presentational reasons? If so, should the Queen's Speech and the House of Commons be used—some might say abused—in that way?

Hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Madam Speaker: Order. Let me respond to the point raised. Of course, I did not read the Secretary of State's statement before he made it, but out of courtesy I must always allow a Secretary of State wishing to give information to the House to do so. I have to say that, when I heard the right hon. and learned Gentleman, I did think that the statement should have been made either tomorrow, when we are debating these matters, or on Second Reading of the Bill. Therefore, I sought brisk exchanges, so that we might proceed with our proper business today and return to this matter tomorrow and on Second Reading. That is what I now propose to do.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Order. I will take no more points of order on that matter.

Points of Order

4.23 pm

Mr. Piers Merchant (Beckenham): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I seek your guidance on what further action I can take following the non-declaration of an interest by the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) in a debate on Friday. At the time, she said that full information would be available in the Library, from which I assumed that it would cover the figure involved as well—but to date it does not.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Order. A number of hon. Members are seeking to raise points of order about the declaration of interests. I will take no more points of order on that matter. The House is well aware that our rules have recently changed. I urge all hon. Members who wish to table questions, motions, and amendments to motions and Bills to read clearly the notice in the Table Office before doinf so. It remains the clear responsibility of each Member of Parliament to decide whether a declaration of interest is appropriate. I myself have taken the trouble to go to the Table Office to read that notice; I expect all hon. Members to do likewise.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I do not know whether you have had the opportunity to watch any episodes of "The Final Cut" on television on Sundays. It is giving rise to a great deal of offence in the House, not because the Prime Minister, Francis Urquhart, is portrayed as a killer—these things happen, as we know—but because of the way in which our procedures are misrepresented.

At the end of the programme, we learn that the parliamentary adviser to the programme makers is none other than the hon. Member for Mid-Staffordshire (Mr. Fabricant). Do you not think that it might be opportune for you to call him into your office and tell him a few things about procedure, so that the programme gets it right?

Mr. Michael Fabricant (Mid-Staffordshire) *rose—*

Madam Speaker: I do not usually take further points of order, but, as the hon. Member for Mid-Staffordshire (Mr. Fabricant) has been mentioned, perhaps, in all fairness, I ought to do just that.

Mr. Fabricant: While I should welcome the opportunity to come to your private chambers to have the procedure explained to me, Madam Speaker, may I explain that, although I may give advice, there is no obligation on the BBC to take it?

Madam Speaker: Opportunity is a fine thing; it will not come the hon. Gentleman's way.

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. You may have seen reports to the effect that the Secretary of State for National Heritage is planning to convene private meetings with Conservative Members to give them help and advice on how to obtain money from the various national lottery funds for groups in their constituencies.

Although you, Madam Speaker, cannot be responsible for meetings convened by the Secretary of State for National Heritage, I would hope that you, as the protector of the rights of all hon. Members, might be able to persuade the Secretary of State to make sure that any tips, advice or information are shared with all hon. Members and not only with Conservative Members.

Madam Speaker: I am sure that that is absolutely the right way to proceed. However, I should have thought that the hon. Gentleman, as a parliamentarian of long standing, would be knocking on the door of the Secretary of State for National Heritage to learn a few of those tips for his own region.

Orders of the Day

Debate on the Address

[FOURTH DAY]

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Question,

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, as follows:—

Most Gracious Sovereign,

We, Your Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Parliament assembled, beg leave to offer our humble thanks to your Majesty for the Gracious Speech which Your Majesty has addressed to both Houses of Parliament.—*[Mr. Hurd.]*

Question again proposed.

Investment

4.27 pm

The President of the Board of Trade and Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Mr. Ian Lang): I welcome this opportunity in the resumed debate on the Gracious Speech to debate trade, industry and transport. The Gracious Speech announces the Government's proposals for legislation to ratify the chemical weapons convention, and I am grateful to the Labour party for its support for that proposal. The Gracious Speech also mentions our important objective of world trade liberalisation and transatlantic free trade, the need to promote flexible labour markets as a basis for increased job creation and the continuing need to encourage enterprise and competitiveness and to support small businesses. They are all highly desirable objectives—

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow) *rose—*

Mr. Lang: I have uttered only one sentence, but I shall give way.

Mr. Dalyell: I intervene at this point as the right hon. Gentleman mentioned chemical weapons legislation, in which I have taken an interest for 30 years. Will he consider allowing an annual report on the matter to be presented to Parliament? It is a crucial subject that has been raised with his Department by the expert Dr. Julian Perry Robinson and others. There is good will towards the proposed Bill; might the Secretary of State reciprocate and consider the suggestion carefully before Thursday?

Mr. Lang: I shall certainly reflect on what the hon. Gentleman has said. There will be an opportunity for the matter to be pursued at that time.

The first priority for a successful industrial and commercial policy is to establish economic conditions within which enterprise can flourish. Wealth creation has always been at the centre of our policies. Without it, we will never be able to afford the level and quality of services that the British public rightly want and deserve.

But it is business—not Governments—that creates wealth. The keys to wealth creation are enterprise, competitiveness and flexibility. The Gracious Speech outlined the Government's determination to improve the competitiveness of our economy and make Britain the enterprise centre of Europe, which I am sure the House welcomes.

The Opposition always seek to make much—no doubt we shall hear more of it again today—of those few figures in the economy that are sometimes less encouraging. They pay little or no attention to the good news, which has been so plentiful in recent months and, indeed, years, such as last week's news on inflation and public finances, for example. I know that my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer will take all the available figures into account in determining the course of economic policy.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): On competitiveness, in Britain, outwith the Clyde, the merchant shipyards have largely gone. Will the right hon. Gentleman confirm that the European Union's shipbuilding intervention fund is to continue operating until October next year? What are he and his colleagues doing about the fiddling of the shipbuilding subsidies in Italy and Spain? Let us have fair competition in the building of ships.

Mr. Lang: I share absolutely the hon. Gentleman's objective of fairness throughout the European Community. If he has any evidence to present, I am sure that he will bring it forward. For the rest, he will have seen in the news in the week before last that the shipbuilding arrangements will continue, but will be subject to review in the course of next year.

Despite the occasional variations in the economic news, it remains true that the United's Kingdom economy has grown significantly faster than the G7 average for the past two years. It is expected, along with Germany's, to be ahead of the pack again next year. What is more, we are putting the conditions in place to ensure that we keep it that way.

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, which the Labour party occasionally likes to quote, says in its report that our economic performance is "impressive", and refers to the fact that our

"sweeping structural reforms are yielding dividends in a more flexible, competitive and less inflation-prone economy".

Mr. Denis MacShane (Rotherham): In that case, is the right hon. Gentleman proud of the fact that, according to the OECD, we have sunk from 13th to 18th in the world league table of economic competitiveness and performance under Conservative Governments since 1979?

Mr. Lang: I shall be developing the theme of our competitiveness and the relative improvement in our position in the course of my speech, after which the hon. Gentleman will be far better informed and able to contribute to the debate later.

I am sure that the Labour party will be encouraged by the conclusions reached by the OECD, its comment that our performance is impressive, and its recognition of what we are achieving.

Ms Joan Walley (Stoke-on-Trent, North): On competitiveness, does the President of the Board of Trade agree that the British Steel plant at Shelton in Stoke-on-Trent is highly competitive? It has only just been described as the jewel in the crown, yet it is now under threat because of subsidies to steel plants elsewhere. What will his Government do, and will they use the veto?

Mr. Lang: The hon. Lady knows that the Government have not shirked the need to rationalise our steel industry

to allow it to reduce in size and thereby become extremely competitive. Indeed, British Steel is now one of the most efficient and competitive companies anywhere in the world. We expect other members of the European Community to recognise too the need to take appropriate steps. That is the position that we are pursuing in the negotiations to which the hon. Lady has referred.

A stable macro-economic environment is vital to give business the confidence that it needs to invest in future. Permanently low inflation and sound public finances are an essential prerequisite for a successful and expanding economy—they are not optional extras. That is why we set a target for underlying inflation of 1 per cent. to 4 per cent. and aimed for the bottom half of that range. Even the Labour party could not disagree that our inflation performance over the past few years has been excellent.

I should like to put that into some historical perspective. Since the Government developed their inflation target, underlying inflation has averaged 2.8 per cent. That compares with 7 per cent. during the 1980s and 13 per cent. in the 1970s. That is no mean achievement.

Business is responding to the improved environment. Over the past year, manufacturing investment is up by 11 per cent. and manufacturing investment in plant and machinery is up by more than 14 per cent. The CBI reports that investment intentions this year have been at the highest level for six years.

The Labour party is often keen on comparisons; I shall give it a few. In the past 15 years, our economy has forged ahead; Britain has beaten the European average. Our economy has grown faster, our unemployment has been lower, our productivity has grown faster, our manufacturing businesses have been more profitable and our investment in research and development is higher than the European average. The 1980s was the first decade since the war when the United Kingdom grew faster than Germany, France or Italy.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): Is profitability the real measure of success? Has the Secretary of State noticed what has happened in my constituency? Campbell's, an American conglomerate and multinational, purchased a company for £58.6 million. Within nine weeks, it announced the closure of that company, which made £4 million profit last year—probably more by the time we have unravelled the books.

Is it not true that the only way in which Campbell's can now be dealt with is by the British people boycotting Campbell's soups? That is the way in which to deal with the company; the only language it understands is market forces. If British consumers are prepared to say, when they go to the supermarket, that they will not buy Campbell's soups because of what Campbell's did—closing down an extremely profitable company in Maryport—that will be the only way in which we can teach it a lesson.

Mr. Lang: The hon. Gentleman makes his constituency point and I understand the strength of his feeling. He asked whether profitability was important. Yes, it is. I wish that the Labour party would recognise the importance of profits and profitability. They were not, of course, the only criteria I gave. I also mentioned growth, unemployment, productivity and research and development; in those areas, the United Kingdom has performed better than the European average over the past 15 years. Our manufacturing productivity has grown faster than that of any other major industrialised nation since 1980 and it has risen two and a half times faster than that of West Germany.

Against that background, small businesses have blossomed. Since 1979, more than 1 million have been created. The Opposition have often made much of the importance of manufacturing so they will, no doubt, welcome the fact that our share of world trade in manufactures has stabilised after decades of decline. Since 1979, the volume of British manufactured exports has risen by more than 85 per cent.

The Opposition often talk about investment. Since 1979, investment in plant and machinery has risen by more than 50 per cent., business investment has risen by one third and overall investment has risen faster than it has in Germany, France or Italy. It has risen six times as quickly as it did under the previous Labour Government.

Investment is made to secure a return. One of the keys to increased investment is profit, which is precisely the point about which the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) asked me. The profit and profitability—the words that Labour loves to hate—of British business have improved markedly under this Government; Labour would reverse that. It would impose huge new costs on business through regulation, through its training tax, through the minimum wage and through the social chapter. That would discourage not only inward investment, but domestic investment.

Business and manufacturing investment in the United Kingdom has been boosted by our privatisation and liberalisation policies—investment that Labour's doctrinal opposition would have prevented from happening.

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield): I have an increasing feeling of being unwell in the unreal world of this Chamber. Can the Secretary of State bring us back to the realities of life? Was he around in the 1980s when our manufacturing base was devastated? Plants in his constituency and in the constituency of every hon. Member were devastated and good firms closed down, never to reopen. Is it really true when the Secretary of State says that nothing of that sort happened? Were we all living in a dream world, or is he misleading the House?

Mr. Lang: The hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman) seems to have forgotten the shambles which the Conservative Government inherited from his party in 1979, and the massive efforts that we had to make to reverse the trend of decline. Certainly manufacturing jobs were lost and plants were closed, but in recent years—as a result of improved competitiveness—we have achieved new investment, new growth and new export markets.

The hon. Gentleman asked me about the 1980s during my remarks on privatisation. The fact is that the Labour party opposed every privatisation measure that was brought before the House, claiming that privatisation and competition would lead to falling investment and rising prices. In fact, the opposite has been true.

Mr. William Powell (Corby): My right hon. Friend's analysis of the changes in the British economy is not theoretical. If he comes to my constituency, he will see that every single one of the matters he is outlining is the truth and has led to a booming economy.

Mr. Lang: My hon. Friend is absolutely right, and Corby possibly illustrates that point better than any other constituency.

[Mr. Lang]

Productivity in the privatised industries has moved sharply ahead. British Telecom, for example, has raised its productivity by 140 per cent. Investment in the privatised industries has shot ahead. BT has invested £25 billion since privatisation, while Mercury has invested £2.7 billion in a new digital network.

Liberalising the telecoms market—a measure opposed by Labour, of course—has brought in new competitors and new investment. The cable companies expect to have invested £10 billion by the end of the decade. Labour's thanks for that huge investment would be to renege on the Government's commitment to the regulatory framework in favour of a sweetheart deal with one company. No wonder Labour had its wrist slapped by the director general of Oftel. Real investment in the electricity industry has increased by more than 10 per cent. since privatisation. Compare that with the 25 per cent. cut between 1974 and 1979. Investment by British Gas and the water companies has more than doubled in real terms since privatisation.

Customers too have seen major improvements, with falling prices and improved service quality. The average domestic electricity consumer will enjoy a reduction of about £90 in his bills next year. Domestic consumers have benefited from a fall in real prices since privatisation of more than 22 per cent. before VAT. Industrial customers have seen their real gas prices fall by 40 per cent. since privatisation. BT's prices have fallen by more than 35 per cent. in real terms since privatisation.

When the Labour party talks about investment, clearly it is not talking about private sector investment, privatised industry investment or manufacturing investment. It is not talking about inward investment, through which thousands of companies are investing billions of pounds to create hundreds of thousands of jobs. Labour is talking about that atavistic socialist belief that no investment matters unless it is public sector investment. If Labour wants to increase that, it should say by how much, and I invite the right hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) to say so today.

How will that increase be paid for: by cutting other spending—perhaps on health or education—or by higher taxation? The electorate are getting fed up with Labour's absurd pretence that it can increase expenditure and cut taxation at one and the same time. That engenders only incredulity and distrust, and rightly so because Labour's sums do not add up.

Following the privatisation of state-run companies which used to account for around a tenth of our national output, we have greatly enhanced competition in our economy. Indeed, competition and choice have been at the heart of the Government's economic policies. As a result, competition is present to a greater degree than ever before in the economic life of this country. It is an essential ingredient in the promotion of the UK's competitiveness.

Competition must be underpinned by an effective system of competition law. I have been considering this matter, and I recognise that a reform and updating of the existing arrangements is overdue. The House is aware that the Government have decided to reform competition law in two principal areas. We intend to prohibit cartels and restrictive trade agreements unless positive countervailing benefits can be shown. We intend to strengthen the powers of the Director General of Fair Trading to investigate monopolies and anti-competitive practices.

We do not intend to discard some of the real strengths of the UK system, such as the distinctive roles of the Office of Fair Trading as investigator and prosecutor and the Monopolies and Mergers Commission as the dispassionate assessor of the public interest. Nor do we consider that the case for the introduction of a prohibition on abuse of market power has been proven.

While we will wish to take proper account of the evolving relationship between European Community competition law and the competition law of member states and to consider how a prohibition on restrictive agreements modelled on article 85 of the EC treaty might fit into the UK common system, we must certainly avoid replicating those features of the EC regime which experience has shown to be unsatisfactory. The changes we make must suit our circumstances.

We must prepare the way thoroughly and on the basis of consultation for fundamental reform which the Government will then implement as soon as practicable. I can the tell the House that my Department will accordingly be undertaking a comprehensive consultation exercise in the new year. This will take the views of business, consumers and competition practitioners on the technical and operational issues which will need to be settled before the Government can give effect to the reforms to which we are committed.

It is not competition as such that costs jobs; being competitive creates them. Nor is it technological advance or trade that creates unemployment. It is the failure to foresee and the inability to adapt to change that leads to jobs being lost. That is why flexibility in our economy is so crucial, and that is why we reject the rigidities and the extra burdens that would arise from the Opposition's policies of a national minimum wage and opting into the social chapter.

Talking to the CBI last week, the Leader of the Opposition said:

"the real fear is that being part of the social chapter we may in future agree to the import of inefficient working practices to Britain".

That is right, and we have been telling the right hon. Gentleman that for years. That is the very reason why the Prime Minister negotiated the opt-out from the social chapter.

But while the Leader of the Opposition was right to highlight the dangers of the social chapter, he was wrong to assert that it was not detailed legislation, but a set of principles. If that were all it was, why is he so keen to sign it? We could just proclaim the principles ourselves. The fact is that it is much more than that. It is a binding obligation that would lead inexorably to detailed legislation.

The right hon. Gentleman seems quite unable to grasp the fact that if the UK signs the social chapter, we would lose the opportunity to reject proposals for damaging legislation that would be imposed upon us—regardless of the views of this House—by qualified majority voting. So his claim that each piece of legislation will be "judged on its merits" is worthless. That is not an option. Once the social chapter was signed, there would be no protection for this country from laws which would raise employers' costs, undermine competitiveness and destroy jobs.

I welcome the Leader of the Opposition's tacit admission that some aspects of the social chapter would run counter to our interests, but the position of Opposition Members has been made more exposed by the words of their own leader. It makes their posture even more indefensible. They would sign the social chapter even though they now admit that it would damage the competitiveness of our economy. Opposition Members should read the leader of *The Times* on 15 November, which said:

"The truth is that Britain is in an enviable and much envied position. By remaining outside the Social Chapter, Britain has become a magnet for outside direct investment. To throw away such a precious competitive advantage would be madness."

That says it all.

Not signing the social chapter does not mean poor working conditions or low wages. On the contrary, both have improved very substantially for most workers. We have in place a fair and balanced framework of individual employment rights. One of the supports that underpins that framework is an industrial tribunal system which enjoys widespread trust and confidence. The essential work of the tribunals has grown both in scale and complexity over the years. The Government are firmly committed to ensuring that they continue to provide an effective means of resolving disputes over employment rights.

The Green Paper published last year invited views on ways of improving the operation of tribunals and of encouraging more settlements in-house or with third party assistance. Some 200 responses were received from both sides of industry, the legal profession and a wide range of other interested parties. They were broadly supportive of most of the proposals and I can tell the House that today I have announced the Government's intention to implement those proposals when a suitable legislative opportunity arises. I believe that this will be widely welcomed.

The changes proposed will make an important contribution to promoting the role of conciliation and voluntary arbitration as alternative means of settling disputes at work and to streamlining tribunal procedures. They will help to ensure that a system which has so amply proved its worth will continue to play its indispensable role in the framework of British industrial relations.

Part of the more flexible labour market that we have achieved, with all the benefits it has brought in terms of increased jobs, has been the result of the dramatic improvement in industrial relations. More than 2 million jobs were created in the last economic cycle; half a million since the end of the recession. Half of those were in the last year alone. Over the last economic cycle we have created jobs at twice the rate of countries such as France and Italy.

We have a higher proportion of our population in work than all our European competitors. We have broken out of the vicious cycle that saw each downturn in the economy causing unemployment to ratchet up another notch. For the first time since the early 1960s, unemployment peaked at a lower level in the last recession than in the one preceding it.

Even more encouragingly, the same is true of long-term unemployment. Britain is one of the very few European Union countries to have managed to break out of this cycle. Although it remains too high, unemployment has fallen faster in this country than in most of our competitors in the EU or the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development—by more than 700,000 in the past three years. Our unemployment rate is now below that of Germany, Italy, France and Spain and well below the EU average.

Yet Labour, through the national minimum wage, wants to adopt labour market policies more akin to those of Spain and France. The rate of youth unemployment in the United Kingdom is about half that of France and about a third that of Spain. Spain and France are the only two countries to have a minimum wage along the lines proposed by the Trades Union Congress. The impact on young people in those two countries has been devastating.

While the flexible labour market has greatly improved the United Kingdom's job creation record, it has not done so at the expense of wages, whatever the Opposition may claim. Real wages at all levels have increased and take-home pay for a single production worker in the United Kingdom is actually higher than in any EU country except Luxembourg.

Mr. Michael Clapham (Barnsley, West and Penistone): What does the Secretary of State have to say to the unemployed of Barnsley, following a survey in May this year which showed that 79 per cent. of the jobs that were advertised in Barnsley were advertised at wages lower than would have been possible had the wages councils still existed?

Mr. Lang: The average increase in real living wages in Britain since 1979 is 40 per cent. The wages of a single production worker in Britain are higher than anywhere else in the EU, and the wages of a married man in the same capacity are higher than in Italy or France.

Britain's advantage lies not in having low wages, because we do not have them—*[Interruption.]* We do not have them, as the figures that I have just given illustrate. Our advantage lies in having the lowest non-wage labour costs of all our major European competitors. That remains vital to creating more jobs in this country.

One of the key factors in making Britain so attractive to inward investors has been precisely the improvement in our competitive position. It is integral to our growing competitiveness and attractiveness as a location for business investment. Last week I was in Bavaria, where I met the chairman of BMW and the vice-president of Siemens Semiconductors, both major international companies and major investors in Britain. In the words of Bernd Pischetsrieder, the chairman of BMW:

"The bottom line is that what you started in Great Britain back in the early '80s other European countries still have to do today."

Foreign firms are showing, by their major investment commitments, their approval and confidence in our policies and our work force. The UK is the No. 1 location for Japanese, United States and Korean investment in the European Union.

The United Kingdom attracts one third of all inward investment in the European Union and more than 40 per cent. of both Japanese and American investment in the Union is based in the UK. Once again, in the first half of this year, we were the top location for German investment worldwide, attracting more than double the amount of investment made in the same period last year.

What is more, more than half the inward investment into the UK last year comprised expansions of existing plants, thus confirming the confidence that inward

[Mr. Lang]

investors have in the British economy and the talents of its work force. Our inward investment record is the verdict of the rest of the world on Britain's recent economic achievements.

The inflow of investment into the United Kingdom has also had its corresponding outflow, as British firms have increasingly recognised the need to compete in a global environment. Here, too, our economy benefits considerably. Outward investment allows British companies to develop their competitive strength both at home and abroad. It helps them to gain access to world markets for British goods and services.

Britain ranks second only to the United States in its stock of outward investment. Our total stock of overseas investment amounted to £183 billion in 1994, earning £22 billion for this country. As a proportion of gross domestic product it is more than double that of any other major investor. We are the largest investor in the United States, and the largest European investor in China.

We are first and foremost a trading nation. We are the fifth largest exporter in the world and we were the only one of the major industrialised nations to increase our share of world exports last year. We export more per head than Japan or the United States. Since 1979, the volume of our exports has nearly doubled. After decades of relative decline, our manufacturers are again competitive in the world marketplace.

Underlying export volumes have risen by 24 per cent. since the beginning of this recovery—to record levels. Our exports to the European Union are growing strongly. Manufacturers exported more than a third more to the Netherlands than a year earlier and exports to Germany and Spain are up by a fifth.

We are also doing well in the world's most dynamic markets. In the past 12 years, the south-east Asian market has tripled in size, but our exports have done even better. Moreover, our exports to south-east Asia have grown faster than those of France or Germany. In the past year, our exports to Japan, Hong Kong and Indonesia have risen by more than a fifth and already this year exports to Japan are up by a third. Last year, we had a balance of payments surplus with Asia as whole, including a surplus with the newly industrialised Asian tigers.

We have been engaged in recent years in the reversal of years of decline and the achievement of long-term structural improvements in our economic performance. The Government have always taken a long-term view. The competitiveness White Papers that we published this year and last show that we have long-term challenges to meet, but we are at last gaining ground lost in the past. The White Papers set out a long-term programme for action for all parts of Government to help improve our underlying performance.

The need to continue to improve our competitiveness is more pressing than ever. The pace of change is accelerating. The world marketplace is becoming increasingly competitive. New challenges but also immense opportunities in the world's rapidly growing markets are emerging all the time. Enterprise and flexibility are essential if our firms are to seize more of the prizes on offer.

That is why we are determined to reduce the burden of regulation on our firms and to continue our fight against backdoor regulation by means of the social chapter. The flexibility of our labour market is one of our greatest strengths, as our competitors acknowledge.

We have been resolute in our determination to improve our underlying performance. We have not shirked the difficult and sometimes unpopular decisions that were necessary. I believe that the benefits are now plain to see. We are no longer the sick man of Europe but are well on the way to becoming its enterprise centre. The Government are determined to achieve that goal.

4.58 pm

Mrs. Margaret Beckett (Derby, South): The Secretary of State has been saying recently that the widespread feeling of economic insecurity pervading the country is just a state of mind. One thing that came out of his speech very clearly today is that the Government's state of mind is one of extraordinary complacency, especially in the light of today's poor figures on gross domestic product and total investment.

Who would have thought from listening to the Secretary of State this afternoon that growth in GDP has been revised down to 2.1 per cent. in the past 12 months and that gross domestic fixed capital formation has shrunk by 2.2 per cent. in the past quarter and risen by only a disappointing 0.6 per cent. in the past year?

Against that background, the context within which the Gracious Speech has been set, the tenor of the public debate that the Government have sought to foster and the content of the speech itself, with the exception of the chemical weapons Bill—the only legislation in the Department of Trade and Industry portfolio this Session and a Bill that we welcome, although we will have to scrutinise its exact details—testify to the Government's further lurch to the right. Indeed, the speech, the context and the public debate are all further evidence of the Government's view that, instead of good government, Britain is best served by absence of government.

As a result, we contend that Britain's industrial and economic performance is far too weak. The Government consistently dispute that claim, and the Secretary of State did so again today. There is a clear gulf between us, or perhaps, clear blue water—a gulf of both analysis and prescription. We differ not only on the nature of Britain's ills but on how they may be tackled. Nor does absence of government mean in this case just benign neglect. As the Government substitute party for public interest at every turn, their neglect approaches the malign.

Take the chair of the Conservative party, who used the press launch of the Queen's Speech to explain that its main purpose was not to further the national interest or address weakness in our economy but to smoke out the Labour party. Indeed, take the President of the Board of Trade, the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, who went to the Confederation of British Industry conference, not to tell members what they should do for Britain, let alone what Britain's Government might do to help them to advance Britain's interests, but to tell them what they should do for the Conservative party.

Look at the changes that are being considered in the timetable for selling Railtrack or Nuclear Electric. The timetable for the latter was already thought to be tight in

terms of safety, yet it is being brought further forward to placate the mad tax cutters on the Tory Back Benches—none of them apparently present today.

Sir Wyn Roberts (Conwy) *rose—*

Mrs. Beckett: I shall give way to one of the few who are.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Talking of tax cutting, does the right hon. Lady fully support the shadow Chancellor in his ambition to achieve a 10p rate of tax?

Mrs. Beckett: Yes, indeed I do. As I hope the right hon. Gentleman is aware, my hon. Friend's suggestions form part of a number of remarks in which he has suggested what sort of tax cuts should be made if resources are available for them, such as a cut in the value added tax on fuel. I hope that we will see the right hon. Gentleman in the Lobby with us, if we have a chance to put that to the vote.

In all those respects, it has become clear that, for this Government, the national interest now explicitly takes second place to the interests of the governing party. As the Conservatives focus on their party alone, they become increasingly out of touch with the people.

The other remark of the Secretary of State that was reported last week—that job insecurity is "a state of mind" and that the reality is different, when 8.5 million people have experienced unemployment since the last general election alone and millions more in every job and profession live in hourly fear, not just of losing their job but of being unable to get another—touches on one of the rawest nerves in middle England and rivals, if that were possible, the insensitivity of a Gerald Ratner or a Norman Lamont. Yet the Government continue to turn their back on proposals like our own for a Government programme to kick-start new employment and training projects, funded by a windfall tax on excess utility profits, even though Britain ranks 20th out of the 24 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development countries for levels of job creation since 1979—something else that no one would have understood from the Secretary of State's remarks.

Nor do other international comparisons bring us much comfort. Britain ranks 23rd in the world competitiveness tables for productivity. We were the only country, apart from Turkey, to cut seedcorn investment in research and development, although we were the people who had £128 billion in today's prices from oil. Our overall record on investment is worse than that of our competitors, and so—we believe as a direct result—is our record on growth. We rank behind all the other G7 countries in terms of our manufacturing investment as a proportion of GDP—our national wealth—and behind every country of the European Union, and we have fallen to 21st in the ranks of the OECD.

In real terms, manufacturing investment was more than 17 per cent. lower in 1994 than when the Conservatives came to office in 1979. Just as we rank low in investment, so we rank low in growth. On growth averages since 1979, Britain is bottom of the league of the G7 countries and in Europe, and this has been the slowest period of growth for the United Kingdom since the 1930s.

That is the whole of the Conservative Government's record—not highlights that were carefully selected to try to present a different picture. It is also their failure: the intensification of Britain's decline as a productive, competitive manufacturing nation.

Between 1979 and 1995, the value of sterling against the German mark halved. It also declined by more than 25 per cent. against the United States dollar and by 70 per cent. against the Japanese yen. In addition, as the Secretary of State mentioned, hourly labour costs in UK manufacturing are lower than in the United States of America, Germany and Japan and yet, with these two significant advantages—a lower currency and relatively low hourly labour costs—much of our manufacturing industry remains uncompetitive in not only domestic but international markets.

A few moments ago, the Secretary of State spoke about the terrible problems that the Conservative Government inherited from their predecessors—a Labour Government. But in 1983, under a Conservative Government, we saw the first ever trade deficit in manufactured goods since the industrial revolution—a deficit that has remained ever since. Only a few weeks ago, that deficit widened further.

Clearly devaluation, whether on its own or in combination with lower wage costs, does not in itself provide the panacea for declining competitiveness: the missing elements are investment and the sustainable increases in productivity that only investment can bring. In most years since 1979, the rate of new investment has been less than the rate at which old plant and machinery were scrapped. Today, the Secretary of State has argued, as Ministers have argued recently, that the increase in manufacturing investment last year was higher, at 11 per cent. That increase was from a very low base, however. As late as 1992, the real capital stock of manufacturing after depreciation was only 1.5 per cent. higher than in 1979.

Nor are we investing in skills. The proportion of 16-year-olds leaving English schools without any qualifications rose this year for the second year running. Two years ago, 6.9 per cent. of children left without qualifications. Today, the figure has risen to 8.1 per cent., and 8.3 per cent. of 16-year-olds failed to gain even one grade G at GCSE.

So in Britain today we have plant and machinery that are outdated, a work force who are low-skilled and, with little investment in plant or people, low productivity by international standards. In consequence, under this Government we have had the lowest average growth in post-war history, as well as the highest levels of unemployment and, for most people, the biggest tax rises.

That is this Government's record, and their remedy is equally disastrous. Recently, Ministers have been forced to admit that Britain is being overtaken by the so-called "Asian tiger" economies. They claim that that is further justification for their drive to lower wages and working conditions. In fact, the Government's strategy, if such it can be called, is to build a kind of Tory Euro-Disney—a never-never land run on Mickey Mouse economics—in which the people of Britain are being taken for an expensive ride.

But we are not being beaten only by the Asian tigers. We are also being beaten by the high-wage economies of France, Germany, Switzerland, the USA and elsewhere. The strategy of transforming our industrial and engineering centres into locations for low-cost, low-wage, low-skill assembly plants will not help us to compete in the global economy; on the contrary, it will cost us dear. This country's survival and that of our people depend, first and foremost, on our ability to make and sell goods in the domestic and global markets. A year ago, the president of Honda stated:

[Mrs. Beckett]

"The money game is fine, but industry is the only way for a country to survive, and I wonder how the British expect to make a living in the future."

That was said on the occasion of the acquisition by BMW—which the Secretary of State quoted—of Rover. If that proves how successful we are, I wonder why Rover did not buy BMW.

The Government's neglect of our national interest continues, even when the absence of Government action threatens their own declared policy—as, recently, with takeovers and sales in the utilities. The Government's case for privatisation was that the utilities were monopolies and, as such, were bound to act with insufficient regard for consumer interests. The utilities were not only sold at knock-down prices but split into competing units with the claim that competition would act to protect the consumer and hence help the public interest. Today, we see consolidation and the potential creation of fresh utility monopolies in the private sector, as industries are subject to a wave of mergers and takeovers which the Government are failing to check, and about which the Secretary of State had nothing to say today.

We are seeing a dangerous concentration of power. In the north-west, more than one of the essentials of life—water and electricity—are in the hands of one private company. We are even seeing essential services fall into the hands of private companies whose base, origins and essential interests lie overseas—for example, in France and the United States. To make matters worse, it is an open secret that such foreign-owned utilities are investing here because they have far greater freedom to ride roughshod over the interests of British consumers than they would at home.

I have written to the Secretary of State more than once, as did my predecessor, calling on him to refer not just individual bids but the entire electricity industry to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission for independent investigation of public and consumer interest. In that respect as in others, Britain needs the industrial strategy that the Government lack—a strategy for investment in Britain's future.

The Secretary of State had little to say today about small and medium-sized firms, although lip service was paid to them in the Queen's Speech. Such firms are often the most dynamic enterprises in any given industrial sector, and in countries such as Germany they form an important part of manufacturing industry. The owners of many small businesses, being hard-pressed for time, work 70 hours or more a week and often face tremendous barriers in getting their hands on information and serious hurdles in the way of obtaining accessible finance. A Labour Government would seek to tackle that funding gap. We have already developed plans to match investors with lenders through tailor-made accessible services at no additional cost to the public purse, using an enhanced network of business links throughout the UK—an idea that the Government, we are pleased to see, are beginning to take up.

We are equally concerned about technology-based firms, which often find it difficult to borrow because of bank preference for collateral. We have advanced ideas for enhanced business links to address that market failure through an equity underwriting scheme that would underwrite a certain proportion of equity invested by a venture capitalist and in return look to receive a share of profits accrued later.

Another market failure that the Government could address is the lack of information available to so-called business angels. It is estimated that the amount of finance available from that source is £3 billion to £5 billion, yet a major problem for such investors is in obtaining information about potential investments in good industrial and commercial ideas. By working with private sector organisations already involved in matching such investors with companies, we could investigate how a national on-line database could be established and made available. The cost of all such plans could be offset by the rationalisation of existing schemes and an element of profit sharing from the equity underwriting proposal, to make better use of existing resources.

In the long run, many profitable small businesses create their own capital. We want to provide every encouragement for the reinvestment of profits by smaller firms. As part of a review of tax obstacles to long-term investment, we are examining how the balance of the tax take on small businesses could be redistributed, to provide strong incentives for the retention of earnings for investment.

More widely, my colleague the shadow Chancellor recently proposed that in this month's Budget, the Chancellor of the Exchequer should, for a limited, 12-month period, double the first-year tax allowance for new investment from 25 per cent. to 50 per cent.—the kind of stimulus to new investment that is widely accepted as the most effective. We want not only an increase in investment but an improvement in its quality and effectiveness. As a nation, we need to enhance innovation, celebrate it and deploy the best in design because innovation and design are necessary for our national pride, and they are crucial in maintaining our living standards in an increasingly competitive world. Britain has some of the best designers in the world, but they are not put to sufficient use with others in British business.

I was interested to hear the Secretary of State's remarks about his intention to produce a consultation paper on competition and corporate policy, which we will study with interest. We have proposed rationalising the Monopolies and Mergers Commission and the Office of Fair Trading into a single competition and consumer standards office, charged with identifying and dealing with restrictive practices, such as price fixing and rigged tenders, and anti-competitive practices such as abuses of monopoly power.

In the past, the Government seemed to rely exclusively on an administrative approach, whereas we believe that a more prohibitive approach would be more effective. We shall scrutinise the Government's proposals in their consultation paper to see whether, as the Secretary of State suggested today, the Government intend to move towards a more prohibitive approach.

The establishment of the right economic climate for the regeneration of industry is not enough. The training and education of our work force need to be improved. We have the urgent need of an advanced industrialised society competing in hostile, global markets for highly productive, well-educated and skilled people. We need to raise education standards and to foster the lifetime development of new skills. There is no doubt that Britain

has a number of world-class manufacturing companies—everybody could name some, but there are too few of them.

Much of the country's weakness rests with the short-term adversarial culture fostered by the Conservative party and encouraged since the 1980s. Britain needs to take the long-term view, and that requires partnerships, not division. We need to look to the future, identify fresh markets and opportunities and set out to play a major role in those markets.

In too many industries, such as biotechnology, our lead is under threat from abroad. In other industries, such as fibre optics, our lead has probably already been lost. In others, such as environmental technology, we may still have a lead. It is essential that we seek to stay in the lead—to exploit the opportunities of a new market, as our competitors do.

In 1991, Taiwan took a policy decision to move from a low-cost, low-wage, low-skill economy to higher value, high-tech industries. Taiwan identified 10 sectors of high-tech content in which there would be global demand into the next century, including aerospace—in which Taiwan had no production capacity. Instead of concluding that the country was excluded from such markets, Taiwan set out—the Government working in partnership with industry—to develop plans from scratch. It started planning and building for the future through a partnership between the Government and industry—something that has not happened in this country for the past 16 years.

The responsibility rests on the Government not only to undertake competent macro-economic management but to create the political climate in which a cultural shift in favour of manufacturing can occur. Taiwan and Japan have shown that that can be done. Britain needs to begin to re-create high-quality, high-paying, high-productivity jobs based on skills and investment that generate ever more value added per hour, and to do so on the basis of co-operative relationships between employers and employees.

Most successful world-class companies focus not only on narrow financial criteria but on people and relationships. They involve their employees in a process of consultation and decision making in company affairs. That is the kind of view that is encapsulated in the social chapter, the provisions of which—although no one would have thought so, to hear the Secretary of State today—are already met and exceeded by world-class companies such as Nissan, AT and T, Motorola, United Distillers and many others.

Those provisions are important for achieving basic rights and standards for employees and are accepted by all our European competitors. What the Secretary of State said today about the remarks of my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition to the CBI was profoundly misleading. My right hon. Friend was seeking to address the misleading propaganda coming from the Government about what signing up to the social chapter would entail.

As my right hon. Friend told the CBI, if there are new developments in social policy and legislation, we believe that Britain should be involved in the discussions, arguing our corner, putting Britain's case when those matters are raised with our European partners, and not leaving an empty chair. We believe that the only way forward for Britain is a hard-headed analysis of how to build that high-wage, high-skill, high-investment and high-employment economy, and then total determination in the bid to achieve it.

We are not alone in our analysis. In pre-Budget submission after pre-Budget submission, the representatives not just of the TUC but of the CBI, the chambers of commerce, the training and enterprise councils set up by this Government and the small business associations have called on the Government to take action to stimulate and to sustain investment. They have called, as we have done, for further tax incentives for investment in research and development. They have called, as we have done, for capital allowances to promote investment, only to be told that they are old-fashioned. They have sought, as we have sought, Government action to improve our infrastructure.

In this year's submission, the CBI pleads for investment in education and training to be protected and has expressed the hope that any tax cuts will not be bought at the expense of Government capital programmes. These bodies are all calling on the Government to cease to absent themselves from the field, and to take up the role that only Government can play.

Labour's project is for national reappraisal and national renewal on the basis of a new consensus, a consensus that speaks to the real condition of Britain today—the consensus that we need to encourage long-term relationships between finance and industry. We need to build economic strength from the bottom up and not just from the top down, and that is why it is important to co-ordinate industrial and economic development at a regional level.

The new consensus states that the interdependence of public and private sectors is more important than the boundary between them, and that is why we propose real public-private partnerships to invest in infrastructure, in addition to what the Government can do rather than in substitution for it. The new consensus believes that small and medium-sized enterprises are the engine of growth in the economy, and that is why we propose new ways of stimulating the small business sector.

We need, most of all, a new consensus of partnership. Today, it seems, Britain may be beginning to turn to Labour, under whose Governments Britain achieved greater growth than we have averaged over the past 16 years. Britain may be beginning to see that, if we are to build a successful economy, we need partnerships between Government and business, between employer and employee and between investors, banks and entrepreneurs.

Contrary to what the Government say, there is always a choice of course to pursue. Unless we choose a fresh course, Britain's competitive weakness will continue, and so will Britain's slow decline. The Queen's Speech sets out clearly the lack of vision of this Government—a Government who have run out of ideas, who have run out of steam and who have almost run out of time.

5.24 pm

Mr. Michael Alison (Selby): Although the topic for today's debate is, strictly speaking, investment and the areas that the right hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) covered in her speech, there is fortunately no law of the Medes and the Persians that forces one to

[Mr. Michael Alison]

confine oneself to those topics, and I earlier gave notice that I am hoping in my short speech to venture into the terrain of tomorrow's debate, as indeed the Home Secretary did earlier.

I shall make one or two comments on the Family Law Bill—the Lord Chancellor's major effort and initiative to reform the divorce laws. I naturally do not expect the Minister to answer the points that I raise in my speech; and I would like to apologise to the right hon. Lady for the apparent, but unintended, discourtesy in not plunging—as her distinguished speech certainly merited—straight into the debate that she has launched on this topic.

Like, I suspect, many colleagues, I am neither a lawyer nor familiar with the legal intricacies of divorce. As a lay legislator confronted by the Family Law Bill, I have had to plunge into the quicksands of this very tricky area. Two especially arresting facts have struck me about the Government's proposals in the Queen's Speech.

The first of those facts is that 75 per cent. of divorces currently finalised are secured, usually in a matter of three or four months, by the petitioners cheerfully and openly opting to advance one of the three so-called faults, or fault-based facts—adultery, cruelty or desertion—to demonstrate that their marriages have broken down irretrievably. They opt for this route because expediency, in their view, deserves precedence over sensitivity. The speed of getting the divorce outweighs the potential blame or opprobrium associated with the idea of fault.

The Lord Chancellor's proposals will close the stable door—the so-called "quickie" divorce route—to alleging fault, by introducing an irreducible one-year time lapse between petitioning for divorce and securing it. The interesting question is whether, by shutting the stable door on this "quickie" divorce option, a very important horse has irrevocably bolted. In other words, has the concept of fault in divorce now necessarily finally fled from the courts' cognisance of what has happened before when divorce proceedings are launched? I, for one, hope that fault will not be finally removed from divorce proceedings.

A marriage contract, which has such immense human significance—to state as well as to Church—cannot really be conceived as expendable, or as simply time-expired like a window-cleaning contract. If we evacuate fault, marriage becomes as banal and bland as an ordinary, secular contract. I do not believe that it is in the interests of either party to divorce proceedings, or of anyone else involved, that fault, which distinguishes the marriage contract from a casual, secular, material contract, should be ignored.

It is paradoxical that the Lord Chancellor advised us in his draft Bill that the actual Bill should be sanitised on fault. Fault is admittedly difficult to pin down in personal relationships. It causes much anguish and bitterness between members of the broken partnership, let alone the pain that is caused to the children who are involved. If a sanitised approach to divorce proceedings is necessary, why do 75 per cent,. as I have already suggested, of petitioners cheerfully opt for the route of fault merely to shorten proceedings by a few months? It cannot be so necessary to evacuate the concept of fault if it is chosen so freely by so many people.

Is it the truth that the Lord Chancellor has with some subtlety deliberately left himself with the opportunity of allowing fault to be reintroduced within the framework, perhaps on the basis of responding to the initiative of his critics in Committee, by means of a rather interesting and unobserved back door?

The Lord Chancellor has said himself that the second crucial feature of his proposals has not been widely noted. It is to be found in clause 10 of the Family Law Bill. Effectively, it allows the courts to prevent the dissolution of a marriage, perhaps indefinitely, even if the magic period of one year has elapsed since the petition for divorce was presented. Although bringing forward the idea of a strictly limited period in which divorce proceedings might extend to 12 months, the Lord Chancellor has introduced, by the back door, discretionary powers for the courts to disallow such a divorce, even after the passing of one year, if the courts judge that grave financial or other hardship would be caused to the applicant and that it would be wrong in all the circumstances to allow the divorce to proceed, in spite of the passing of 12 months.

A new and draconian dimension of restriction has thus been written into the Bill. Yet the Bill has been castigated by many of the Lord Chancellor's critics as being over-liberal in the provision of rapidity. Current law allows a discretionary court ban only when, after five years of separation, a divorce is being sought by one party alone. In the Bill, however, the Lord Chancellor, unobserved by many, has strikingly increased the power of the courts in all divorce proceedings to disallow a divorce on the ground of economic hardship and so forth in spite of the base-line provision of a time limit of 12 months.

It is worrying, in the light of the Lord Chancellor's striking initiative in taking powers to extend the normal provision of 12 months and to widen grounds for refusal, that the important new power that I have described can be operated only on the basis of "no fault" in a marriage being established and brought into reckoning. If a court's findings on financial hardship and other considerations are considered to be well founded, it cannot make sense for the court to go ahead without some cognisance being taken of the character and nature of the marriage—that is, in other words, the underlying reality of the marriage, for that marriage, by judicial edict, is about to be extended almost indefinitely under the clause 10 provision.

If there is an underlying area of the marriage, which is now to be extended by the power of the courts, of profound disharmony and fault, and if, for example, the wife in the partnership is judged by the court to be likely to be left penniless and homeless if the divorce goes ahead, and the divorce is thus disallowed by the Lord Chancellor's special back-door restriction on the ground of financial hardship, can the court really be intending to lock the wife into a marriage that may feature repeated adultery by the husband as well as repeated cruelty and violence? Clearly not. It would be a contradiction if that were to happen.

A way must be found, therefore, if the Lord Chancellor's powers to refuse a divorce are accepted, to establish some finding of the fact of fault in a marriage, perhaps as part of the analysis that is inherent in the mediation procedures on future arrangements for home, children and finance, for example. That must be done on the basis of the Bill's own logic. Although the Bill

represents an attempt to sanitise the proceedings in court, it means inherently and necessarily that some attempt to analyse the presence of fault must take place if the Lord Chancellor's provision that there should be an indefinite postponement of divorce is to be acceptable. I hope that the Lord Chancellor, who will be leading debates on the Bill in another place, will take cognisance of this important dimension.

5.36 pm

Mr. Denzil Davies (Llanelli): We are told in the first sentence of the Gracious Speech that the President of France will see the Queen next year. I have no doubt that, after he has seen the Queen, he will see the right hon. Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major), the Prime Minister, if the right hon. Gentleman is still Prime Minister next year. I would not wish to comment, and cannot do so, on the state of mind of the right hon. Gentleman, but it would seem to me that his job is pretty insecure. I suppose that the President of France will still be the president next year. He has most of his seven years in office to go. Judging by the present mood of the French people, who knows what will happen? Perhaps before long they will start putting up the barricades and throwing cobblestones. For the purposes of my speech, I shall assume that both Jacques and John will be holding their respective offices next year.

The Prime Minister and the president will be able to talk about many things—for example, nuclear tests, Maastricht two or Maastricht one-and-a-half, depending on one's view of the treaty. They will, of course, be able to talk about Helmut. It is always Helmut. They can talk also about the public sector borrowing requirement. We are fortunate that the Minister who is to reply knows everything about the PSBR. He was a Treasury Minister for a few years.

There is a reference to the PSBR in the first sentence on page 3 of the Gracious Speech. I do not know the French for public sector borrowing requirement. Even if I did, I would not be allowed to use it. Indeed, I would be called to order. But the French is probably more eloquent than the English.

Mr. Cynog Dafis (Ceredigion and Pembroke, North): It could be the same.

Mr. Davies: It could very well be the same, as the hon. Gentleman says.

In English, at the top of page three, we read that Her Majesty's Government want to balance their budget. They want to eliminate the wretched public sector borrowing requirement. Indeed, the President of France is trying to do something similar. He originally thought that he had to go down only to 3 per cent. of gross national product. He is still at around 5 per cent. or 5.5 per cent. and is having terrible problems. Then he went to see Helmut, who told him that the rules had changed and that, to ensure that the German mark does not end up as some kind of spaghetti money, it is necessary to go down further, probably to 1 per cent. of GNP with regard to the budget deficit.

So John and Jacques, then, can talk about balanced budgets, or at least getting close to them. Looking around Europe, we see that it is not only Britain and France that are talking about balanced budgets. The Germans, and they may have some difficulty, the Italians, the Dutch, the Belgians—even the Swedes, of all people—are seeking to reduce public expenditure to reach a balanced budget. Whatever the long-term economic effects might be, the social consequences on the poor, the unemployed, the disadvantaged—I believe that they are now called "the excluded"—of Europe will be dire.

I would like to blame the Maastricht treaty for all of this. I certainly blame the treaty for much of it. But the whole fashion of the public sector borrowing requirement goes even beyond that treaty, because the Prime Minister opted out of the single currency and is determined, apparently, to achieve a balanced budget. In the United States, balanced budgets are all the rage, on both sides of the political divide. Even President Clinton says that he wants one; he wants one that is slightly different from that of Newt Gingrich, but they both want a balanced budget.

As we survey the economic and financial scene, we see that balanced budgets are the latest fashion. Fashions come and go—flared trousers, sideburns, mini-skirts—and we now have balanced budgets, but obviously not as attractive. No self-respecting Chancellor of the Exchequer or Minister of Finance when they meet their masters, the governors of the central banks, in Basle or Washington, would dare appear in anything but the best balanced budget suit.

Whether or not a balanced budget is good for an economy is immaterial: nobody will ever find out, probably, because by the time the evidence has accumulated and been assessed, fashion will have changed, and those who participated in the exercise will either be dead or in old people's homes—if any such homes are left. As the Secretary of State will know, one way to achieve a balanced budget is to put up taxes. Indeed, a few years ago, people used to talk openly—even those on the radical right—about putting up taxes to achieve a balanced budget. Today, that has all gone. Nobody would dare now say, "You should put up taxes to achieve a balanced budget." That would not do. That would upset the "comfortable majority", as John Kenneth Galbraith once described it.

By all means let us have balanced budgets. The financial and economic establishment want them—economists write about them all the time and long articles are written—so long as they do not have to pay for them. We cannot have the financial and economic establishment paying for balanced budgets. They are a great thing. They are a splendid fashion, but somebody else must pay for them.

Who is going to pay for them? We know who: the poor, the unemployed, the disadvantaged, the excluded. They will pay for them because, of course, the other method, as the Secretary of State will know, of achieving a balanced budget is to cut public expenditure. As social welfare is the largest element in public expenditure, if we cut public expenditure we shall cut social welfare and have to cut it more than anything else. That is what is happening. In the United States, social welfare is bearing most of the brunt. Next week in the Budget, we shall discover the position in Britain.

As far as the Queen's guest next year, President Chirac, is concerned, I read in the papers last week that the stockbrokers, bankers and financiers of the Paris Bourse were rolling in the aisles because their President had announced that his Government had decided, at last, that

[Mr. Davies]

cutting social security, cutting the welfare state, was the way to achieve the 3 per cent. or, probably, Helmut's 1 per cent.

Mr. Dafis: I remind the right hon. Gentleman—I am sure that he knows already—of the same pattern that is emerging in the relationship between the developed world and the third world, because when third-world economies run into trouble, the International Monetary Fund imposes structural adjustment programmes to achieve a balanced budget, and the effects on the poor in those countries are absolutely appalling.

Mr. Davies: Indeed: that is because the IMF people who go to those countries have all been taught in the same school. They have the bug. They have the fashion, and that fashion is balanced budgets.

The poor of Europe—the excluded—will pay for the single currency if it ever comes about. Extending it a bit wider than Europe, we could say that the poor of the western world will pay for a balanced budget. The policy of many countries—supported by many parties in many countries—is hypocritical and immoral. But the comfortable majority and its representatives have convinced themselves that it is not. Indeed, they have convinced themselves that, far from being immoral, cutting social welfare is good for the poor, that it takes the poor out of the dependency culture.

There are many groups in our society—I do not criticise or decry this, as it is a fact of modern life and modern government—who are part of the dependency culture. I shall not go into detail. We could talk about the farmers, who may well have good reason for it. We could talk about the European fighter aircraft. Some people would say that that is part of the dependency culture. We could talk about money for the arts and for various pressure groups. They are also in the dependency culture. Apparently, it is only the poor who have to suffer cuts in social welfare, so they can be taken out of that wretched dependency culture.

Mr. Peter Snape (West Bromwich, East): My hon. Friend has left out—no doubt inadvertently—one other group which is part of the dependency culture. It was defended earlier by the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry from the Government Front Bench. I think of employers who pay wages that are below decent minimums. They are part of the dependency culture because the Government subsidise such employers, despite the disincentive, they say, that such subsidies cause to other people.

Mr. Davies: My hon. Friend makes a valuable point. There is a long list. In this case, it is the poor who are the target.

Hardly a day goes without me reading in the broadsheets that some think tank is considering the reform of the social welfare system. Those think tanks are usually staffed by the sons and daughters of the comfortable majority. Many of them, perhaps, find it difficult to find work in the competitive market economy. Those think tanks are asked—it is a rather idiotic phrase that we all use—"to think the unthinkable". That, of course, means cutting the welfare state.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) coined a phrase, "warm words". The warm word is reform. If the poor are listening and they hear that word, I suggest that they run for cover pretty fast, if they can find any cover.

I recall, throughout the 1980s, sitting here and listening to Ministers talk of tax reform. I must say that I did not see much reform—and, having read the batch of Finance Bills that have been enacted over the past few years and talked to accountants, I think that it is clear that those accountants do not believe that much reform was introduced. In fact, the legislation is now more complex than ever.

"Reform" was, and still is, code for "cuts". "Social welfare reform" really means cuts in the welfare state. If the "reform" procedure eventually came up with a plan for increased expenditure, it is impossible that the comfortable classes would allow Governments to find the money.

The other "warm word" is "tough". "Tough" is one of those transatlantic words: I believe that the phrase "tough love" was coined somewhere in the United States. The poor are our children, it seems. We know what is best for them; we love them, but we must be tough with them. The Victorian equivalent of that phraseology was "Spare the rod and spoil the child". We have squared the circle, then. We can have balanced budgets; we need not put up taxes; we can cut welfare; and the poor will thank us for it.

The Secretary of State referred to competition, and to the various new papers aimed at reforming the monopolies and mergers system that keep being published. Some people believe, or profess to believe, that a competitive and dynamic market economy can generate enough wealth to keep the comfortable majority in the state to which they have been accustomed, while also securing social justice—or social cohesion, as the Europeans call it. I hope that those people are right, but the increasing evidence emerging from western economies—not just Britain—is that the combination of a competitive market economy with tight inflation targets and a balanced budget will not produce sufficient wealth both to ensure social cohesion and to keep the comfortable majority in reasonable comfort.

I do not know about this, but one of the inevitable consequences of a competitive market economy, controlled by central bankers and with inflation targets, may well be a large pool of unemployment. If that is the case, and if we start taking money from the poor to alleviate the insecurities of the comfortable majority, the Queen's guests—Jacques, John and even Helmut—and their heirs and successors may well reap a terrible whirlwind.

5.53 pm

Sir Wyn Roberts (Conwy): It is always a great pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Llanelli (Mr. Davies). Not only is he a former Chief Secretary to the Treasury; he is the right hon. Member for Llanelli. Both facts qualify him to make the kind of deeply thoughtful speech that he has just made—and he covered a good deal of ground.

I followed what the right hon. Gentleman said about the philosophy of the balanced budget. He described it as "fashionable", but I am not sure that it is more fashionable

than the facts that two and two make four and that most Treasuries insist on that basic principle. The right hon. Gentleman said that it was, of course, possible to achieve a balanced budget by raising taxes and/or cutting expenditure, but he did not tell us what the Opposition would do if they were in government. Now he points, rightly, at Opposition Front Benchers; as far as I can make out, they will do neither.

Speakers from the two Front Benches gave us two contrasting pictures. Certainly, the speech delivered by my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade carried a stronger ring of truth than what we heard from the right hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett): at least I recognised the picture drawn by my right hon. Friend of inward investment in this country.

The right hon. Lady mentioned Taiwan. I have been to Taiwan on more than one occasion, and have visited Chung Wa in Taipei—a company that is now investing heavily in Scotland, and creating some 3,000 jobs. I should tell the right hon. Lady that one of the great attractions of Chung Wa is the university campus in the middle of its factory complex. I heard the head of the company, Dr. Lin, lecturing some 2,000 of its employees.

I was told that there were two rush hours in Taiwan—one at about 6 pm, when people came home from work, and the other at about 10 pm, when they came home from their technical training colleges. That is not simply a matter of Government provision; it suggests a considerable will among the people of Taiwan to acquire higher skills.

I shall return to the subject of the economy—particularly in relation to Wales—but I want to concentrate on the broadcasting Bill that is to be introduced by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for National Heritage. I understand that it covers changes in the rules governing media ownership, as discussed in the White Paper published in May this year, and the advent of digital broadcasting, which was the subject of another document that appeared in August.

I feel that the Government are right to conclude that there is a continuing need for specific regulations on media ownership beyond those of general competition law; but, like many of my right hon. and hon. Friends, I look forward to a diminution of that need, because regulations tend to distort the operation of the market.

We have an example in the cogent case put by the director of the Newspaper Society, Mr. Nisbet Smith, to my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on behalf of regional and local newspapers. He argues that their prohibition from owning radio and television stations in their circulation areas, while national newspapers and magazines are allowed to do so,

"will lead to a reduction in reader and consumer choice, by making it harder for regional and local newspapers to provide a genuine alternative to the editorial agenda set by London newspapers, and will distort competition between the print media. National newspaper and magazine companies will become multiple media companies in their circulation areas and be able to dominate regional and local newspapers which will be prevented by the Government from becoming multiple media companies in their circulation areas."

As an avowed regionalist who believes that our society is unhealthily dominated by a one-track and often blinkered metropolitan view—perhaps we shall hear an example of that later in the debate—I have a great deal of sympathy for the argument that the Newspaper Society advanced on behalf of its 240 member companies, which include the Liverpool *Daily Post* and the *Western Mail* in Wales. Far from safeguarding media diversity, the proposals in the broadcasting Bill are likely to undermine it.

We need to develop rather than discourage regional strengths. I always admire the different parts of the United States—the mid-west, the east side and the west coast—which appear to have great independent strength. We have lost many regional strengths over the years, and I am sure that Britain is the poorer for it.

With the advent of digital television and radio, we face the possibility of abundant choice, or possibly an over-abundance of choice, and all our broadcasters are looking hard at their prospects for survival. What we know to be good should be encouraged to flourish; that is the basic principle from which I start. Our Welsh language channel, S4C, in conjunction with Channel 4, provided a worthwhile service, and continues to do so, I am glad to say, because I had a hand in its creation in the early 1980s. The matter was raised at Question Time and I was pleased by the reply of the Minister of State, Department of National Heritage, my hon. Friend the Member for Harwich (Mr. Sproat).

I understand that the White Paper proposes that both S4C and Channel 4 should be guaranteed a joint place,

"on condition that the broadcasters seek, either by splitting the service or rescheduling, or both, to make the full Channel 4 service available as far as possible throughout Wales without reducing the availability of the S4C service in Wales."

That sounds reasonable and it looks fine on paper, but I am told by those who have carefully considered the practical implications that it is a tall order. The more that I examine the complexities, the more I am inclined to believe that it is a prescription for a conflict that should and could be avoided.

I urge my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for National Heritage to consider the feasibility of a different solution. As the hon. Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North (Mr. Dafis) said in his question this afternoon, S4C merits parity of treatment with the other main services in Wales. So does Channel 4, and each eventually deserves its separate and independent digital equivalent of the single analogue that they currently share.

In progressing to that, I urge my right hon. Friend to give top priority to the S4C service, because I suspect that some people are waiting in the wings for her to fail to do that, so that they can restage the battle that accompanied the birth of the Welsh language service in the 1980s. I am sure that she will not be foolish enough to repeat the mistake that was made at that time, when the Government abandoned a manifesto commitment, only to be forced to honour it under public duress and by the pricks of their own conscience.

Such an arrangement will mean that S4C will eventually have to be able to supplement its current subsidised Welsh language output with programmes from other sources if it is to provide as complete a service as it successfully provides now. The White Paper has anticipated that by stating clearly in paragraph 2.46 that the BBC and Channel 4/S4C

"will be prevented from subsidising any new commercial venture from the funding arrangements for their existing or guaranteed services."

[Sir Wyn Roberts]

I accept that, and I express my faith that those who are concerned with television in Wales will rise to the challenge and will be able to provide the additional programming on a commercial basis. I do not think that it is beyond the wit of man or woman to devise a suitable scheme to facilitate that.

I said that Channel 4 merits an independent service in Wales. Some of its programmes, especially the 7 o'clock news programme, are missed by Welsh viewers, and Channel 4 has put a strong case to the effect that it no longer requires the protection that is afforded by the Broadcasting Act 1990, which now has the unintended result of an escalating annual transfer of funds to the ITV companies. If the funding formula were abolished, Channel 4 would aim to boost the proportion of British material, double its investment in British films, substantially increase its drama output and enhance its schools and education programmes.

That would also allow Channel 4 to play a full part in the introduction of digital services. That sounds an attractive package, and I have no doubt that Channel 4 would deliver it. I hope that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for National Heritage can go at least some way towards meeting Channel 4's request to be relieved of its current perverse obligation to subsidise ITV.

The right hon. Member for Llanelli spoke about the opening part of the Gracious Speech. I shall refer to the end of it, which, as usual, contains the request that the Almighty's blessing may rest upon our counsels. Nowhere do we need divinely inspired counsel more than in dealing with legislative devolution, which is not specifically mentioned in the Gracious Speech but is linked to the good governance and economic development of the United Kingdom. That features prominently in the speech.

Since the Address was delivered, the Government have made it known that there will be an announcement on St. Andrew's day of some changes affecting the Scottish Grand Committee. I understand that those will have ramifications for Wales, and that has caused a stir in the Principality. I suspect that what is envisaged for Scotland is a further instalment of the White Paper, "Scotland in the Union: A Partnership for Good". That seems to be a sound approach, because it at least preserves the unity and integrity of our parliamentary system, whereas other proposals plant the seeds of conflict and disintegration.

Although the proposals are not yet known, I have heard them disparaged already by hon. Members who do not seem to realise that they are thereby disparaging themselves after all, Scottish and Welsh Members are themselves a Parliament in miniature in the Scottish and Welsh Grand Committees, however circumscribed their powers may be. There is no doubt that there are aspirations in Scotland and Wales for political recognition of their respective, collective national identities, but how to meet that aspiration and give it a satisfactory expression without damaging the interests of the United Kingdom as a whole poses problems that defy solution, as those of us who were involved in the debates in the late 1970s know only too well.

I know that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales is introducing proposals to develop the Welsh Grand Committee—I hope, to allow debate on the principle of measures or parts of measures as they affect Wales. If such steps, which are minor compared with the Opposition's proposals, are not welcome and workable, the people of Wales will know what to think of the major moves that the Opposition have in mind to divorce Wales from Westminster.

What concerns Welsh people, like other peoples in the United Kingdom, is their standard of living. Although our economy has made significant strides forward during the years of Conservative rule, there are still worrying clouds over the landscape. There are, however, patches of light, too.

In recent years, the unemployment differential between Wales and the rest of the UK has been narrowing. In the latter half of 1992, the Welsh unemployment rate fell below that of the rest of the UK for the first time since 1924. We have been level pegging more or less ever since, but still below the European average. What concerns me, however, is that our gross domestic product per head remains comparatively low, and that is reflected in earnings and disposable incomes. In 1994, as a whole, average gross weekly earnings of full-time employees in Wales were 10.5 per cent. below the Great Britain average and, overall, wages were lower than in any other region. The decline relative to the rest of Great Britain has been going on since 1984.

Those are stark and true facts that must be set against the fall in unemployment and the 11 per cent. increase in the civilian work force in employment. We need a strong and continuing regional policy to correct that imbalance and to bring Welsh wages up to the Great Britain average.

Mr. Roy Hughes (Newport, East): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir Wyn Roberts: I am coming to an end. [Hon. Members: "come on."] I give way to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Hughes: The right hon. Gentleman expressed an interest in broadcasting, and I know that, before he came to the House, he was an employee of a television company. Did he see "Kane's Wales" last night on BBC Wales, which conclusively revealed that Wales is the poorest region in western Europe? Substantial arguments seem to support that claim.

Sir Wyn Roberts: I did not see the programme, but Wales can be all things to all men in just the same way as we heard two contrasting speeches from the Front Benches, I am sure that one could make similar contrasts in Wales.

My real complaint against the Opposition and their obsession with devolution is that they distract attention from Wales's real need to strive and battle ever harder to develop its economy and to bring increased prosperity to its people. A Welsh assembly will not create jobs, except for the boyos of the Labour party perhaps. It will not bring a single foreign or British investor to Wales—it will scare them away. It will sap such power as Wales has in Westminster and in Whitehall and dissipate scarce resources in what will prove to be a petty squabbling shop rather than a talking shop.

Wales will be torn apart. We shall see north versus south, the valleys versus Cardiff, and unitary authorities versus the assembly. Of course, I wish that it were all going to be different and that we would be inspired by our own assembly to achieve the great advances that our people need and are capable of achieving, but our history is against it, and I fear the worst.

6.14 pm

Mrs. Diana Maddock (Christchurch): Competitiveness and economic success in future are dependent on wise investment today. We hear a lot from Conservative Members about tax cuts, particularly about how cuts in the standard rate of income tax might save them from electoral defeat in the not too distant future, but we hear very much less about the cost of investment cuts, particularly in terms of reduced investment in schools, small business assistance and transport infrastructure, to give but three examples.

Other hon. Members will speak today about those sectors, but I intend to deal with one sector of investment that is of particular significance to Liberal Democrats: investment in housing, and the Housing Bill. I do not believe that I must make the same pleadings as the right hon. Member for Selby (Mr. Alison), first, because housing is inextricably linked with our economy and vital if we are to have a competitive, flexible and successful economy; secondly, because the Chief Secretary to the Treasury was a Minister with responsibility for housing, and should be able to answer the issues that I am raising today.

Why have the Liberal Democrats chosen today to talk about housing and the Housing Bill? Outside this place, we get far more votes than we are ever allowed true representation. That means that we may get five bites of the cherry on the Queen's Speech. Housing has been one of the issues that has been way down the political agenda, and that is why we have chosen to debate it today—not because we think that the other matters under debate today are of less importance.

Mr. Barry Field (Isle of Wight): I share the hon. Lady's view that housing is important. Will she join me in condemning the Liberal Democratic-controlled unitary council for scrapping an agreement that goes back years to pay housing benefit direct to landlords on the Isle of Wight; cynically to ensure that housing lists grow ever longer and tenants spend their housing benefit on anything but their rent; and to create mayhem where there was good order and discipline?

Mrs. Maddock: I wondered what it was that one of the Tory Whips had whispered in the hon. Gentleman's ear, and it has now become obvious.

Mr. Field: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Maddock: I will not give way. I want to make progress.

Mr. Field *rose—*

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. The rule is clear. If the hon. Lady does not give way, the hon. Gentleman must resume his seat.

Mr. Field: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Madam Deputy Speaker: If it is a genuine point of order.

Mr. Barry Field: I was just accused of taking instructions from the deputy Chief Whip. He came to me and said that he had met someone at Buckingham palace from the Isle of Wight, that he has just had a letter from him, and that he would like to reply to it.

Madam Deputy Speaker: That is not a point of order.

Mrs. Maddock: I am sure that, at some point, one of the Whips may have put that point in the hon. Gentleman's ear, whether it was this afternoon or not.

For many years, I was a city councillor in Southampton and listened to the pleading of landlords who had to pay back rent that had been given to them in housing benefit when their tenants had done a moonlight flit. It is not easy to know which is the best way to deal with that matter. Clearly, my Liberal Democrat colleagues have weighed up local circumstances in the Isle of Wight, and they have come to a conclusion.

Investment is about putting money in now to save greater expenditure in the long run, and to enable us to produce wealth. Investing in good-quality housing, which will last longer and need fewer repairs, is a prime example. We certainly need that now. At the current rate of building, our homes, both public and private, will need to last for a few hundred years each.

Investing in the construction of new homes and schools is one of the most effective ways of getting people back to work. This year and next year, it is estimated that 12,000 more construction workers will lose their jobs solely as a result of last year's cuts in housing association building. It is estimated that, for every pound spent on construction, at least half will be saved not only in lower benefits, but in increased tax revenues.

Investment in housing cannot be measured only in terms of money and finance; the value of investment in homes has a tremendous effect on people's lives. To be homeless can be crippling. Not only is it very stressful: it is also very damaging to people's physical health. Homelessness means that people are often excluded—they are divided from society and shut out from opportunity, education, meaningful work, health care, financial support and, fundamentally, decent housing.

Many such people become trapped in a downward spiral, with the escape route shut off by the many measures enacted by what I believe to be an insensitive and dogmatic Government. For a party that talks so much about the need to help families, its actions on social housing are a betrayal. Investment in supporting families is crucial. Two of the main causes of family break-up are lack of and insecurity in homes and jobs.

Almost 20 years ago, the wider problems of homelessness were recognised in law for the first time, when, in 1977, the Liberal Member for Isle of Wight, Stephen Ross—sadly, no longer with us—introduced the Housing (Homeless Persons) Act, with support from all sides of the House. That Act was passed because people inside and outside the House recognised that homelessness was a long-term problem and that, unless long-term solutions were found, it would lead to countless other problems in health, work and other aspects of people's daily lives.

If we regress to a position where temporary accommodation and 12-month contracts are the norm for homeless families, we will be denying them the security and the stability that they need to get back on their feet. The repeal of the Housing (Homeless Persons) Act, which is effectively what the Government appear to be proposing in their Bill, will be a monumental step backwards in the battle against homelessness. Since it was introduced, the Act has helped hundreds of thousands of homeless families to find a decent home and a stable environment and to recover after the terrible trauma of being made homeless.

I do not deny that there is a serious problem with the length of local authority waiting lists throughout the country, which sometimes leads to people blaming the

[Mrs. Maddock]

homeless for apparent queue jumping. In fact, it is a clear and obvious consequence of the way in which the Government have starved councils and housing associations of funds.

The proposal to change the rules on access to social housing is little more than an exercise in scapegoating to try to shift the blame for Britain's housing crisis away from the Government. By their own speeches, Ministers have fuelled a belief—some of them have even convinced themselves—that homeless people are all queue jumping. Now, they feel that they must act if they are to retain any credibility.

Quite apart from everything else that the Government are proposing, these reforms are really something of a con trick. Putting homeless people into temporary accommodation and then on to the waiting lists will not make the waiting lists any shorter or make any difference to the speed with which most of the people currently on them will be housed. The Government's proposals will not reduce housing need or housing demand and they will not increase housing supply.

The Government are failing everyone in housing need. They are also failing the construction industry. The reason for the huge waiting lists for local authority housing is clear—it is quite simply the severe shortage of affordable housing. Fewer houses were built in the social sector last year than in any year since the war. If the rumours about Budget cuts are true, there may be only enough money to invest in 16,000 new properties in the social sector next year. Currently, the waiting list for housing in Birmingham is 16,000.

What I find even more distressing is that the Government are now trying to hide behind the Awua judgment—the legal decision that Brent council's obligation to house a homeless family was adequately fulfilled by placing them in temporary accommodation for 28 days. That judgment has set a precedent that was certainly not intended in the original legislation. It cannot be allowed to stand. It is the logic of the madhouse for the Government to claim that it somehow makes their proposals all the more acceptable. In fact, it makes it absolutely essential that the law in this area is clarified. Liberal Democrats will be fighting tooth and nail to keep the spirit of the current law in the new Bill.

I want to turn from quantity of housing to quality, because both are equally important. I hope that the Home Energy Conservation Act, which I successfully piloted through Parliament last year, will come into force in April. It should lead to some improvements in home energy efficiency, provided that the resources and the investment are put in place. However, at the same time the Government are proposing the negative step of scrapping mandatory renovation grants. They are doing so at a time when 1.75 million homes are either unfit for habitation or below a tolerable standard, and living in those 1.75 million homes are 4.25 million individuals.

I would be the first to accept that the present system of home improvement grants for private home owners is far from perfect. It is very complicated and bureaucratic, and it depends not only on where someone lives, but on whether he can find his way around the red tape involved in getting a grant. In addition, mandatory grants can be awarded only after a property is ruled to be unfit for human habitation, so it is often a case of shutting the stable door after the horse has bolted.

It could be argued that giving more discretion to local authorities would allow them to tackle problems earlier. However, I and many others in the housing sector truly believe that the Government will use the proposed reforms as a smokescreen to hide a further reduction in funding.

Improving the standard of our housing stock, both public and private, should be a major plank of Government policy. It is certainly a sound investment for the future and a way of creating jobs. However, it is not only home improvement grants that the Government are intent on taking away from home owners. Mortgage interest relief has been slashed, at a time when the market has been at its lowest ebb for a long time. Recent cuts in income support for mortgage holders have left home owners with no real effective safety net. The claim that private insurance schemes are practical options for most home owners has been blown out of the water by report after report.

There is no doubt that housing and housing matters are inextricably linked to the economy. The President of the Board of Trade spoke earlier about the need for flexibility. We now have one of the most inflexible housing systems ever, across all tenures.

There is an inherent contradiction in the Government's economic policy that has badly hit home owners—that of trying artificially to pump up the housing market while at the same time pursuing a general anti-inflation policy. One does not have to be an economist to recognise the contradiction there, and to predict the effects that we are now seeing, with more than 1,000 houses being repossessed every week and, consequently, even more pressure on local authority waiting lists. It is one area where the Government have certainly introduced competition. On top of that, an estimated 1.5 million people are trapped in negative equity.

How have the Government responded in their proposed housing legislation? It would appear that they have abdicated all responsibility for the problems faced by home owners and tenants alike, and are proposing legislation which looks likely to consist largely of gimmicks and smokescreens and which, by all accounts, will not provide the long-term programme of investment in homes, which are the vital anchors for all our families.

What could have been a sensible policy to encourage housing association tenants to buy their homes is dreadfully flawed, because the Government are more concerned with the dogma of introducing the right to buy than with the consequences of those sales in some areas. Thankfully, I believe that the Government have finally bowed to pressure and exempted much rural housing from the scheme. Even so, the scheme remains problematic in many areas.

I am astonished when I see how much effort the Government and others are putting into devising ever more devious ways to allow public bodies to go to the private market to obtain capital—not because it is a bad idea, but because Ministers are so bound by their obsession with the notion that it is somehow wrong for public bodies to borrow.

Borrowing to finance revenue spending is the road to disaster, although I have to say that Tory colleagues in my county of Dorset are always encouraging my local authority to do just that. However, borrowing for capital

expenditure for investment is lasting. These are the principles on which industry works. One would think that the Government would by now have recognised them, too.

Why should housing associations be able to go to the private sector to seek finance to build homes, but local authorities are not allowed to do likewise? Local authorities are democratically accountable for their spending. The Government's position is even more hypocritical, given the news that grant-maintained schools will be allowed to borrow in the private market. That blows a hole in the Government's policy and their defence of what they have done in this sphere.

We need to be prepared to use our imagination to break free of the constraints which prevent investment. I am thinking of the rule according to which all spending, including capital investment, contributes equally to our main measure of Government borrowing. That point has already been alluded to today. There is no logic in that notion. It makes councils, which desperately need new homes for homeless people, keep millions of pounds locked up unused in their bank accounts.

The Liberal Democrats would separate capital and revenue spending and give local authorities the freedom to invest the money they have in new homes. We would also allow local authorities direct access to capital markets to finance local projects. In all my time in local government and in the House, I have yet to hear a convincing argument as to why local councils' financial wings have to be kept as clipped as they have been by the Government, especially for projects that are likely to reduce their costs in the long term, and create much-needed jobs in their area.

The Labour party seems to be very hesitant and timid in this sphere. I have been waiting for the long-promised housing policy document that the hon. Member for Greenwich (Mr. Raynsford) told me was coming earlier this year. Regrettably, the Labour party seems to be similarly blinkered when it comes to reform of the measurement of the public sector borrowing requirement. I understand that Labour's Treasury team has ruled out any change in Government accounting rules to release funds for investment.

There is too much timidity in politics today. Too many politicians seem scared to challenge traditional orthodoxy.

Ms Clare Short (Birmingham, Ladywood): Not me.

Mrs. Maddock: There are always exceptions to every rule. Interestingly, it is quite often women who are prepared to put their heads above the parapet.

At the moment, the Government's housing agenda appears to be led by the right wing of the Conservative party, which seems to have a set of fairly simple messages: expand home ownership, regardless of sustainability, cut welfare payments, and the notion "private sector, good; public sector, bad". The long-term costs of those measures to the economy and the loss of democratic accountability seem not to come into it.

Liberal Democrat housing legislation this Session would take the agenda in a new direction—that of real investment for the long term. We would liberate local authorities from outdated Treasury rules by differentiating between capital investment and current expenditure. We would allow local authorities to spend the receipts from the sale of their council houses to provide new social housing and would allow housing associations to do the same without imposing a wholly inflexible right to buy. We would also make it crystal clear that local authorities have a continuing duty to offer long-term secure tenancies to families made homeless through no fault of their own.

We would also give local authorities new powers to bring back into use the 800,000 empty properties in England. We would look to invest in our young people by making councils responsible for providing accommodation for homeless 16 and 17-year-olds who currently slip through the welfare net and are treated neither as adults nor as vulnerable minors. This is our agenda: secure homes, flexible tenures, partnership, the extension of choice for all and, fundamentally, an adequate supply of high-quality housing, which is absolutely vital if we are to have a competitive, flexible and thriving economy.

Investment in our people is the best guarantee for all our futures—decent education and training, health care, help for the unemployed through investment in our infrastructure and help for small businesses. However, to make the most of such investment, the firm anchor for most of our families is a safe, decent and affordable home.

6.36 pm

Mr. David Porter (Waveney): We are more than half-way through our lengthy debate on the Queen's Speech and, so far, the theme has been well laid out—it is clearly the battleground for the next election, or at least part of it, as the speech of the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mrs. Maddock) demonstrated. It was none the less a thoughtful speech.

As always on such occasions, it is not only what is in the Gracious Speech that is significant; reading between the lines and considering what is not in it are equally important. I deal first with what is in it and the three priorities: making Britain the enterprise centre of Europe, stepping up the fight against crime and increasing choice still further in education. Few will disagree with those laudable aims, but I feel that we would do better to invest our subscription to Europe in this country rather than subsidise competition in other countries through our net contributions to the European leviathan. If the Budget next week were to cut European spending, it would be a popular Budget indeed.

Clearly, we shall not be the enterprise centre of Europe if we adopt the social chapter and the minimum wage, so the Government are right to continue to oppose them. I regret, however, the narrowing of our vision from the workshop of the world to the enterprise centre of Europe, as Europe is not expanding economically while so much of the rest of the world is.

The fight against crime is absolutely spot on. I just wonder how much of national resource is lost in crime. The Government's earlier work is having some success in the form of falling recorded crime in most areas, against the trend of rising global crime. However, people's impression is not always one of falling crime. It is that impression—that confidence—with which we have to deal in law and order as in economic well-being.

Some years ago, I was condemned by a number of people in East Anglia for suggesting that the police should intern some criminals, at least for a time. Judging by the outcry, one would have thought that I was calling for gas

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chambers for them. I am now delighted to report that Suffolk police are targeting some people's activities, especially in Lowestoft and Beccles, with encouraging results. Quite often one person can be responsible for quite a large number of crimes.

Turning to education, the increasing of choice or parental preference in education has run alongside the drive to improve standards and must be supported. All right hon. and hon. Members, as parents or grandparents, want our children to do better than we did, and in a world where no one owes the United Kingdom a living, they have to be our best investment.

In reality, we know that in rural areas, and in most towns too, there is no choice for parents. Children go to the local school. Economics and common sense dictate that. But within that constraint, it is surely right and proper to extend choice as widely and deeply to as many people as possible in pre-schooling, statutory schooling, tertiary education and training. Vouchers are an excellent, simple device to help broaden diversity of provision and widen choice.

In the same way, once we stop thinking that only councils can provide housing, or that only the national health service can directly provide beds, or that local authorities alone can supply public services, we will immediately open up choice again—within a regulatory framework to ensure standards.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) said in the debate on the Queen's Speech on Wednesday that people do not object to paying benefits to those in need in our community, and that we do not mind helping those who face a genuine threat before they come to this country, and he is quite right. People, citizens and taxpayers of this country will not, however, tolerate abuse of our hospitality and taxes by bogus asylum seekers, any more than they will any longer in the main tolerate abuse by those who cheat the social security system. Incidentally, in all the flurry of the weekend's post, there were only two letters from my constituents about the Queen's Speech, and both were about bogus asylum seekers.

Like my right hon. Friend the Member for Selby (Mr. Alison), I have serious doubts about the consequences of the divorce reform proposals, but a free vote should help that. Otherwise, I commend what is in the Queen's Speech.

I turn to what is not in the Loyal Address. There is no measure to deal with our membership of the common fisheries policy—a nightmare which gets worse each week. If we were serious about allowing a British industry to thrive, our exit from the common fisheries policy would be a priority.

There are no commitments on roads—we have to wait for the Budget next week for those. The title of today's debate includes transport and investment, and it is accepted that roads, as appropriate, are an investment. The outstanding success of the port of Felixstowe in Suffolk is in good measure attributable to the fact that the A14 from the midlands and its connections to the motorway network run directly into the port.

By the same token, the pledge in the White Paper "Roads to Prosperity" in the 1980s to dual the A12 fully from London to Great Yarmouth would be an investment of relatively modest proportions but would produce a far bigger economic gain for Lowestoft. However, that policy seems to be a little unfashionable at the moment. In particular, the Wrentham bypass and the new crossing of Lake Lothing at Lowestoft would have environmental benefits as well as create some economic returns.

The signals are that we may be putting back even further some of that road investment. In recent years there have been some spectacular, if random, improvements in road communication in East Anglia, but that is a redressing of the neglect of previous decades. In economic terms, isolation is not an acceptable substitute in East Anglia for a coherent transport investment strategy, as in other parts of the UK, and certainly in other parts of the European Union.

In the Queen's Speech, there is no push to go for all schools becoming grant-maintained, which is a pity. Sadly, in Suffolk, there is not a single grant-maintained school—mainly because of a perceived satisfaction with the local education authority, under both its present Labour administration—although some discontent is creeping in—and its previous Conservative control. Also, Suffolk has developed a wide range of partnerships. There are schools in pyramids and clusters, with business and industry, and those sharing teachers and parts of the curriculum. It is a profound strength and is recognised as such by parents and teachers.

The other probable reason for there being no GM schools is the enormous success of our three-tier system—primary, middle and high schools—with the transfer ages of nine and 13, which cut across the key stages of the national curriculum. That forces schools to work together.

Personally, I would like all schools to become self-governing and LEAs to be demolished, but I am aware of the charge that, while we are empowering parents and local providers, we are not always building in the right democratic answerability. School governors report to parents, and some are elected by parents, so there is an element of democracy, and it needs fostering.

The same is not true, however, in health, as is well illustrated in my area. Due to the history of the configuration of health authorities in Waveney and Great Yarmouth, together with increasing numbers of elderly people, a review is being conducted on hospital provision for the elderly in north Suffolk. The proposals and the consultation process could lead to the closure of beds, wards and, ultimately, unless there are concrete alternative agreed uses, closure of community hospitals at Lowestoft and Beccles, even though the preferred policy is for community hospitals.

Quite rightly, the Minister for Health has told campaigners that local bed provision is a matter for the local health authority's providers and purchasers. However, the danger is that the public will lose faith in the consultation process if their views are persistently ignored by local authorities and trusts, rubber-stamped by the regions and eventually by the Secretary of State.

Therefore, there is a perceived gap in public accountability in a public service as vital as health care. I sound that warning to my hon. Friends on the Front Bench. That perceived gap cannot be neglected indefinitely, and if not now, then in some Gracious Speech soon, it will have to be considered.

In reading between the lines of the Gracious Speech despite the huffing and puffing of the Opposition, I think that it is part of a continuing programme to modernise the state for the next century. Privatisation, deregulation and competition have not been lost sight of. Record inward investment finds fertile soil in Britain today. The fact that some of the trade unions are starting to flex their muscles again, sensing that the Labour party could soon be dancing to their tunes in Downing street, shows how important it is that we keep up that drive.

We need to remove still more red tape; we need to enforce fewer regulations from Brussels—and Whitehall. We need to use tax reductions for individuals and business to stimulate the economy. We need to encourage those barometers of our economic health—retail and construction—in a positive way. We need to use taxes to make family stability attractive again. The Queen's Speech is a step on that road, and the Budget will be the next. But the Government need to keep thinking, acting and believing more aggressively—in a political sense—if all that has been achieved is not to be thrown away.

6.46 pm

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield): I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) on an excellent speech—her first from the Front Bench in her new role. It was such a refreshing change to hear someone trying to consider the broad scope of investment in our country, especially as it affects wealth-creation processes and the manufacturing sector. I look forward to the winding-up speech from my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Ms Short) the shadow Secretary of State for Transport.

Like many hon. Members, I was attracted to politics by its potential to improve the conditions of life for the people of our country. My discontent was with the inability of our economy and our society over many years to give the less privileged people in our country a real stake in its fortunes or a real chance of a decent standard of living.

Of course, a few of the ideas and strategies to achieve greater prosperity, which some of my generation and I embraced—when I was in manufacturing industry and, indeed, later when I was at the London School of Economics—have been worked on, modified and changed a little. While I worked in the manufacturing sector and, indeed, right throughout my career, I have always held the conviction and been committed to a belief—it remains totally unchanged—in the fundamental importance of the creation of wealth in offering the inhabitants of these islands the opportunity of the good life.

There are many definitions of that good life, but I like the pretty handy one that it means: a nice home, a well-paid job, good holidays, and decent levels of education, health and social care. We all intuitively know what the good life is and what we want for our constituents and the people of this country. I continue to be convinced that the creation of that wealth must be primarily through the manufacturing sector of our economy.

The Queen's Speech has the usual obligatory references to

"encouraging enterprise and competitiveness and support for small businesses",

and "further deregulation", and it promises

"increased competitiveness encouraged by raising educational skill levels, advancing knowledge, and promoting an efficient and flexible labour market."

But there is little sign of positive plans to achieve those goals and, overall, the Queen's Speech gives little sign that the Government are aware of the perilous situation facing our national economy, as Britain plummets to 18th place in the world prosperity league. Apart from one tiny Bill, which has cross-party support, nothing in the Queen's Speech will do anything to help our manufacturing enterprises.

From every side of industry, we hear calls for the Government to take radical steps to reinvigorate our industries—investing in them and building up their international competitiveness, educating and training a modern, multi-skilled work force and giving them the modern infrastructure of services that they need to thrive. That is the industrial agenda which any Government must address and which should have been addressed more effectively in the past 16 years.

As co-chairman, with the hon. Member for Coventry, South-West (Mr. Butcher), of the parliamentary manufacturing industry group, and as one of the instigators of the networking for industry initiative, I have been privileged, over the past two years, to hear the informed opinions of industrialists, academics, bankers, trade unionists, corporate analysts and financial journalists on our economic and industrial position. What is fascinating is the remarkable similarity of their views, not only in terms of the challenges that we face, but in terms of their prescriptions for bringing our manufacturing sector back to rude good health. They are all deeply committed to ensuring that Britain remains in the ranks of the wealthiest and most successful nations when the world and the competitive situation change faster each day and when a fundamental shift in global economic power is well under way.

In a debate a few weeks ago—it was one of the Wednesday morning debates, which are such a refreshing part of our changed structures—we were informed by the Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, the hon. Member for Amber Valley (Mr. Oppenheim), that Britain's economic decline commenced in the 1850s. I could not resist the temptation of shouting out that it was the Whigs' fault. The Minister hinted in his winding-up speech that, by implication, it could not be the Conservative party's fault.

I do not want to dwell in the 19th century, but to look briefly at the development of our economy since 1950. It is broadly agreed that, over the past four decades, the UK trade balance in manufactures has been in long-term decline. That is an all-party responsibility and I do not make a party point. The inexorable downward trend since 1950, with periodic ups and downs, is clear.

Equally marked was an upward trend in the non-manufacturing balance, which was briefly interrupted in the mid-1970s by higher world oil prices, but which was resumed when North sea oil came on stream, just after the Government were elected in 1979. The long-running improvement in the UK's non-manufacturing balance was caused by an improvement in the UK's balance in food and raw materials, and, when that tailed off, by the boom in oil production.

[Mr. Barry Sheerman]

Throughout the period, there was also a persistent, though fluctuating, surplus on services. The tailing-off in the food and raw materials balance and the declining balance in oil towards the end of the 1980s were not, however, accompanied by any significant recovery in the balance in manufacturing trade. On the contrary, it too deteriorated. There was a growing emphasis on the success of services. We all remember the Conservatives' obsession with services and how they said, "Forget manufacturing industry. Look to the horizon, where all our constituents will work in the service industry."

I intend to concentrate on the belief that service jobs will replace manufacturing jobs and that services will replace manufacturing industry as the source of our wealth. With the growing emphasis on the success of services at the expense of manufacturing, a central policy question must be answered by all parties. Labour Members, especially Front-Bench Members, are looking at the problems in the long term. It was refreshing to learn from the remarks of my right hon. Friend the Member for Derby, South that we are looking at a long-term strategy for manufacturing industry. The argument in the 1980s was whether service industries had the potential to close the widening visible trade gap. If services cannot do that, what scale of manufacturing trade recovery will be required to have a significant beneficial impact on future trends in output, growth and employment?

One of the most illuminating attempts to look at the problem has come from the Cambridge economic policy group, which has pioneered an analysis that helps us to look in detail at three scenarios. I will take the House briefly through those scenarios because they are vital to everything in our modern economy. The first scenario examines the development of the economy if it continues along the familiar pattern of the existing trend—in other words, if we follow through the Queen's Speech with no new policies, no new investment and no change.

In the second scenario, we would shift to an enormous expansion of the financial and miscellaneous service sector. Let us take the view of the 1980s and follow it to its logical conclusion. In the third scenario, there would be a considerable effort to boost investment in the manufacturing sector, which would consequently be a success.

Let us consider scenario one. When the implications of existing trends in trade competitiveness and overall economic performance are explored, taking into account the unintended but beneficial effects of the 1992 devaluation and making quite optimistic assumptions about world trade, the picture is extremely gloomy if we go on from here with no real change. Economic growth would be relatively slow and unemployment would remain high. There would also be an unacceptably large deficit in the balance of payments. By 2003, the country would face serious external problems.

The second scenario focuses on the rapid growth of financial and miscellaneous services, a category which covers virtually all internationally traded services except for travel and transportation. It includes banking, insurance, telecommunications, films and television, consultancy, royalties and other business services. It is an area of non-manufacturing trade in which Britain's international performance is, admittedly, good and in which significant further improvement may be feasible. All that is accepted in this scenario.

The second Cambridge scenario reveals, however, that such exports cannot compensate for serious failings in the manufacturing sector; that is at the heart of the problem. Offsetting the prospective manufacturing deficit would require an inconceivable increase in the export of financial or miscellaneous services and would assume transformation in those services that is far beyond the range of possibility. Indeed, the increase in financial activity envisaged would be roughly equivalent to absorbing all the current international financial activity of New York and Tokyo, in addition to the increase already envisaged in natural growth trends in services. Depending on services is at the centre of the argument.

The third scenario focuses on the manufacturing sector. It assumes an increase in size and an improvement in the international competitiveness of manufacturing industry greater than that suggested by the current trend level. The assumed improvement is substantial, but it is conceivable with the right combination of industrial policy, financial incentives and a realistic exchange rate. In this scenario, we see unemployment falling considerably from now until 2003 while the balance of payments deficit is eventually eliminated. The clear strategy is to increase gradually the growth rate of manufactured exports and to reduce that of imports. On that projection, by 2003, manufactured exports would be 14 per cent. higher and imports would be 4 per cent. lower than if we had followed the current trends.

The improvement in trade performance would be accompanied by greater productivity in the manufacturing sector, where output would be 14 per cent. greater in 2003 than if we had followed the current trends. There would also be an increase in the output of business and other services allied to the manufacturing sector whose contribution is crucial to the performance of manufacturing.

Hon. Members may say, "Where do we go from there?" There are three ways in which to look at the long-term future of our economy.

The third scenario shows that our only viable course is to follow an investment programme in our manufacturing sector. We must not neglect the service sector, but if we think for one moment that services can make a difference to our declining manufacturing sector, we have another think coming. I wish to make a comparison. If the third scenario is followed, the deficit in manufacturing trade will not only be eliminated by the end of the century as the sector records a rising surplus, but, by 2003, the current account will be in balance and Britain will no longer be accumulating debt.

The point is not that manufacturing will replace financial and miscellaneous services, but that the scale for potential improvements in manufacturing is so much greater than in financial and miscellaneous services, due mainly to the much larger scale of manufacturing trade. People often talk about manufacturing and services as though they were of equal weight, but we must look at the reality.

In 1993, the combined value of UK imports and exports of manufactures was £206 billion, while the figure for financial and miscellaneous services was £26 billion, or a little over 10 per cent. of the manufacturing total. To close

the balance of payments gap would therefore require eight times as great a percentage improvement in services performance as in manufacturing performance. To achieve the envisaged transformation in manufacturing is difficult, but possible. To improve the performance of services as envisaged would be quite unachievable and impossible.

Transforming manufacturing industry would be a major challenge in organisational and human terms, but would not be prohibitively expensive in terms of investment. We are saying that, while it is a hard row to hoe, it is not impossible. At present, gross domestic fixed capital formation in manufacturing is around £12 billion a year, or 2 per cent. of GDP. In our scenario, the figure would have to be increased by 3 per cent. of GDP. In cash terms, this would imply an extra £6 billion a year, which is less than one sixtieth of total consumers' expenditure and, funnily enough, is not far off what the media have speculated the Chancellor of the Exchequer will soon be handing out in tax cuts.

In conclusion, clearly there is a pressing need to address the industrial agenda in a radical and innovative way. All the signs are that only one party in this country is tackling that imaginatively. The Conservative Government—on the other hand—appear doomed to get further and further out of touch, not just with the electorate but with manufacturing industry and its leaders. The leaders of manufacturing industry in this country wonder what world the Government are living in, and the Secretary of State today painted a picture that is not recognised by ordinary people out in the real world of manufacturing.

I have been a little disheartened that only about half a dozen Conservative Members—not including those who are paid to be here—have been in the Chamber during the debate. Of those Members, one talked about families and divorce law, another about television and another about local government. Today's debate was, I thought, a prime opportunity to talk about investment in manufacturing, transport and the infrastructure, but that challenge has not been taken up by Conservative Members. Perhaps that can be attributed to the fact that so few Conservative Members have any knowledge of or experience in manufacturing industry. They have not worked in the industry and they do not know it, although a couple of them—more than a couple, in fact—are consultants to the industry.

The Queen's Speech will be greeted with dismay by manufacturers, managers and workers across the country, as will—I suspect—the forthcoming Budget. The Government are incapable of thinking about the long-term future of Britain's wealth-creating capabilities, and they are entirely obsessed with the short-term goal of bribing enough voters to secure them a further term in office. Such an eventuality—unlikely as it may be—would be a dark day for the British manufacturing sector.

7.4 pm

Sir Michael Grylls (North-West Surrey): I shall do my best to remedy the disappointment of the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman) at the earlier speeches from Conservative Members by referring to trade and industry in some way. I was excited when the hon. Gentleman said that he was going to talk about wealth creation. By doing so, he stood out like a sore thumb from a large number of his colleagues who do not appear to approve of wealth creation. But with all courtesy to the hon. Gentleman, I was disappointed that he allowed himself to get dragged along by the arguments for and against services and manufacturing industry. In a global business sense, those are fallow arguments, as both sectors need each other.

The hon. Gentleman was wrong to suggest that the Government have been hooked on the service industry at the expense of manufacturing industry. Some of the great success stories of the past few years would suggest that Britain has developed as a newly industrialised country. We talk about countries in the far east as NICs, but Britain in a way is also a NIC because we have been re-industrialised after the disasters of the 1970s, when it was almost impossible to run a firm sensibly. Trade union law was totally out of control, and the then Labour Government refused to reform it. The reforms brought in by the Government in the 1980s were vital in changing that climate.

On the positive side, I agree with the hon. Gentleman that we need to focus strongly on supporting and encouraging manufacturing industry. I wish to refer to two matters in the Queen's Speech in that context. The first is the Government's determination to maintain control over and bear down on inflation. That contributes to the fact that manufacturing industry is increasing, because we are now seen to be a country of relatively low inflation, and that is vital.

The second matter is the Government's intention to continue to do everything they can to support and encourage the development of small business. A huge amount has been done to turn around the anti-enterprise—particularly anti-small business enterprise—culture which existed in our economic and industrial scene for too many decades after the war. Even during the recent downturn in the economy, the number of new businesses being started each year has never fallen below 400,000.

The hon. Member for Huddersfield would no doubt say that a lot of firms have gone out of business, and that is of course true; it happens as part of a life and death cycle. But it is vital that new enterprise is growing like grass all the time. The hon. Gentleman will agree that, if that does not happen, the industrial climate will not be healthy. I can remember when talking about small business in the late 1970s was an off-beat thing. The late Lord Lever was the Minister in charge of the matter in the then Labour Government, and he was very good, but small business was an off-beat thing to worry about.

That argument seems to have been won. Everyone realises that small businesses are important. Even the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mrs. Maddock) made a passing reference to small businesses. She did not tell us what the Liberals would do for them, other than spend a great deal more taxpayers' money on all sorts of things. No doubt that money would have to come from small businesses. The argument that small businesses are a central part of our economy has been won. I was delighted to see small businesses feature strongly in the Queen's Speech.

I hope that the Government will continue to nurture small business and look at ways of encouraging, for example, greater provision of long-term money to finance small and medium-sized firms. I hope that the Government will encourage larger firms to pay their bills more quickly by giving a good example and by forcing them to publish in their annual accounts how quickly they pay their bills.

[Sir Michael Grylls]

The hon. Member for Huddersfield spoke about manufacturing industry. It is a mistake and it is clearly wrong to go around saying that our manufacturing industry is disappearing. He will be aware, as the House is aware, of the huge success of the British pharmaceutical industry. The majority of the most successful drugs currently sold around the world are made by British firms and were British innovations. That is a huge success story.

Although much of the car industry is foreign-owned—that is not the most important factor—it is located in Britain and is providing British jobs and creating wealth and exports for Britain. The British car industry went through the most appalling disaster period. Sales and production went down and down, but they are now going up and up. It is well known that all the major manufacturing firms are now located in Britain. That is a huge advantage not only to the big firms but to the small firms which supply them and which have been sharpened up by the arrival of new companies.

The first Japanese firm that came to Britain in a big way was Nissan, which came to Washington in the north-east. One of the great by-products of that happy decision to invest in the north-east was the encouragement to small suppliers to the car industry to sharpen up their act. I remember talking to Nissan about that in Tokyo just before it came over. The increase in competitiveness among British component suppliers has not only made them more efficient in Britain but encouraged them to export to the continent and other countries, which they have done successfully. That would never have happened without inward investment.

It is wrong to knock British manufacturing industry on the head. If one analyses British industry realistically, one can see that, 100 or more years ago when the industrial revolution started, we were first, so we were almost bound to decline relatively. The hon. Member for Huddersfield made an all-party point. Both Conservative Governments and Labour Governments have made terrible mistakes in dealing with manufacturing industry in the post-war period. That is history. We went down, but now we are coming up again in almost any sector that one cares to talk about—washing machines, cars, refrigerators or prescription medicines. That is why I say that we really are a newly industrialised country.

I have mentioned the effect of inward investment on the car industry. It is almost wholly beneficial. I plead guilty as much as anyone to having the old-fashioned feeling that it is a shame that we cannot own the industry, but once we get over that and think more clearly, we recognise that the world is a global marketplace and ownership does not matter very much.

Mr. Snape: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir Michael Grylls: In a moment.

If there are 10,000 jobs in Washington with Nissan, that is 10,000 jobs, whether I own the company or a Japanese gentleman owns it. Those jobs are the same. Those exports are the same. Of course the hon. Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Snape) is going to say that dividends go back to Tokyo. That is true, of course they do, but we must look at the other side of the coin. Britain has the biggest investments in the United States of America. Those companies employ not British but American people, but the dividends come back to Great Britain. The world is one place. So we must tear out of our hearts the over-nationalistic feeling that it is a shame that manufacturing is not British.

Mr. Snape: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will not accuse me of being over-nationalistic if I put it to him that I would prefer decisions affecting British manufacturing industry and workers to be made in Britain, as I would prefer dividends and profits to remain in Britain rather than be repatriated abroad.

Sir Michael Grylls: Decisions in large-scale manufacturing are not made by just one lot of nationals, whether British, Japanese or American. The boards of directors of the multinationals are made up of members of all nationalities, so we must not get hooked on the idea that companies are from one country.

The hon. Member for Huddersfield said that not many Members were involved in manufacturing industry. I have been personally involved for more than 20 years. I have seen how decisions are made. If a company is American or Japanese-owned, decisions are shared. Decisions are not made in isolation. No one makes a decision about a business, for example, in Great Britain without taking into account the British interest.

The multinationals used to be part of the demonology of the Labour party, but perhaps that attitude has slipped out. If it has, that is a good thing. Many of the wiser multinationals will go on the local stock exchange to encourage local money and have a high local profile. I think that is a good idea. Some firms do it and some do not. It is one world now, certainly in large-scale manufacturing.

There is a contest for inward investment. The real political point is that, if we do not have the right climate here, inward investment will stop coming. Investment went to the United States because, by and large, the United States has been historically welcoming to enterprise. Therefore, many British investors and companies invested in America because they could do so profitably and successfully. We are now attracting the lion's share of investment within the EC by Japanese and American companies because we offer a favourable and attractive climate of low corporate taxation, less regulation and low inflation. We tinker with that at our peril.

I was intrigued by the speech of the leader of the Labour party at the Confederation of British Industry conference. He said all sorts of things, but it was what he did not say that was important. He said that the Labour party no longer believed in penal taxation. I am not sure what he meant by penal taxation. Was he saying that he did not believe in the personal taxation at 80 and 98 per cent., corporate taxation at 55 per cent. and death duties or inheritance tax at 80 per cent. presided over by the Labour Government? What level was he talking about? He was not specific. He never said what he would do for small firms, as the Gracious Speech did. He never said what he would do about the 100 per cent. allowance on inheritance tax for non-quoted companies. Will that be reintroduced under a Labour Government? If it were, it would be hugely damaging to the economy.

I welcome the words on inflation, and urge my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport to use his good influence in the Government to ensure that we do not let up on that work. It is frightening to have to say

this but, after all the work that has been done to bear down on inflation, by and large Britain still does not have credibility in respect of it, although the figures are good. The average is 4 per cent.; under Labour it was 15 per cent.

The figures are good, but there is a suspicion in many of the financial markets that, sooner or later, the British Government will let up on the fight against inflation. I do not believe that this Government will do so, but I urge my right hon. Friend to maintain that policy very strongly indeed. Manufacturing and service industries and small businesses totally depend on the success of that policy. If one allows inflation to rip, one destroys companies, jobs and the manufacturing and service industries. I urge my right hon. Friend to keep up that good work.

7.20 pm

Mr. John Garrett (Norwich, South): Lack of investment, particularly in education, industry and transport, is a fundamental determinant of economic performance. We do not find any reference to investment in Her Majesty's speech. There is talk of "support for small businesses" and the authorisation of

"the construction and operation of a high speed rail link between London and the Channel Tunnel."

Those two references pale into insignificance when set against the proposed reduction in the public sector borrowing requirement and the reduction in the share of national income taken by the public sector.

It is as clear as day that long-term public investment will be sacrificed to the short-term political benefits of cuts in income tax. That will be very bad news for my constituency. The city that I represent, having come through the past two recessions with its industrial base damaged, now faces the most devastating local recession, with about 3,000 redundancies announced in the past year: the closure of Rowntree Nestlé, a factory that has been in the city for about 300 years; the sale of Colman, with more than 100 redundancies already; cuts at Norwich Union amounting to about 1,200 jobs; the closure of an Eagle Star office, with the loss of 130 jobs; the loss of another 170 jobs at Anglia Television; and job losses at British Gas and Eastern Electricity. That is hundreds of job losses in a city that was prosperous for a very long time.

The city of Norwich is reeling from those blows, and we now face the uncertainty of the privatisation of Her Majesty's Stationery Office, where 900 people are employed. HMSO is highly successful, and to privatise it is pure ideology. As a major supplier to the public service, it has spent the past 200 years preventing Government Departments from being ripped off by private contractors. To replace those jobs, we need investment, both public and private, and we certainly need the initial stimulus to come from public investment in infrastructure, transport, education and training.

The county of Norfolk has a deplorably low level of infrastructural development. Norwich is the only city of its size not to be attached to the motorway network. It desperately needs a fully dualled link to London and the dualling of the east-west A47 to link Yarmouth and Norwich to the midlands. I am not extra-enthusiastic for road building in general, but I am convinced of the need for a basic road network in East Anglia, particularly from London to Norwich and east-west across the county of Norfolk. Those links are absolutely essential. Much of Norfolk is a low-wage area with limited job opportunities and rising unemployment. Those two projects would breathe economic life into the county.

The dualling of the A47 and A11 is also necessary to allow trading links with Europe to be developed further. Yarmouth and Norwich have had long-standing relationships with the low countries and it is essential that we take advantage of those by improving our infrastructure. As a result of the trunk roads review of 1994, no new schemes are to be started in East Anglia in 1995 and 1996.

Investment is also needed in rail connections in the region. It is clear from the use of superannuated rolling stock and the frequent signal and equipment failures that there should be investment in track and rolling stock on the London to Norwich line. Such investment has been paralysed by the impending privatisation of the railways. Rail privatisation is highly unpopular and quite staggeringly costly. All surveys show that the policy has no public support. It has cost £100 million in consultancy fees and £700 million in fees to the City of London already. Railtrack, which is worth up to £6.5 billion, is expected to be sold for £3 billion. Meanwhile, investment is stifled. The railways need investment, not privatisation, and the public want a reliable network, not a fragmented, private monopoly.

On rolling investment in our national economic recovery, the recovery has been remarkably slow. The former Chancellor and the one before him promised that the green shoots of recovery were coming through. Business investment has grown by 4 per cent. since the trough of the recession. Historically, we have not only a far lower level of investment than our competitors but a lower rate of growth in investment. The Bank of England noted earlier this year that capacity constraints had appeared because of our low level of investment. It is difficult to comprehend that, in the past 16 years, so few of the receipts from North sea oil—our wealth—have been diverted into productive investment, either in industry or in infrastructure.

Sir Michael Grylls: The hon. Gentleman was trying to provoke me on the subject of investment. Does he not recognise that there has been enormous investment in British Telecom and the other privatisations, including all the water companies? If that has happened with those privatisations, is there any reason to suppose that it will not happen with the privatisation of British Rail? Of course the same thing will happen.

Mr. Garrett: I do not believe that that has happened with privatisation. The force of technology alone would have obliged BT to invest at a very high level. As for the water utilities, it is a pity that some of those companies did not invest in stopping leaks instead of paying their executives inflated, fat-cat salaries and declaring profits of that size. The hon. Gentleman's point is worthless.

We have a lower rate of investment growth than any other G7 country, as well as lower employment growth. In the league table of income per head, we have fallen from 13th to 18th, and Britain is now 21st in the league table of investment per head. In this country, investment per head per annum is £1,600, whereas it is £2,250 in France, £2,600 in Germany and £3,900 in Japan. That is the size of the investment gap that we suffer. It is no

[Mr. Garrett]

wonder that the output of British manufacturing industry is only 1 per cent. higher than it was in 1973 during the three-day week. The latest figures show that total investment for the third quarter fell by 2.2 per cent. compared with the second quarter of 1995, and increased by only 0.6 per cent. in the past 12 months.

Investment in education and training should be a top national priority. The only reference to that policy area is the voucher scheme for nursery education and allowing grant-maintained schools to borrow on the open market, for whatever that is worth, and students to choose between public and private sources of loan, the benefit of which is completely lost on me. The many students in my constituency are living in poverty. They have borrowed to the hilt. Allowing them to borrow from a bank will not make any difference. Their accommodation costs are approaching their total income on full grant and full loan. What more encouragement could be offered to a future generation of educated people?

We spend far too little on education, and hon. Members on both sides of the House know of the anger in their constituencies at the recent cuts in education funding. Education and training, as other Governments know, are the crucial factors in economic growth. We have cut local authority expenditure, which in turn has crippled investment in education.

The Gracious Speech should have outlined a statutory framework to ensure that all employers make a proper contribution to the training of their work force. We got none of that. The city that I represent used to be one of the best housed in the country, with some 25,000 council properties. The best 6,000 of those properties have been sold off. The area suffers from acute housing stress, with many families in bed-and-breakfast accommodation, a record housing list and no new construction. Housing investment using the receipts from the sale of council house sales would be an investment in family quality of life. There is an investment famine in industry, education, transport and housing—and we are all the poorer for that.

I was sorry that there was no whiff of any proposals for constitutional change in the Queen's Speech. Our country's institutions—not least this place—desperately need modernising. The House needs more power and responsibility vis-a-vis the Government and more control over the Government—any Government. The authoritarian control of Parliament by the Government must be reversed by more critical examination of legislation, as the leader of my party suggested in respect of the new asylum and immigration legislation. The House also needs to undertake more informed scrutiny and use greater powers in respect of protecting human rights. There is a need to implement the European convention on human rights in domestic law. Our country is the only one in western Europe that has not done so.

There is a need to devolve power to local government and to reform the House of Lords. There is a crying need for a freedom of information Act. I regret that those ideas are too radical for the Government, who have run out of steam and are putting all their hopes into short-term tax cuts.

7.30 pm

Mr. Barry Field (Isle of Wight): I hope that the House will allow me a little latitude, in the same way as it was tolerant to my right hon. Friend the Member for Selby (Mr. Alison). I apologise to Madam Speaker for not observing my right hon. Friend's courtesy in writing to her in advance of tonight's debate to say that I would be departing a little from the chosen subject.

I ask for a little latitude as this is my maiden contribution to the debate on the Gracious Speech, and it is the first occasion on which I have spoken as Chairman of the Deregulation Committee. I want to use the occasion to express on behalf of all my constituents the gratitude of the Isle of Wight to Her Majesty the Queen for appointing my noble friend Lord Mottistone as our first home-grown governor.

The Isle of Wight is, in every sense and facet, a unique community. It has the great good fortune among all the shire counties of having a governor who is appointed by Her Majesty. The office goes back hundreds of years and there has in its history been a number of interregnums. The last followed the untimely death and heinous murder of Lord Louis Mountbatten. His Excellency Lord Mottistone is the first governor to have been chosen from within the island's community. He is a distinguished member of the Seely family, whose record of service and public duty for the benefit of the island is remarkable.

In an era of exceptional cynicism and constant denigration of our great British traditions and dynasties, it is remarkable that the Seely family should have such an unbroken record of public service. His Excellency would be the first to admit that he is a man of modest means. Unlike other governors appointed in 1992, but on the Prime Minister's recommendation, to Bermuda and Hong Kong, the Governor of the Isle of Wight is unpaid.

In the days of the Nolan committee, I know that I speak for the whole island when I say that David Mottistone is a prime example of service before self. His dedication to and enthusiasm for all his duties has been exceptional. He has crossed the most difficult of all the rubicons on the Isle of Wight—he is universally trusted.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I should caution the hon. Gentleman against crossing his personal rubicon. I do not see how his remarks relate to the Queen's Speech. Tolerance in this instance relates to the subject matter chosen; it does not go so wide as to exclude the Gracious Speech altogether. The hon. Gentleman must either refer to the Queen's Speech or—

Mr. Garrett: Resume his seat.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I would not make so bold. I am sure that the hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Field) can oblige me and will not have to resume his seat.

Mr. Field: I was almost on the final lap of that part of my speech. As you will appreciate, Madam Deputy Speaker, I am the only Member of Parliament who speaks for an entire county.

During Lord Mottistone's time as Governor of the Isle of Wight, he has been a tower of strength and wisdom to us all, and we wish him a long and enjoyable retirement. I have always made it clear to the Government that if someone upsets Hampshire, 15 Members of Parliament will arrive on their doorstep. If someone upsets the Isle of Wight, they get me and two rather infamous labradors. Our not-so-secret weapon has always been the Governor of the Isle of Wight. The offices of many junior Ministers

have telephoned me to ask how his excellency should be addressed. On one occasion, I was even asked why we had a governor.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I must ask the hon. Gentleman to address the topic of the Queen's Speech.

Mr. Field: The subjects for debate tonight are investment and transport. We have heard much about inward investment. I am particularly attracted to a figure that is often conveyed by the Governor of the Bank of England. The United Kingdom owns £250 billion-worth of the rest of the world, whereas the rest of the world owns £200 billion-worth of the United Kingdom. It is obvious that the balance is much in favour of our nation.

I hope that my right hon. and hon. Friends in the Departments of Transport and of Trade and Industry, and others throughout Whitehall, will ensure that the implications of the social chapter and the minimum wage for every type of business and enterprise throughout the United Kingdom are costed, so that we will have examples of precisely what they would mean for British industry and commerce, from the corner shop to the biggest industrial company. I commend to my right hon. Friend the Minister for Industry and Energy an article in *The Times* by Stanley Kalms of Dixons, who attended the Confederation of British Industry conference. Apparently, his was something of a lone voice—but, as so often with minority opinion, the lone voice is often the one that bursts the bubble.

The minimum wage should not only be costed for every business but we should hear from our ministerial colleagues, particularly in view of the strength of feeling about deregulation expressed in the Gracious Speech, precisely what is to be done about the interfering, petty bureaucrats who think it appropriate to order a greengrocer to remove his wares from the pavement—a tradition that goes back years. That reveals to my right hon. Friend the Minister and to me precisely where the heart of the Labour party lies. Derbyshire county council did not have anything better to do with its time than to take that poor man to court: how ridiculous.

As to the effect of a minimum wage on tourism, the Isle of Wight has a low gross domestic product. My right hon. Friend the Member for Wales—[HON. MEMBERS: "Does it have only one?"] Only one who speaks Welsh. My right hon. Friend the Member for Conwy (Sir W. Roberts) is also the only Member of Parliament for Wales who is so well respected, as well as being one of the longest-serving Ministers for a Department of State—a record that is unique since the turn of the century. The minimum wage would be very damaging to tourism at our seaside resorts, which already have to compete with the sunshine economies of the rest of the EC. Worse, we have heard in the past few days that Labour wants to abolish A-levels. That too would be extremely damaging to this nation's competitiveness.

Our privatisations have been extremely successful, of course. As I speak, British Telecom is experimenting with smart card technology on the Isle of Wight. As a result of my representations about the international nature of Cowes week, BT has installed multilingual telephones. The company has also done great service to the Isle of Wight by promoting teleworking; for a community linked to the mainland by a ferry service, that obviously represents the employment of the future.

Our local partnership investments are already a legend throughout the country, performing sterling work on the Isle of Wight. I should, however, add that we do not have as many multilingual telephones in this country as are encountered abroad. The same goes for multilingual cash machines. The UK is one of the principal destinations for international tourism, so I hope that the Minister will give his Treasury colleagues a boot up the backside, in an attempt to get the clearing banks to do a little more investing in hole-in-the-wall technology.

Rail privatisation on the Isle of Wight has been a particular source of frustration. Ours was the first railway line in the country to be privatised, but now we seem to be at the back of the queue. There is all-party support for the 12-mile line that runs from the end of Ryde pier to Shanklin, on which steam could be reintroduced. Thus far, I am sorry to say, this is one opportunity for tourists that we have been frustrated in our attempts to enhance.

We were pleased to receive assisted area status, and we hope in due course, with the assistance of the DTI, to get objective 1 status. None of us believes any longer that there is a crock of gold at the end of the Brussels rainbow, but such status would allow a community such as ours access to other funds currently denied to it.

Another great success of privatisation has been that of the docks, under Associated British Ports and the trust ports. I refer also to the abolition of the dock labour scheme. I was sorry that the Queen's Speech did not mention abolishing light dues or opening up the shipping register to make it more competitive—or requiring trust boards to publish their accounts. They are, after all, quasi-public bodies. I have been frustrated in my attempts to extract the trust board accounts from the Yarmouth harbour commissioners, and I know that many of my constituents have had the same experience.

The Minister will know that ferry services to the Isle of Wight are currently the subject of an inquiry by the Monopolies and Mergers Commission. I hope that, when the report reaches the Minister's desk, he will consider it carefully, bearing in mind the impact of the ferries on the island's economy. He may even contemplate divesting one of the routes so as to create greater competition. On the table at the moment is a proposal for the western Solent from Associated British Ports.

Colleagues in the Department of Transport have recently told me that light dues cannot be waived for vessels to and from the Isle of Wight. I hope that they will give careful consideration to what the master of the Cowes harbour commissioners, Captain Henry Wrigley, wrote recently. He said that the Minister for Aviation and Shipping does indeed possess the means to adjust light dues on vessels plying to and from the island.

I sincerely believe that the Navy may yet abandon its responsibility for buoys in the eastern Solent. If that happens, vessels travelling to and from the island may face an increase in light dues. This is a tax that my constituents, alone among all constituents represented in this House, have to pay. This additional charge on the island's residents is quite iniquitous: our economy is already struggling.

I still hope that the idea of the Lyndhurst bypass will be resurrected. I wrote to the transport authority on the Isle of Wight council asking whether the Liberal Democrats would support me during the passage of the

[Mr. Field]

relevant Bill through this House. They refused, which was sad because it is the best route from the island and the one that could most usefully be enlarged.

I wish that the health service had made an appearance in the Gracious Speech. The National Health Service Act 1977 set up the arrangements under which hospital travel costs could be paid for constituents. The Isle of Wight was specifically included; the Bill was drawn up in such a way that there was no requirement to meet travel costs if a community was within six miles of the nearest land mass. That was varied by an order of 1987, to allow travel costs for treatment for communicable sexual diseases to be paid for my constituents, 35 per cent. of whom are over retirement age. On the other hand, the travel costs of those with cancer or heart disease cannot be paid. Yet they are paid for residents of the Scilly isles—a remarkable anomaly.

I was sorry to hear nothing in the Gracious Speech about national identity cards. There is a universal view in this country that we, like many of our EC partners, need such a card.

I am pleased to note that the Lord Chancellor's Bill will include domestic violence measures. I am glad that they are back on the agenda for the coming Session because I, with others, was responsible for setting up a women's refuge on the Isle of Wight. It has successfully sheltered women who have suffered violence in their marriages. I detected some cynicism in Body Shop's recent campaign among colleagues—it seemed to bear no relation to the facts of what is happening.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Witney (Mr. Hurd) began the debate on the Loyal Address with a request in respect of education. I agree with him. The Isle of Wight council, under Liberal Democrat control, is wasting well over £1 million a year of taxpayers' money on things like a waste-derived fuel plant, the electricity generation side of which recently went into liquidation. Considerable sums were paid out to no advantage for the Isle of Wight.

Be that as it may, some schools retain substantial unspent sums from their budgets, while others have little or nothing, owing to sickness and absence. I should be failing in my duty if I did not represent them tonight, and I shall shortly be seeing the Minister for Local Government, Housing and Urban Regeneration to make my point.

I am sorry that we have not done more to try to prevent social security fraud. As I said earlier to the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mrs. Maddock), the Liberal Democrat spokesman, I am extremely disappointed that the new unitary authority on the Isle of Wight, under Liberal Democrat control, scrapped a system that had worked for years of direct payment to landlords. They were not made to every landlord because not every landlord is a good one. Bad landlords were not part of the scheme. Tenants on the Isle of Wight are now complaining about the difficulties that they have in managing their affairs because payments are no longer made direct to their landlords.

The hon. Member for Christchurch has talked about dogma. Surely the ending of direct payments was a dogmatic decision. It was taken cynically and deliberately to create extended waiting lists on the Isle of Wight. We had been so successful in transferring housing stock to housing associations and reducing waiting lists.

The hon. Member for Christchurch referred to my predecessor, Stephen Ross. I remember Stephen Ross telling me in the House that he regretted some aspects of the Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977. Indeed, the leader of the local authority has said likewise. The Act broke the local connection, which was so valuable in enabling local housing committees, with which I have been involved, to know which families were good tenants. The Act destroyed much of the ethos of our council housing estates.

We are fed up on the Isle of Wight with people moving in from all parts of the country, playing the system like a grand piano and overtaking local residents who have waited patiently on the housing waiting list, as one would expect.

Mrs. Maddock: Is the hon. Gentleman aware that housing benefit fraud is a problem with landlords who take money from "tenants" who do not exist? It is a difficult matter to deal with. I am sure that my colleagues on the Isle of Wight considered such matters before taking what they considered to be the most appropriate action to stop fraud. I know that they were and are faced with a real problem.

I regret the hon. Gentleman's comments about the Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977. I knew Stephen Ross personally. I am sure that he never regretted the fact that he had made proposals permanently to deal with the real problems of homelessness as they bear on individual families. The Act has nothing to do with the way in which various councils interpret the rules. There is no reason for homeless people not being dealt with according to their needs under the Act. It is—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I remind the hon. Lady and other hon. Members that interventions, by their nature, should be short, whatever the provocation.

Mr. Field: The hon. Lady is wrong. Stephen Ross told me that he regretted some aspects of the Act. Housing benefit fraud has not been a major problem on the Isle of Wight. I am certain that the hon. Lady's colleagues on the Isle of Wight have done nothing more than peddle naked political dogma. The Isle of Wight has enough problems without creating additional ones. Unfortunately, the Liberal Democrats have cynically and deliberately created more problems. That is not my view and mine alone; it is shared by some tenants and some landlords. It is also the view of some of those who operate the present scheme. The hon. Lady cannot escape with sweet and honeyed words. I recall what was said by my predecessor. Her response will not wash. If he were still alive, he would tell her off for taking such an approach.

I am extremely disappointed because we have lost a proud housing record on the Isle of Wight. We were the first part of the United Kingdom to transfer all local authority housing stock to housing associations.

As the hon. Member for Christchurch spoke of dogma, I remind her of the actions of Mr. Bill Le Breton when he led Medina. He peddled dogma and let the North British housing association on to the island. That caused considerable problems. Tenants of that association's properties have long campaigned to have the right to buy. I promised the management of the association that, if it did not get its act together and recognise the right to buy, on which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I have corresponded at considerable length, it would be

necessary to introduce primary legislation. Tenants have the expectation of the right to buy and there is no reason why an organisation such as the North British housing association, which is alien to the Isle of Wight and did not conduct itself very well in the early stages, should be refusing its tenants the opportunity to buy.

I am tempted to stray, Madam Deputy Speaker, into—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Member has strayed far enough; he must resist temptation.

Mr. Field: I shall acknowledge your strictures, Madam Deputy Speaker, and conclude by saying that the windfall tax seems to have left the tree remarkably bare. It has been suggested by the Opposition that income tax should be reduced to 10 per cent. It seems that we are fast approaching what I call the McIntosh factor. Andrew McIntosh was the leader of the Greater London council for only one day. I do not believe that the leader of the Labour party would be leader of it for any longer than that. He is the Trojan horse to end all Trojan horses. I do not believe that the electorate will buy that at the next general election.

7.56 pm

Mr. Peter Snape (West Bromwich, East): I adhere to a long-held tradition in this place by referring to the speech by the hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Field), who preceded me. Apart from the cliché-ridden nonsense of his final sentences, I congratulate him. Over 22 years I have never heard anyone ruled out of order during a debate on the Gracious Speech. It is a wide-ranging debate. Perhaps your intervention, Madam Deputy Speaker, has brought home to the Conservative Whips Office the dangers of press-ganging incompetent Conservative Back-Bench Members and causing them to enter the Chamber to make fools of themselves.

The speech by the hon. Member for Isle of Wight might read well. I doubt whether it will, but much depends on the journalistic ability of those who edit the local newspaper on the Isle of Wight. I know, however, that it did not do much for his reputation in the House or for our standard of debate generally.

As I wish to direct my remarks to investment and transport, I start by declaring an interest as a member of the National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers, a vice-president of the Railway Development Society and a non-executive director of West Midlands Travel, which is now part of the National Express group.

I shall move briefly from controversy to partial tranquillity and harmony by congratulating the Secretary of State on his recent appointment. I was unable to do so a couple of weeks ago during his first debate in his new job, but that was not for want of trying. It is ironic that he is about the 12th Secretary of State for Transport under successive Conservative Administrations. I hope fervently that he will be the last Conservative Secretary of State for many years. The right hon. Gentleman is probably less of an ideologue than some of his predecessors. I know his private views on rail privatisation and I shall not embarrass him by repeating them. I understand the difficulty in which he finds himself in defending nonsensical privatisation.

I shall make a special plea for the west coast main line and the need for investment. In common with hon. Members on both sides of the House, I have been pressing for investment in the line. I thought that we were near a conclusion a couple of years ago when the then Minister of State, Department of Transport, the right hon. Member for Kettering (Mr. Freeman), promised that upgrading and modernising the line would start by mid-1995.

Alas, that proved to be another Tory pledge on which we could not rely. It does one no harm, obviously, in the present Conservative Administration, to be caught out making pledges that cannot be fulfilled. I notice that the hon. Gentleman—as he was then—is now a right hon. Gentleman and a member of the Conservative Cabinet, so he is surrounded by people who make pledges that they cannot fulfil. It is a particular disappointment to me and to some of my hon. Friends that the breakthrough that we thought we would get on the modernisation of that line has not materialised.

Over the past few years, a number of deputations have been to see Transport Ministers to make the same plea that I make this evening. Their pleas were about the earlier promises that public money was available to upgrade the line. It should not be a party political issue, but regrettably it is. In any other civilised democracy, the provision of proper transport links is not something that causes great political debate. Most political parties in most other parts of the world, whether they are regarded as being on the left or the right, regard good transport links as essential to the flourishing of a modern economy and treat them accordingly. Regrettably, we do not possess such political maturity in the United Kingdom.

I do not make this plea on behalf of the railway unions, the Railway Development Society, or even railway enthusiasts, whether or not they be wearing anoraks. I make it on the ground of the general economic good of the country. The lack of investment in the railway industry generally, particularly in the run up to the farcical privatisation, and in the west coast main line in particular is enormously damaging to the economic prospects of this country.

I understand that, recently, yet another delegation, from an organisation called West Coast Rail 250, met the Minister of State, Department of Transport following publication of its own report on the need for west coast main line upgrading. I understand that the outcome of that meeting was only that the line would be refurbished to existing standards over the next nine years. Regrettably, there is neither programme nor funding to upgrade it for high-speed operation. My understanding is that the refurbishment programme includes essential maintenance and renewals plus the development of a signalling system that would pave the way, eventually, we hope, for higher speeds. It does not provide for new trains or for track improvements to allow them to run at higher speed.

I have, over the years, been guilty of boring the House with stories of my own railway experience—*[Interruption.]* I had not realised that I had bored the Whip on the Government Front Bench. *[Interruption.]* I am sorry, he is not the Whip. I had not realised that I had bored the hon. Gentleman, because I do not know who he is, but I have bored hon. Members on both sides of the House with stories about my own railway career. I have no wish to repeat any of them. But having said that, I contradict myself—

Mr. Jon Owen Jones (Cardiff, Central): Just one.

Mr. Snape: Just one story, then, and I promise not to make it too boring.

[Mr. Snape]

There is a signal box just outside my home town of Stockport, called Edgeley junction No. 2, which was built by the London and North Western railway in the early 1890s. It is still there. I was not there when it was built, I hasten to add, but I was there at an early stage in my career. Trains are signalled quite safely as they pass it, using a lever frame that dates from the time when the box was originally built. The point that I am somewhat laboriously seeking to make is that at least one of the signalling instruments in daily use in that signal box is older than signalling instruments that I have seen in the railway museum at York.

There cannot be, I hope, a more poignant plea for greater railway investment than that. I hope to soften the heart of the Secretary of State when I say that such a situation surely is unacceptable as we move towards the 21st century. The sooner we have investment in that particular line, the better.

I ask the Secretary of State to make a few journeys between London and Birmingham on the part of the west coast main line that I and my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Ms Short) on the Front Bench make quite regularly. It would be instructive for him to ride on rolling stock and behind locomotives, all of which are more than 20 years old and many of which are rostered to do more than 1,000 miles every working day. Is it any wonder that, occasionally, things go wrong and gaps appear in the service?

Because of the fragmentation of what was formerly a unified service, there is little spare capacity when things go wrong and trains are cancelled, causing inconvenience to passengers—or "customers" as they are known these days. They are not out of service very often, but some of the faults with the air conditioning, internal doors and windows, are all too familiar to regular travellers. Indeed, conductors on the trains repeatedly point out such faults to those of us whom they recognise in the hope that we can do something about it, because their daily reports do not seem to make any difference.

They are not alone in investing in Members of Parliament mythical powers, which, of course, we do not possess. Although some of us have done our best to persuade the powers that be within the railway industry to repair regular faults, because of the lack of spare capacity and, inevitably, the lack of money, they are not repaired.

Not only would passengers benefit from the upgrading for which I am pleading this evening. Significant reductions in journey times and increased capacity would surely allow modern high-volume freight trains over the whole length of the line, while track realignment, tunnel improvements and beefed-up power supplies would allow both passenger trains and freight trains to run at higher speeds. In addition, bridge and tunnel clearances should be increased to allow piggy-back freight and other improvements to increase freight capacity.

The piggy-back consortium recently published a report on the need to upgrade the line and to carry out some of the bridge and platform alterations, which are costed at around £700 million. Coincidentally, that is one of the many estimates that I have seen for the total cost of privatisation so far. Again, although I do not expect the right hon. Gentleman to agree with me this evening, I suggest that that sort of money would be better spent on the improvements that I have outlined tonight.

One of the problems is that there is no one in the driving seat to take that essential work forward. As I understand it—if I am wrong, the Secretary of State will correct me—Railtrack is expected to make an application to the EC in the near future for assistance with the funding of the west coast main line infrastructure. Will the Secretary of State give the House some assurances this evening that any such application will receive the support of the Department of Transport and of the Government generally?

As I understand it, and despite previous promises, no public money is available as a capital lump sum. Instead, the Department is to shovel public money through revenue subsidies to privatised train operators, even though privatisation of the west coast main line will not go ahead because of the very lack of investment and of modernisation to which I have referred.

Again, my understanding—I apologise to the House for being vague—is that, because of the hiatus in the run-up to privatisation, it is for Railtrack to provide options so far as different upgrading levels are concerned, which the franchising director would then discuss with potential franchise holders. If, as predicted, the train operator needs extra subsidy to run an upgraded service, I understand that the franchising director will make a case to the Department.

Again, it is a bureaucratic nightmare. It is not the short cut to a better railway that we were promised when privatisation was announced—and, in my view, it constitutes an abdication of responsibility for the Department to indulge in what I can only describe as an expensive evasion of its duties and those of its Ministers.

Mr. Michael Fabricant (Mid-Staffordshire): I wonder whether, in the new spirit of openness following the Nolan report, the hon. Gentleman would like to tell us how much he received from the privatisation of West Midlands Travel plc? Indeed, could it possibly be argued that he is advocating its case here?

Mr. Thomas McAvoy (Glasgow, Rutherglen) *rose—*

Mr. Snape: I shall reply to the hon. Gentleman's question in a moment; in the meantime, I shall give way to my hon. Friend.

Mr. McAvoy: We have just witnessed the pathetic sight of a Tory Whip going round the Chamber with a copy of the Register of Members' Interests trying to stir up sleaze. Opposition Members know that that belongs firmly on the Conservative Benches.

Mr. Snape: First, let me deal with the question of whether any benefit can accrue to the company of which I am a non-executive director from the modernisation of the west coast main line. I honestly believe that there is no such benefit: we run the stage carriage service in Birmingham, and I can see no connection. However, for obvious reasons, I declared an interest.

Conservative Members attack Opposition Members for having no business connections. They say that we know nothing about business; indeed, they say that we are unemployable. I was originally elected to the board of West Midlands Travel by both management and trade unions, and was re-elected by what I can only describe as eastern-European-type majorities—between 93 per cent. and 95 per cent. of the work force. As for the remuneration that I receive, if the hon. Member for

Mid-Staffordshire (Mr. Fabricant) is sensible enough to read the annual report—as requested by Cadbury—he will find exactly what he wants to know.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. The debate should not be delayed by arguments of this nature. If complaints are made against any hon. Member, we now have a Parliamentary Commissioner to whom to refer them.

Mr. Snape: Conservative Members do not seek to make complaints; they seek to draw inferences. The matter referred to by the hon. Member for Mid-Staffordshire was the subject of legal action between myself and *The Daily Star*, which led to an apology by the newspaper—and to insignificant damages, I am afraid; nevertheless, a small contribution was received with thanks.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Ladywood on her current portfolio. She has spent the past few years dealing with what have been called—I say this in no derogatory way—women's issues. I feel that better public transport—particularly in regard to buses—is definitely a women's issue. For too many years, the provision and design of buses appear to have been dictated by male accountants rather than the needs of customers. It is about time that bus designers took account of the fact that many daytime users are women, and that many of those women have shopping and buggies containing young children. The sooner that bus designers and operators cater for that market, the better the service will be.

Sir Peter Fry (Wellingborough): I am interested in what the hon. Gentleman has had to say about comfort on buses. Does he agree that all parties in the House must support the Government to prevent the European Community from insisting on a seating plan that reduces the number of seats and increases the number of standing passengers?

Mr. Snape: Indeed. The great difference between bus journeys here and those on the continent is that, in many continental cities, journeys are comparatively short and standing is much more acceptable that it would be in the United Kingdom. I support the hon. Gentleman's plea: we should be left to design buses suitable for the British market. I hope that the Secretary of State will also support that idea.

I do not wish to hog the debate, but I should like to say a little about the aftermath of bus deregulation. I want to persuade the Secretary of State, for as long as he holds his present post—I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Ladywood will soon take that post from him—of the need to improve bus services throughout the United Kingdom.

It is all very well for local authorities to create bus lanes and impose restrictions on parking, but all too often—as we know to our cost—such restrictions are not observed by motorists. Few experiences are more annoying than sitting in a motor car in a traffic queue and watching people deliberately flout the regulations by driving up bus lanes. The police will say, understandably, that they have not the resources to police the bus lanes, but I am afraid that until there is proper enforcement we shall not persuade motorists to leave their cars at home—and it must be a question of persuasion. I am sure that the Secretary of State will agree that people cannot be compelled not to drive to and from work. Until we can provide bus, rail and light-rail services that are nearly as quick and comfortable as private cars, exhortation will remain just that.

Let me take the Secretary of State further along the same road—if that is not too dreadful a pun. We also need to introduce quality thresholds for buses. One of the problems of deregulation is that, when reputable operators seek to run a comprehensive service, that service is frequently undermined by operators who purchase second-hand vehicles and run them on the busiest routes for a few hours in the morning and a few hours in the evening. I am not sure whether that is what the Government intended in the 1986 legislation, but it is certainly not a sensible way of trying to attract people out of their cars. We do not want town and city centres throughout the country—particularly during rush hours—to be cluttered with ancient buses, many of which look as though they ought to be in Lord Montagu's museum.

We need proper standards of vehicle specification, and proper standards of investment in new vehicles. We need proper driver training, and proper publicity and service standards. The comprehensive service that many reputable operators run throughout the country is being undermined by certain people who are attracted by the cheap end of the business. We also need to examine—as I know the Government are—the environmental impact of buses, and new technologies.

Many reputable companies—I will not talk specifically about mine, in case the Government Whip rushes in with yet another copy of the Register of Members' Interests—are anxious to look at new technologies. Let me remind the Secretary of State that a compressed natural gas public service vehicle costs around £140,000, as against about £110,000 for a conventional bus. If the passenger transport authorities, the local authorities and the Department of Transport were prepared to participate in a programme backing the introduction of such vehicles, we could do a good deal to reduce the pollution about which people in many towns and cities are rightly concerned. Operators will not buy and introduce such vehicles if at the busiest time on a route their profitability is undermined by the activities of those of whom I spoke earlier.

I apologise to hon. Members for detaining them for so long. Regardless of what hon. Members read in the Register of Members' Interests I have participated in debates on these issues since I was elected to the House more than 20 years ago. For obvious reasons, I hope that the Minister will not be in post for much longer, but while he is there, I welcome the fact that perhaps he is a little more open-minded than some of his colleagues. I hope that, when my hon. Friend the Member for Ladywood takes over, she will have a fresh look at bus and rail services because behind their improvement lies the improvement of the general economy of this country.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I understand that the winding-up speeches are to start at 9.20. That leaves 60 minutes for the remainder of the Back-Bench speeches. Six hon. Members hope to catch my eye during that hour and most of them have been here for most of the debate. I hope that that will be considered by those hon. Members who speak.

[Mr. Deputy Speaker]

8.20 pm

Mr. William Powell (Corby): We always listen with interest and respect to the hon. Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Snape) when he speaks on transport issues. I hope that he will forgive me when I say that I do not propose to follow his remarks. However, I listened carefully to his speech, and perhaps my hon. Friend the Member for Wellingborough (Sir P. Fry), who understands these issues better than I do, will have some observations—if he is called.

The general background to the debate is investment, and I shall speak about that issue as I see it in my constituency. During the 12 or 13 years that I have been in the House, there has been massive public investment in virtually all areas of my constituency. There has been investment in industry under the Industry Act 1975. My hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Field), who has left the Chamber, said that he was pleased that his constituency was now an assisted area.

If there is better news than that of becoming an assisted area, it is that an area is no longer assisted. That has happened in my constituency, and since the announcement, the decline in unemployment has been accelerating. Investment in the private sector has continued robustly to expand, and more and more industry is moving in without any public subsidy provided through assisted area status. That is on top of the expansion of existing companies, which is also happening at a robust rate.

There has been massive investment in roads, and that has brought about an enormous improvement, most of all to the A14, but also to many of the less important roads. There has been no investment in railways but that is because I have no railway stations in my constituency. My constituents use either the excellent rail system in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Wellingborough, that in the constituency of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, or the one in the constituency of the chairman of the Conservative party, my right hon. Friend the Minister without Portfolio, the Member for Peterborough (Dr. Mawhinney)

There has been massive investment in and reclamation of derelict land. There has been massive investment in local authority schools and grant-maintained schools, of which we have some of the best in the country. There has been investment in the city technology college and Lodge park technology school and in education and training in the Tresham institute. I was pleased to be present a few days ago at the opening of another significant expansion of its facilities, which were paid for by the public sector.

I can testify from my own experience that the picture of no public investment is completely untruthful. One could take the matter even further, but I should like to deal with two items of legislation in the Gracious Speech, one of which has been commented upon and the other has not. They are the proposals for legislation about MI5 and for reform of our divorce laws.

I shall deal first with our divorce laws. I rather regret the fact that we need any divorce laws at all, but, man being a fallen person, the reality is that the law needs to be reformed. When I studied law quite a long time ago, the existing divorce law was going through the House. Part of my university course entailed reading and studying what was being said in the House at that time about the proposals that led to the Matrimonial Proceedings and Property Act 1970, the Wilson Act, which has formed the basis of our divorce law ever since.

One of the interesting facets of the 1970 Act was that, to all intents and purposes, it was sponsored by the Church of England. It followed a report called "Putting Asunder", that had been commissioned by Archbishop Michael Ramsey. It formed the basis of the legislation which Mr. William Wilson, who at that time was the Member for Coventry, South, had proposed. Therefore, I read with amusement and some interest Church criticisms of the operation of legislation which it had the primary responsibility for promoting in the first place.

There was substantial discussion before the 1970 Act was passed. I vividly remember the doughty work carried out by my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Dame J. Knight) in opposing that reform. She made a number of predictions, all of which have been fulfilled, about what would happen, because there is a deep truth about the way in which one can draw any divorce laws.

It is that, broadly speaking, however the law is written, one third of people will find it a perfect fit, one third will find it rough justice with which they can live although around the edges there are problems, and one third find it completely unacceptable. All that happens when the law is changed is that people are shifted from one category to another.

Finding justice in such uncertain human relationships is an elusive art. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Selby (Mr. Alison) underlined, although our noble and learned Friend is being valiant in presenting his new proposals, and although they will meet some of the criticisms about how the existing law operates, the reality is that all that will happen as a result is that a few people will be shifted from one to another of the categories of satisfaction with the law.

Human relationships are not so carefully defined that they are capable of fitting neatly into patterns of this sort. I hope that the new law will be an improvement, but I fear that many people will be disappointed as a consequence of its operation.

Ms Short: This is the second time that this issue has been raised. The thinking behind the new proposals is to prevent couples who are, sadly, divorcing fighting over children, and getting more and more conflict and pain within families in the divorce process. I wish that those who criticise would recognise the importance of that point.

Mr. Powell: I have sufficient professional experience of these matters to know perfectly well that what the hon. Lady says is true. Equally, I know that, although that is the underlying impulse of the proposals, we live in an imperfect world, and the legislation will not always work out in the way we want. I suspect that, as a result of the changes, a significant number of people will say that they preferred the law that we are about to repeal. There is no way in which we can ever draw divorce laws that will enable everybody to be satisfied with the rules.

I shall now deal with the important legislation relating to the future activities of MI5. Organised crime stalks our country in a way that is deeply damaging to our commerce and to the fabric of our society. I wish to concentrate on two areas of organised crime, and I hope that, in its renewed co-operation with the various police authorities, MI5 will pay particular attention.

When I first raised the question of theft of heavy goods vehicles around the country, there were no statistics, and few policemen were prepared to concede that it was a serious sector of organised crime. As a result of what I and others have said over the years—I am pleased that the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman) is present, because he has also played a big part in raising this issue—the police now take such matters much more seriously.

The Home Office has just published some research into heavy goods vehicles theft. It provides the most comprehensive range of information about that matter for the police and the public authorities. It reveals the seriousness of what has been taking place, which has immense consequences for our commerce, but it gives few clues to why such crimes are carried out.

In a sense, we know why such crimes are carried out: it is big business, and the people behind it are making large sums of money. They are operating on a ruthless scale, perhaps stealing a vehicle in London, having it customised and cut up in Birmingham, Manchester, Nottingham or Leeds, and exporting the parts around the world, with large sums of money involved. That is happening on a big scale. I therefore hope that the recently published Home Office research will be used as a basis for a concerted campaign to break the gangs who are behind one of the most ruthless sorts of organised crime.

We know that death stalks our land as a result of drugs. Some people take the view that our drug laws are simply unworkable, and that the best thing to do would be to liberalise them. Of course, we are all entitled to our private views—I know that the hon. Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Ms Short) has her private views about this, to which she is entitled—but I take a radically different line about our drugs laws.

I wish their enforcement to be made much more rigorous. I do not particularly want young police constables to spend their time persecuting people taking minor quantities of marijuana. I do want gangs who supply drugs to be pursued across the world with the utmost determination. Intelligence and co-operation across police boundaries and national frontiers will be needed to ensure that that happens.

I pay tribute to Customs and Excise and to the police for the increased number of seizures that they have made in recent years—that has been admirable—but we all know that many more drugs are getting through, and that that simply must be stopped.

One of the matters that parents raise most frequently with me in my constituency involves their complaints that drugs are available in or close to schools. Hardly a school in this country is able to say that it is always drug-free. That affects even junior and infants schools. Of course, pupils at such schools are not particularly going out and buying drugs, and they are not being pushed towards them, but the vicinity is being used by drug pushers, and there is no question but that many school children, in both the public and private sectors, are using drugs.

I want a strong campaign in our schools to counteract that most sinister danger to young children. I understand the reluctance that many head teachers may have to identify their school as in any way having a problem, because clearly, a school with a reputation for being a drugs haven is likely to find its reputation suffering as a consequence. Therefore, some of the responsibility for sweeping clean our schools and their vicinities from drugs must be assumed by much greater co-operation between local education authorities and police forces.

The chief constable and chief education officer usually have offices next door to each other in county hall or in the town hall. There is no reason why, at county level for Northamptonshire or at borough level for Birmingham, there should not be an agreement between the local education authority and the police force whereby police forces will be encouraged by the local education authorities to undertake searches of schools and their vicinities.

In that way, the initiative does not come from a head teacher, a disgruntled parent or someone who does not wish to place that responsibility on their shoulders, but would be regarded as a regular and necessary part of the co-operation that is needed between police and local education authorities—not merely to provide lessons on the evils of drugs, although that must be done, but to ensure that drugs are sought out and found and that the people who are responsible for the drugs are brought before the criminal courts.

I would take the process one step further. Over the years in which I have been in the House, on a number of occasions, we have given increased and enlarged powers to the courts and the police in dealing with drugs. Not everyone in this country is always completely enamoured with the American legal system, but certain aspects of it should not be disparaged as much as they are. We already have a system in which some informal plea bargaining can take place before a defendant appears for trial in courts. Not infrequently, judges are known to say what range of sentence they might have in mind in the event of certain things happening at the trial.

The American system has a different aspect to it. American judges have been known to sentence big drugs pushers who send out £1 million of drugs to 600 years' imprisonment—an excellent sentence, because it then enables the law enforcement authorities in the United States of America to debrief a convicted and sentenced defendant about his or her activity.

If, after the sentence, the defendant gives substantial assistance to the prosecution authorities in a way that can be checked and assessed over a period, it is open to both the prosecution authorities and to the defendant to go back before the judge and to say, "Will you please now review the sentence as a consequence of the help that I have given and that has been proved?"

We need to build in to our system a greater incentive to secure the co-operation of convicted drugs barons in the elimination of a scourge that has grown only more serious with the passage of time.

8.37 pm

Mr. Cynog Dafis (Ceredigion and Pembroke, North): I should like to speak on the enormous importance of investment in renewable energy for sustainable economic

[Mr. Cynog Dafis]

and social development on global and European levels in the United Kingdom context, but with particular reference to Wales. I have an interest to declare. I am secretary of Eurosolar UK, which is involved in lobbying on behalf of global energy, but I receive no pecuniary interest from that.

Through its endorsement of Agenda 21 in the Rio declaration, the Government have committed themselves to the principle that environmental sustainability should be a key consideration in all decisions, in all sectors of policy and, especially, in economic and industrial development, so I make no apology for starting with a key theme in environmental policy: global warming and climate change, which is essentially linked to consumption and energy generation.

The issue will hit the headlines again before the end of the year with the publication of a new report from the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, which will confirm that climate change is occurring as a result of global warming and that the effects will be serious, including a likely sea level rise of between 1 ft and 1 yd in the 21st century, and a possible loss of one third of the world's forest cover. The possibility exists that, through feedback mechanisms, the whole thing could accelerate out of control.

The report will also confirm that this alarming phenomenon is a consequence of the emission of greenhouse gases that result from human activity. It will point out that, as we already know, 50 per cent. of greenhouse gases come from CO_2 emissions, and that 75 per cent. of those result from the burning of fossil fuels in the generation of energy.

The report will also point out that the stabilisation of emissions at 1990 levels—that is both the United Kingdom and the Rio conference target—will be nowhere near sufficient to prevent the concentration of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere from increasing. Further, even if concentrations can be stabilised, global average temperature will continue to rise for centuries. All that points clearly to the need to reduce emissions sufficiently first to stabilise, and then to reduce, concentrations in order simply to minimise the extent of climate change and its ill effects.

In turn, that shows that the demands of the Association of Small Island States at the Berlin conference in April this year that there should be a target for reductions in CO2 emissions of 25 per cent. by the year 2005 is far from immoderate. However, it would present a very significant challenge. The pressure for increased use of energy seems to be unstoppable, in particular to allow a rise in the standard of living and the quality of life in what is called the third world.

Some 70 per cent. of the world's population—2 billion people—currently have no access to electricity. The developed world uses 10 times as much energy per person as the developing world. It is no wonder that, with an expanding population, global demand for electricity is predicted to increase by 265 per cent. by 2025.

Much can be achieved through reduced energy intensity, and that should be a policy priority. However, reduction through energy intensity will almost certainly not be fast enough to cancel out the effects of economic growth. According to the World Energy Council, even with what is called an ecologically driven scenario—the most optimistic scenario possible—that will give a global growth rate of 3.3 per cent. per annum with energy intensity reductions of 2.4 per cent. per annum, which in turn would lead to a total energy demand of 11.3 billion tonnes of oil equivalent by the year 2020, compared with 8.8 billion tonnes of oil equivalent in 1990. As a result, the carbon emissions would amount to 6.3 billion tonnes, compared with 5.9 billion tonnes in 1990. That is so remote from what is needed to minimise climate change that, quite honestly, it is bizarre.

The conclusion must be that, if we are to enable development to occur, especially in the least developed countries, there must be no less than a transformation in our methods of generating energy. That should be a core element in global development policy. There are two options. One is the nuclear option, which is not only dangerous but, in the political and socio-economic context of much of the underdeveloped world, totally unrealistic.

The other option is the variety of resources that we refer to as renewables—sometimes called sustainable energy, sometimes called solar. Of course, all renewables, apart from the tide, come from solar sources. The unlocking of the potential of the solar source through the development of technology, and then the transfer of that technology to the third world—and therefore a dispersal of its availability—must be the key to sustainable development and the protection of the natural environment.

Renewables are a huge resource. Every year, the earth's surface receives about 10 times as much energy from sunlight as is contained in all the known resources of coal, oil, natural gas and Uranium combined. It equals 15,000 times the world's annual consumption by the human race.

Both the potential and the need have been recognised. The Rio conference led to what has become known as the solar summit process. The United Nations reckons that 60 per cent. of world electricity could be generated by renewables by the year 2050. The European Union has a range of strategies both for global development and for increasing its own capacity in renewables.

The "Power for the World" project, a photovoltaics action plan, estimates that providing solar electricity to 1 billion people in the third world would cost about $60 billion, or $3 billion a year for 20 years. That is under 0.3 per cent. of current military expenditure—a far better investment in global security than weapons of war. It is clear that this must loom much larger in global development policies, both in bilateral and multilateral aid programmes and in the lending regimes of the World bank.

The European Union adopted the Madrid declaration in March 1994, stating that renewables should

"substitute the equivalent of 15 per cent. of conventional primary energy demand in the EU"

by 2010. The Altener programme has been set a goal of an increase in renewables contribution to total energy demand from under 4 per cent. in 1991 to 8 per cent. in 2005, and a trebling in production of electricity from renewables, excluding large-scale hydro.

The EU's unequivocal commitment is in stark contrast to the virulent opposition of Transport Commissioner Neil Kinnock to wind energy. Wind is a major component in renewables, capable of providing up to 20 per cent. of world energy by 2050, and the technology is currently one

of the most advanced. There is no way in which the Madrid declaration or the Altener targets can become reality without developing wind, nor could the Department of Trade and Industry target of 1,500 MW declared net capacity in the UK by the year 2000 be achieved without wind.

However, Mr. Kinnock is patron to Country Guardian, the anti-wind farm group whose evidence was so thoroughly rejected and rubbished by the Welsh Affairs Select Committee and whose latest bulletin declaims:

"Our top priority must be to prevent the developers of 51 English and Welsh and 12 Scottish projects from obtaining planning approval."

I do not want to over-emphasise wind, because it is only one of a diversity of sources. However, it is important to recognise the very low environmental impact—in the deepest sense of "environmental"—of developing wind power. A supply of 2,000 MW of electricity from wind would occupy 100,000 acres of land, 99 per cent. of which would still be available for other uses. That is a very light ecological footprint.

On the other hand, 2,000 MW of electricity from biomass, in the form of coppicing willow or poplar, harvested mechanically on a three-year cycle, would take up 2.5 million acres in their entirety. I want to make it clear that I favour the second as well as the first, but the comparison is instructive.

Neil Kinnock's position as Transport Commissioner is untenable because he is a member of a Commission that approves of the targets. It is possible that he agrees with Sir Bernard Ingham, the vice-president of Country Guardian, that nuclear is the way ahead and can fill the gap. If that is the case, Mr. Kinnock should come clean and make his position clear. I trust that it is not the position of his party, to which, no doubt, we shall shortly be looking to implement a serious policy for promoting renewables within the context that I have tried to outline. I wonder whether that policy could be made clear before the end of the debate.

I want briefly to refer to UK policy. The chosen instrument of UK policy in encouraging renewables is the non-fossil fuel obligation and the use of the fossil fuel levy. The Government's target is 1,500 MW declared net capacity by the year 2000. If we are to take the issue seriously—it seems inevitable that we must—that target is far too modest. It would constitute only a tiny proportion of the total energy, or total electricity, production. We should periodically be setting targets for percentages of electricity supply. A figure of 10 per cent. by the year 2000 would not be too high.

Secondly, there is no provision in United Kingdom policy or in the NFFO for photovoltaics, a key technology although the price is currently high. There is no demonstration programme in the United Kingdom, almost alone among European countries, yet it is taken seriously elsewhere. There is an American $150 million project for a 100 MW solar plant in the Nevada desert, which is enough to supply a city of 100,000 people with electricity. That is through grid connection. Photovoltaics has the advantage that it can be on grid or off grid; it can be very small and it can be substantial. It is the only truly urban source of electricity. We need a scheme in the United Kingdom to encourage photovoltaics.

The question now is whether there will be further NFFO rounds after the ones announced recently for 1997 and 1998. I believe that the NFFO should be retained as long as necessary, but also that there should be a requirement on regional electricity companies to purchase a minimum percentage of electricity from renewables, with perhaps the option of clean electricity purchase schemes for customers.

I deal finally, and most importantly, with Wales. The Welsh renewable resource is sufficiently large to be significant in relation to achieving the Madrid and Altener targets. It is also crucial for the economic and environment future of Wales.

I invite members of the Government to read an article by Professor Phil Williams, the professor of physics at the university of Wales, Aberystwyth and Plaid Cymru's spokesperson on energy and the environment. The article is entitled "UK Energy Policy and the Welsh Environment." He points out that Wales would be the ideal location for a pilot scheme to prove what can be achieved by a combination of energy efficiency and renewable sources. He states:

"If God designed one spot on Earth that was perfect for that pilot scheme, it was Wales. Built on a foundation of coal, with a coastline exposed to the waves of the Atlantic and punctuated by estuaries that funnel the tides to record heights, and with windswept moorlands from which a fan of rivers flow to the sea, Wales is an ideal laboratory for comparing most forms of energy generation. And in this comparison, we can also include the longest experience of large-scale fission power."

That article comes from Plaid Cymru's sustainable development strategy for Wales, which is a unique document in the current scene.

Professor Williams argues that energy efficiency in Wales could reduce electricity demand by 25 per cent. by the year 2010. That represents a reduction of 3.75 TWh on the 15 TWh that we presently consume. Four TWh could come from renewables by the year 2010. Ten per cent. of electricity supply could come from wind with a total of 2000 500-kW turbines. He believes that it would be feasible by the end of the next century for electricity in Wales to come entirely from renewable sources.

Many good things are already happening in Wales. Dulais Engineering in my constituency has European Union funding for the Aries project to study how renewables can be made to contribute to economic development in rural areas. There has been success in another direction in obtaining funding from the Altener project to encourage manufacturing and sourcing in Wales. Ford is incorporating photovoltaics in a major new industrial unit at Bridgend.

The manufacturing, servicing, construction and electronics sectors in Wales are already active, but much more is possible. In Denmark, 12,000 people are employed in manufacturing in the wind industry alone, and there is every reason to believe that Wales can emulate that example and become a major centre of an industry that will be crucial in the 21st century, just as it was a major centre for energy generation by coal in the 19th and early 20th centuries. For that, however, we need a strategy.

I am confident that a self-governing Wales would have a strategy in place now. It would certainly be a priority for a Welsh Parliament in 1999, which is when it will first sit. However, I am talking about the need for action now. There is every reason why the Welsh Office, development agencies and local authorities should now be constructing such a plan as part of a sustainable development strategy for Wales.

[Mr. Cynog Dafis]

Much of the work is already being done. MANWEB and SWALEC will soon have a survey of the entire Welsh renewable resource, but a strategy would enable the people of Wales to understand the nature of the whole enterprise and see how the several elements fit together, recognising, of course, that

"energy demand will in future be met by an ever-broader range of energy sources and technologies"

and recognising too how advantageous, economically as well as environmentally, it will be to have a proximate source of clean energy.

The electricity regulator announced last week that there should be a 5 per cent. differential in the price of electricity according to the distance that it is transmitted from source. We also need to recognise how significant for a country of small scattered communities is the fact that renewables are, by their very nature, a dispersed and decentralised resource.

As well as setting the scene, a strategy is essential to activate the various players—the development agencies in relation to inward investment, the various industrial sectors, planning authorities, universities, colleges of further education, training agencies and others—to match an educated and motivated work force to technological innovation.

If renewable energy is a crucial element in a sustainable economy of the 21st century—I say it is and everything indicates that that is so—the preparation and implementation of an all-Wales strategy now must be a matter of the highest priority. I appeal to the relevant agencies, people and organisations to undertake this task now with vigour and vision.

8.56 pm

Sir Peter Fry (Wellingborough): I hope that the hon. Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North (Mr. Dafis) will not mind if I do not pick up on his comments; I should rather return to some of those made by the hon. Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Snape) with whom I have considerable sympathy. We are reaching the ridiculous situation in which we are trying to prevent hon. Members, of all parties, from speaking on a subject on which they have a valuable contribution to make. I say that with no party political intent.

The hon. Member for West Bromwich, East and I are old sparring partners in transport debates. If he has a fault, it is that, unlike some of his train drivers, he sometimes does not know when to stop. None the less, he always makes an interesting contribution. I would like, however, to refer to the main way in which people travel in this country: road. The hon. Gentleman briefly mentioned buses. I believe very strongly that much more can be done to encourage people to use public transport—but not without realising where the real problem lies.

The Royal Automobile Club—I am member of its public policy committee—recently sponsored a report on car dependency which was undertaken by a very learned body from Oxford university. It discovered—surprise, surprise—that 20 per cent. of journeys were considered essential by car users, 60 per cent. were considered almost essential and only 20 per cent. were analysed as being able to be undertaken using some other form of transport. The interesting point was that that 20 per cent. of the journeys that could be replaced by another form of transport were almost entirely of less than a mile.

That is the danger of using statistics. Those of us who live in rural areas and small towns never use our cars for journeys of less than a mile. The great majority of those short journeys are undertaken in the urban and metropolitan areas. That is where there is difficulty. That is where there is excessive use of the motor vehicle. Outside those areas, people possibly have problems getting on to motorways, but there is nothing like the level of congestion in our city centres.

My immediate comment to my hon. Friends on the Government Front Bench is this: let us consider the priorities of transport expenditure. Much more can be done to encourage the motorist to use a bus, provided the bus is more comfortable, it can run on time and the maximum information is given about when the bus will arrive.

I take the point about investment in more technology. It should be possible to have notices that flash how many minutes there are until the next bus arrives at the bus stop. There should be better ways in which to protect someone waiting in the elements to catch a bus. Only by encouraging a greater use of technology will we entice people out of their cars in the urban context.

Outside the urban context, I still firmly believe that there is a place for road improvement and road widening. One of the reasons I say that is that, very soon, new speed limits will be applied to heavy goods vehicles on our motorways. Those speed limits will be comparatively low. Many of our roads—all-purpose roads—have two lanes. The prospect of a lorry travelling at 50 mph being overtaken by a lorry going at a maximum of 57 mph is potentially very dangerous, especially as many motorists assume that they can drive at 80 mph without being caught.

I therefore believe that we should not say that there is no need to spend much more money on roads, whether on widening or on improving them. Many towns and villages still desperately need their bypasses. I make a special plea, first, for the A6 bypass of Rushden and Higham Ferrers, which is a Highways Agency responsibility. I see that my hon. Friend the Minister for Railways and Roads has heard of that proposed road. Secondly, I make a plea for more money for some of the counties that are unable to build bypasses because of the level of the transport supplementary grant that they receive for new road building.

My message is that we have to accept that, in the foreseeable future, outside the metropolitan areas and outside our large towns, most people will move by using their own car or somebody else's car. It is therefore pointless to say that we should spend no more money on our road network, that we should not improve our road network and that we should not widen our motorways. If we do not spend more money on such projects, we will find that the problem being experienced in the urban context will start to affect more and more areas.

I would like investment to tackle the problem of urban congestion immediately by encouraging people to use public transport more and, at the same time, to prevent deterioration throughout the country through a sensible road improvement programme.

9.2 pm

Mr. Thomas McAvoy (Glasgow, Rutherglen): I endorse the comments of the hon. Member for Wellingborough (Sir P. Fry) about the efforts being made to divert debates from the true subject matter. I also pay tribute to his expertise in describing a sane approach to transport, especially in relation to the use of the car, to which I will return.

Despite your valiant efforts in trying to call all hon. Members who have wanted to speak, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I do not think that everyone will be able to catch your eye in time. That is certainly through no fault of your own. You have done your best to try to fit in all hon. Members who have wanted to speak.

This year's Queen's Speech is unique, as has been said already, since the chairman of the Conservative party has made it quite plain that it does not have any regard to the governing of the country or what is good for the country. Never mind all those points, it is about what is good for the Conservative party. It sets a new, low trend, which I know that many hon. and right hon. Conservative Members do not like but about which they are bound by party loyalty not to say anything.

It is also quite disgraceful that the Home Secretary is attempting to play the racist card with legislation. As for the expansion of nursery education for four-year-olds, the voucher system is not wanted anywhere in this country that I know of, and it is certainly not wanted in Scotland.

Today's debate has been about investment, trade and industry and transport. Lack of investment has been mentioned, especially by my right hon. Friend the Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett). Many sources have been quoted as testimony to that point. I add to the list the CBI, which was mentioned by my right hon. Friend the Member for Derby, South.

The CBI especially mentions that there is a 20 to 40 per cent. shortfall in average levels of productivity and stock turnover compared with those of our principal competitor countries. There is historically sluggish investment, with capacity constraints threatening. There is a low level of skills compared with the levels of our main competitors and a persistent trade deficit in manufactured goods. This is not the view of the Trades Union Congress or the Labour party; it is the CBI describing how it sees British industry.

Mr. Michael Connarty (Falkirk, East): Is my hon. Friend aware that the CBI's latest report, for September 1995, shows that the manufacturing trade order book in the UK is back to below the level it was in September 1992, before we were thrown out of the European monetary system? Basically, the Government have wasted a 16 per cent. devaluation over the past three years.

Mr. McAvoy: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that comment. It is ironic that everyone in British industry and British politics, except the Conservative Government, recognises that point.

The travel and tourism industry is not usually regarded as an industry, but it is an extremely important one. A new report on the economic impact of travel and tourism in the United Kingdom was recently delivered in London by the Under-Secretary of State for National Heritage. The report showed that the UK travel and tourism industry's contribution to the economy was much larger and created more jobs than previously estimated.

In 1995, travel and tourism are expected to generate directly and indirectly £100 billion in gross output, employment for 3.2 million people and an £86.6 billion contribution to the gross domestic product—12.3 per cent. of the total. All that has been achieved without any incentive from or encouragement by the Government. The industry is poised to produce more than 300,000 new jobs and almost to double its output to £183 billion. That is the effort being put in by the industry, yet there has been no encouragement by the Government for it to expand.

It is significant that the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, a former Secretary of State for Scotland, did not mention the valuable contribution by the Scotch whisky industry to the industrial, economic and commercial life of this country. After last year's Budget defeat, the Government, in panic, ran through a 4 per cent. increase in duty on spirits to make up for their misjudgment about VAT on fuel. That cavalier attitude towards the Scotch whisky industry is typical of how the Government regard the industry and its contribution to the United Kingdom. The Government's move did not work, because the receipts from sales of whisky to the Exchequer in 1995 dropped 26 per cent. compared with the level in 1994. The Government's reaction was cavalier and panicky; even worse, it did not work.

The recurrent theme of the speech by my right hon. Friend the Member for Derby, South was investment. Britain must raise the proportion of its wealth which is devoted to investment in our industries. If we are to maintain and improve our competitiveness, it is essential that we improve spending on research and development.

Other hon. Members have referred to the so-called cost to Britain of the social chapter and have mentioned the Asian economies. However, there is widespread recognition that the success of the Asian tigers is based on high investment rather than low wages. Firms in those countries have shown that, if one invests in people and trains people, one will get a return, as well as providing job security for the people employed in those industries.

Small businesses have been mentioned many times by the Government, but they receive little help from them. There is nothing in the Gracious Speech to encourage them. We hear lots of rhetoric, but we do not see anything. In contrast, Labour has a firm commitment to consider removing the financial incentives for late payment by introducing a statutory right to interest on late payment by companies above a minimum threshold. That is a proper and businesslike way in which to support small businesses.

The hon. Member for Wellingborough and other hon. Members have mentioned the need for roads. I take a pragmatic approach to road building. If it is necessary, I support it, but if it is not necessary, I suggest looking for alternatives. In a week's time, there will be a massive cut in the roads programme, and that will do nothing to address the environmental concerns aroused by too much use of motor cars. Like the hon. Member for Wellingborough, I have a copy of the RAC's excellent report. The RAC has put some thought into trying to reduce the use of cars, unlike the Government, who seem to stagger on with no approach to the problem.

I wish to make a special plea for my constituency, as the M74 motorway is planned to run through it. A 12-mile missing link in that motorway will result in traffic pouring into Cambuslang and Rutherglen in my constituency, and

[Mr. McAvoy]

even more pollution will be caused by cars ticking over in traffic jams. There are sensible ways to approach the problems caused by the use of cars, but a dogmatic cost-cutting approach to the roads programme designed to produce tax cuts is short-sightedness carried to the extreme.

I wish to spend some time on the subject of the railways, because it certainly deserves that. During the past decade—particularly in the run-up to privatisation—sharp cuts have been made in rail investment, and those can be correlated directly to increases in the number of failures and breakdowns on the network. We can compare British Rail's safety performance statistics to the figures for railway investment released by the Government in a parliamentary answer to the previous shadow Secretary of State for Transport.

The figures show that there has been a 17.8 per cent. drop in investment in the rail network in the 10 years since 1984-85 from £786 million to £663 million. There have been big percentage rises in the number of failures in rolling stock, tracks, tunnels and bridges, and there has been a 47 per cent. increase in the number of fires on trains from 168 to 247. The correlation is obvious and is well made.

Like my hon. Friend the Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Snape), I wish to spend some time on the subject of the west coast main line. A previous estimate of the cost of modernising that line—since increased, I would imagine—was £800 million, with some £450 million going to infrastructure and £350 million going to trains. Everybody accepts that there is a need for the west coast main line, which is a key link serving the west coast of England, Strathclyde and Glasgow, but we have had prevarication, avoidance and a dogmatic refusal by the Government to invest in the railway.

The Secretary of State for Transport issued a press release on the future of the west coast main line, in which he stated:

"This modernisation process will bring clear benefits to passengers and operators alike. This year, the Government has been able to secure EU funding of almost £7 million for WCML."

Can the Secretary of State assure us that that money will be used on the west coast main line or for funding towards research projects for the line? I cannot find any press release or statement on how that money will be spent.

I hear rumours like everyone else, and there is a story that the bulk of that £7 million will not be spent on any new research projects relating to signalling or train control but will pay for last year's feasibility study. If that is true, where is the investment for the future? Bearing in mind the content of the Secretary of State's press release, I respectfully suggest that he owes the House an explanation of where that £7 million will go.

The clear view of most people within the rail industry—with the exception of Railtrack—is that the upgrading project has lost its impetus. When the franchising director announced in August a suspension of the franchising timetable for the west coast main line, he stated that a "lack of project definition" was one of the main reasons for his decision. There is a perceived and genuine reluctance on the part of Railtrack and the Department of Transport to commit themselves to a minimum upgrade commensurate with the west coast main line's status as a priority project within the trans-European railway network.

When the upgrading of the west coast main line was announced in the 1993 Budget speech—that is how long ago it was announced—it was envisaged that upgrading work would begin in 1995. In November 1994, the Department of Transport published its official document, in which reference was made to the planned upgrading. It said:

"the intention is to launch a competition in early 1995 for the design and build, and to let a contract in mid-1995. Work would start as soon as possible after that."

Yet we have had prevarication, avoidance and straightforward refusal from the Government to live up even to their own promises on how the work would go. I stress again that the Secretary of State owes us an explanation as to where that £7 million will be spent and what has happened to the west coast main line.

My hon. Friend the Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson) has featured in an article in *The Guardian* today. The headline is "Railtrack accused of £1 billion sting". The article states:

"The Stock Exchange was last night called in to investigate a claim by Labour that Railtrack has put aside over £1 billion of taxpayers' money to boost its profits artificially after privatisation."

It goes on to quote my hon. Friend. It then says:

"following an independent analysis of Railtrack's accounts published in September it was possible to identify benefits of £1.14 billion to the new owners if privatisation went ahead."

Calculations are given to show how the figure was arrived at; but surely the main question is, if the money has been set aside in Railtrack's account, has the Secretary of State ever been informed? If he has not been officially informed by Railtrack, does he have any knowledge of that set-aside? I wish to cover all eventualities. I wish to make sure that the Secretary of State informs us tonight whether he is aware of the situation and whether he has been informed from any source. What does he intend to do about it?

The article states that Railtrack said later in response to my hon. Friend the Member for Cunninghame, North that

"it could not go to the market without meeting all the Stock Exchange's rules and it had done this in full measure. It described the £1 billion-plus set aside as 'known future obligations' which had to be met, and said it was good accounting practice."

So it is no surprise to Railtrack that it has been accused of setting aside £1 billion.

What is the obligation here? Is it an obligation to the public, who still own Railtrack? Is it an obligation to the Government? Is it an obligation to the privatised company to make sure that in a general election year the privatised Railtrack will be made to seem profitable and will not blow up in the Government's face, as everyone else thinks it will? I particularly ask the Secretary of State to respond to that point. Does he know anything of the £1 billion set-aside?

9.18 pm

Ms Clare Short (Birmingham, Ladywood): We have had an interesting debate. The interest on the Government Benches in questions of investment in our economy and transport appears to be limited. There has been thin attendance and many of the speeches from Conservative

Members have failed to address that subject matter. That is a little surprising. Perhaps it tells us something about the values of the Conservative party.

The description of Britain and the British economy that the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry gave us at the beginning of the debate was completely unrecognisable to me. I do not know what country Conservative Members live in, but it is certainly not the country that I live in.

As I go round Britain, talking to people of all classes and backgrounds, I find a deep sense of worry, fear and unease about the continuing decline of Britain. The worry about what is to become of future generations is genuine and widespread. Indeed, as I prepared the notes for this debate I had on my desk a letter from Mr. Nunn, who lives in Stanmore, Middlesex. He wrote it on 12 November, saying that that is the day on which we commemorate the dead of his generation who did not survive the war. He uses very strong language and those on the Government Bench should face up to how angry people in Britain are feeling about what they are doing to our country. He says:

"We faced the enemy in the 1940s knowing where he was and what we had to do to defeat him. Today the enemy is within and speaks in our own tongue. To prove the magnitude of this betrayal look around you at the decay of this British Isles where once proud men are now reduced to scavenging to bring food to the family table while their morale and living standards sink to ever lower levels."

Strong stuff, but that is the mood of the country, and the Secretary of State simply misjudges how worried people are about the problems of the British economy.

There is no doubt that the major reason for Britain's continuing decline and poor economic performance is the very low level of investment in our economy. The figures are frightening. We start from a base that is lower than that of comparable competitor countries. For example, investment per head is £1,600 in Britain, whereas in France it is £2,250, in Germany it is £2,600 and in Japan it is £3,900, but the trend is for it to get ever worse.

Even Italy invests 19 per cent. more than the United Kingdom as a share of national income. Germany invests 60 per cent. more, Hong Kong 92 per cent. and Singapore 128 per cent. So we are worse off, our investment is lower and the trend is for it to get worse. The British economy is in decline, and the people of Britain are deeply worried about it.

Clearly, to respond to the fears of the British people and the needs of the economy, we must work together to mobilise more investment, particularly long-term investment in our economy and infrastructure. Otherwise, Britain's continuing decline is inevitable.

The tragedy for the country is that we have a Government who are driven by an ideological obsession with a deregulated and privatised free-for-all, which means that they cannot mobilise what the nation needs. We also have a Government who are convinced that the only way to compete internationally is through low wages, which go with low skills and low investment. That depressingly clear Government ideology prevents us from taking the action that we need to take to improve the performance of our economy.

If we compare our transport system with that of other countries, we see a clear example of Britain's comparative failure. The consensus is growing throughout the country, among everyone involved with the provision of transport, that the Government's policies are disastrous for the economy.

In a recent Automobile Association press release on 27 September, Mr. John Dawson, group public affairs director, said:

"Much of the dissatisfaction with the state of our transport policy and system in this country stems from our inability to plan and finance capital programmes. Our investment is at the bottom of the European league. This is bringing ever increasing competitive disadvantage as the CBI have strongly argued."

So there we have it. Everyone, including organisations such as the AA, agrees that there has been a serious failure to mobilise investment from public-private partnerships. Essentially, that is what we need—the Government working with the private sector to mobilise investment throughout our system, but particularly in our transport systems.

A modern economy needs an efficient and sustainable transport system, in the interests of economic efficiency and the quality of life. We have growing congestion and pollution. The CBI has estimated that congestion is costing the economy £15 billion a year. It is taking a growing toll of the environment, and people are deeply concerned. Asthma levels among children and elderly, frail people and the decline in the centres of our cities and towns because of the problems of transport pollution and congestion, are causing deep worry about the quality of life in the future.

There is a growing understanding and consensus that existing transport policy is on an unsustainable trajectory. The Government estimate a doubling of car ownership in 30 years. We cannot go on carving up the countryside, building more and more roads, and commuting by car in ever greater numbers. The congestion and pollution would become unbearable. Most towns and cities would be gridlocked.

Neighbouring countries show the way forward. Other European Union member states have higher car ownership than the UK but their cars are used to travel many fewer miles and tend not to be used for commuting. That is the way forward. Of course we all value the freedom that the car gives us in leisure pursuits and when making family visits, but we cannot assume that we can continue to drive our cars in commuting to town centres. If we do that in ever-increasing numbers, traffic will grind to a halt.

The public transport system must be developed to provide attractive alternatives to the car in commuting to town for work and leisure. There is clear evidence that where there is investment in high-quality public transport, use of it increases and people leave their cars at home.

The tragedy for Britain is that the Government have spent their time dismantling the tools necessary to build a modern transport system. Bus deregulation has had some very negative effects. Since deregulation outside London in 1986, the number of bus passenger journeys in Wales, Scotland and the rest of England has fallen by more than one quarter. That means a drop of more than 1 million bus passenger journeys every year.

In Tyne and Wear, bus passenger use fell by 23 per cent. between 1986 and 1994, while over the same period, bus-operated mileage rose by 23 per cent. In some major cities, there have been bus wars, with all the congestion and danger to which they give rise. In addition, nearly half the larger buses in service today are more than 12

[Ms Clare Short]

years old, which is double the number before deregulation. Worse service, more congestion, older buses and more pollution are exactly what we do not need.

The privatisation plans for British Rail led to a disastrous drop in investment. Our rail system needs above all a big increase in investment. Anyone who has taken the wonderful Eurostar through the channel tunnel knows that, to our shame, Eurostar can travel massively fast on the French side but travels much more slowly on the British side, which demonstrates bad under-investment in our rail system.

The Government's plans for rail privatisation offer exactly the opposite of what is needed. The preparations for privatisation have led to the Government's subsidy doubling but terrible under-investment in all parts of the system. If the Government ever complete that privatisation—which we think is unlikely—the structure of 90-plus operating units will make investment almost impossible. Serious people who have worked on the railways all their lives believe that, because so many different agents will have to co-operate, it will lead to a further drop in investment and require a bigger public subsidy—the opposite of all that is needed to modernise, strengthen and improve the rail system.

The road programme picture is just as bleak. More intensive use needs to be made of the existing road system as investment is made in public transport options and other alternatives. Although the Government claim to be committed to a road building programme, they have disastrously cut maintenance levels. A briefing from the British Road Federation dated 12 June points out:

"The maintenance quality of Britain's roads has declined over the past decade in 8 out of 10 regions in England and Wales . . . Nearly 5,000 miles of major road is in need of urgent structural repair and a further 3,000 miles will wear out in the next four years. Nationally there has been a 10% decline in the maintenance quality of the road network since 1984 with considerable deterioration in five out of the seven classes of road."

So even in the part of the transport system to which the Government claim to be the most committed there is disorganisation and mess. Now it has been heavily trailed that there are to be massive cuts in the Budget for the road building programme. We shall soon see; if there are, they will endanger the future of some of this country's few remaining construction companies. The construction industry is in very bad shape, partly because of the poor state of the housing market. Consequently, it is fearful of the consequences of this sudden chopping and changing of Government policy.

Labour, by contrast, is committed to a review of the roads programme, to try to redirect money from road to rail in a systematic, managed way, as part of a national transport strategy. In that way, everyone can work in co-operation with the strategy to deliver the sort of results that the country needs.

The picture of our transport system is a sad one. It is declining, it is polluting and it takes people ever longer to make their journeys. That is both wasteful and degrading to the environment. Labour is committed to the development of a national transport strategy so that we, as a nation, can agree on the changes necessary to improve the system for the future. We shall want to work in partnership with the private sector, greatly to increase investment in the buses and trains so that people switch from the car to public transport. We shall work to get more freight on to the railways. We are conscious that the opening of the channel tunnel gives us an opportunity to make great gains in moving freight from road to rail, to the benefit of all.

The result of Labour's approach will be more investment and better integration between various modes of transport, so that people can switch easily from trains to buses, or back again. The hon. Member for Wellingborough (Sir P. Fry), who made one of the few serious speeches on the Government Benches today, firmly and clearly stated that it is perfectly within the bounds of modern technology to provide information about the interchanges between the railways and the buses, and about the timetables for both. That must certainly be done to encourage the people of our towns and cities to make the change.

Mr. Barry Field: I should just like to point out that Southern Vectis on the Isle of Wight has launched, in conjunction with, and with a grant from, the Department of Transport, a bus, train and coach timetable service. It is a national dialling service which people can phone from any part of the country to learn how to plan their routes.

Ms Short: That sounds enormously attractive. I am surprised that the hon. Gentleman did not tell us about it during his speech—perhaps because he was so busy telling us about subjects not covered by the Queen's Speech. We should like such a system for the whole country, giving people access to public transport options wherever they live. They need to be able to travel by rail or bus on reliable services with reliable information.

Given the necessity to make these changes, and the growing consensus that they need to be effected, it is fairly amazing that the Government are taking no action to create a national transport strategy. The truth, I fear, is that they have fallen into the hands of right-wing zealots who believe fanatically in deregulation and privatisation even when they damage the national interest. It is a sign of how strong those forces in the Tory party are that someone like the Secretary of State for Transport can be captured by their ideas. The right hon. Gentleman is aware of my respect for him; it is my conviction that he does not believe in the policies that he has to defend to the House and the nation—that is my compliment to him.

The Government's strategy is against the national interest and goes against the views of all who are concerned for the future of our transport system. What this country needs is a general election that will bring in a new Government dedicated to mobilising greater investment throughout our economy and our infrastructure, so as to bring about a halt to their continuing decline. Instead, we have had this mouse of a Queen's Speech, designed for cheap political advantage. The Government have nothing to say to the people throughout this country who are desperately worried that Britain is in continuing decline and that nothing is being done to stop it.

9.34 pm

The Secretary of State for Transport (Sir George Young): Much of the debate has been about competition. Rising to speak at nearly 9.40 pm, as "Panorama" is about to be beamed into the nation's homes is real competition.

It has been a reflective debate. There has been a contrast between the rather bleak picture of the nation's economy painted by the right hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) and the hon. Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Ms Short) and that painted by my hon. Friends. The right hon. Lady and the hon. Lady have ignored the impact of inward investment over the past few years. We have attracted mobile international capital not into Disneyland and service industries but into industries with good productivity and growth prospects, such as the pharmaceutical industry, information technology, motor car manufacture and telecommunications.

The United Kingdom is competing in a competitive world for capital from overseas. Companies from other countries want to locate here because the conditions are right: low inflation, low interest rates, good industrial relations and low corporation taxes. That is good news for those we all care about—the people who are looking for work.

The prescription of the right hon. Member for Derby, South did not meet the analysis. It amounted to enhanced business links—building on something that we have successfully pioneered—and a national on-line database. That was her solution. She called for a national appraisal and national renewal based on a new consensus. That is typical of the bland generalities that we get from new Labour. It sounds good, but when we analyse what is said and ask what it means, we find that it means nothing.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Selby (Mr. Alison) injected a philosophical note into what has been an industrial debate by talking about divorce law and family law reforms. It was like suddenly coming across "Thought for the Day" in a rather turbulent "Today" programme, but it was a welcome contribution. I shall forward my right hon. Friend's comments to the Lord Chancellor.

I hope that I do not embarrass the right hon. Member for Llanelli (Mr. Davies) if I say that he made an honest, provocative and thoughtful speech. I cannot think who he was talking about when he criticised politicians who made generous use of the word "tough". Could it have been the Leader of the Opposition? The right hon. Member for Llanelli spoke with great derision about those who set up think tanks, which are then asked to think the unthinkable about social welfare reform. What, I ask myself, was the purpose of the Social Justice Commission, which the Leader of the Opposition set up?

My right hon. Friend the Member for Conwy (Sir W. Roberts) spoke rightly about the importance of regional strength and its impact on technology. I shall pass on to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for National Heritage what my right hon. Friend said about technology and the proposed Bill on media ownership.

My right hon. Friend the Member of Conwy also spoke of Welsh devolution. If there is one subject on which an English Secretary of State for Transport knows he should not talk, it is Welsh devolution. That is a road with no-entry signs all along it.

I am sure that the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mrs. Maddock) knows that, with the reform of the homeless persons legislation, the safety net will remain. We believe genuinely that reform will lead to fairer allocation. It seems that the Liberal Democrats believe that housing is a priority. We know that they regard education as a priority. They have been honest enough to say that they would consider increasing income tax by 1p in the pound to fund education. If housing is a priority, how will they fund it? Will we have another 1p on income tax for housing? Would the hon. Lady fund it in another way? How many priorities can the Liberal Democrats have? If they have more than one priority, we are entitled to ask how they will fund them.

My hon. Friend the Member for Waveney (Mr. Porter) rightly reminded us of the success of Felixstowe under the regime introduced by the Government. He made an impassioned plea for road investment. He will understand that he may have to wait until next week for the position to become clearer.

At one point in his speech, the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman) uttered the words, "if manufacturing industry continued to fail". If he had listened to my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade, he would have heard that investment in manufacturing has increased by 11 per cent. this year, is forecast to go on increasing and that output is at an all-time high. That does not sound like failure to me.

My hon. Friend the Member for North-West Surrey (Sir M. Grylls) rightly reminded us of the importance of small businesses, and I pay tribute to his work in promoting an unfashionable subject and making it one that is now almost politically correct. He rightly pointed out that success in attracting multinational investment is of interest to small businesses, because the investment filters through and helps small businesses in the areas where they are established.

The hon. Member for Norwich, South (Mr. Garrett) spoke about the railways, and I hope to return to that in a moment.

My hon. Friend the Member for the Isle of Wight (Mr. Field) rightly pointed out that large-scale voluntary transfer is in effect the injection of private finance into housing, which has been pioneered by Conservative local authorities. Indeed, the Isle of Wight was one of the first to pursue that approach. He always campaigns on behalf of his constituents, and did so today. On direct payments to landlords, I remember from my time as Housing Minister that local authorities have discretion to make direct payments to landlords where that is the right thing to do, and I hope that that discretion will be exercised sensibly by his local authority.

The hon. Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Snape) invited me to travel on the west coast main line. I do so regularly. He will be pleased to hear that I travelled in the cab of a train from Birmingham to Coventry only last week. I visited a signal box where the technology was more modern than the one that he mentioned. I was allowed to make a station announcement at the signal box, and I understand that it was widely commended for its clarity, but the absence of a Birmingham accent may have confused some of the passengers.

My hon. Friend the Member for Corby (Mr. Powell) rightly reminded the House what can be done for a declining industry such as steel. With good partnership between local government and central Government, and with help from an enterprise zone, his area was turned around, and as a bonus it has returned a Conservative Member of Parliament, whereas previously one might not have expected that.

[Sir George Young]

The hon. Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North (Mr. Dafis) rightly spoke about environmental pollution, in which transport has a key role to play. We have set challenging targets on exhaust emissions and have introduced a number of measures to reduce vehicle pollution; more such measures are on the way.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wellingborough (Sir P. Fry) referred to the Royal Automobile Club report. I was at the report's launch and commend the way in which the RAC and the Automobile Association are making broad-based realistic proposals that do not simply focus on the need of motorists but recognise that motorists need access to good public transport and that there is a role for alternative forms in the transport strategy of the future.

I now return to the theme of transport, about which a number of hon. Members have spoken. It is not true that investment in transport has been neglected by the Government. More than 700 miles of railway have been electrified. Electric trains now run on more than 30 per cent. of the network. Some 224 stations have been opened or reopened. More than a quarter of the rolling stock has been replaced in the past 10 years. Almost 90 per cent. of the former regional railways stock is less than 10 years old. More than £3 billion has been invested in continuing track renewal.

In recent years, we have funded projects such as the east coast main line modernisation, where £550 million has been spent on resignalling and electrification and on new rolling stock. In 1978, the fastest journey time between London and Newcastle on that line was three hours and four minutes. Between London and Edinburgh, the fastest timetable journey was four hours and 52 minutes. Today, those journeys would take two hours and 40 minutes and four hours and five minutes—savings of 24 and 47 minutes respectively.

I can give no better illustration—

Mr. Brian Wilson (Cunninghame, North): What about the west coast?

Sir George Young: I am coming to that.

I can give no better illustration of the healthy pattern of investment in our railways than to mention three projects that I have launched in the past 10 days. On the morning of 4 November, I opened a new high-speed rail freight facility for Buxton Lime Industries. The Government had contributed £2.6 million to the project, which will potentially relieve the village of Buxton of up to 125 lorry trips each day. On the afternoon of the same day, I had the pleasure of inaugurating stage 2 of the Robin Hood line—a £20 million scheme that included the restoration of rail passenger services through the town of Mansfield. On 13 November, in the presence of the hon. Member for West Bromwich, East, I cut the first turf in the construction of the £145 million Midland metro light rail scheme, which promises to bring major benefits to travellers in the west midlands and to play a key role in the regeneration of the black country.

The long list of essential investments undertaken at public expense since 1979 records only a part of the Government's success in the transport sector. Massive private investment has also been possible in transport industries, especially in those that have been privatised in the past 16 years. Hon. Members with long memories may recall that British Airways used to be a nationalised industry, dependent for its investment plans on the availability of Government funds. *[Interruption.]* The successes achieved by British Airways in recent years show vividly how businesses can flourish in the private sector, meeting their passengers' needs and investing to attract new custom. *[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. There seems to be an increasing tendency for both Front and Back Benchers to make seated interventions.

Sir George Young: We can also point to similar patterns in other industries that have been freed from the straitjacket of public-sector controls. The National Freight Corporation, National Express, most of the bus industry—now including London Buses—the BAA, Associated British Ports and the trust ports Clyde, Forth, Medway, Tilbury and Tees and Hartlepool are now all private-sector operations, free to invest as their customers demand and without constant reference to Whitehall.

We are making good progress both with the competition to select the private sector promoter of the high-speed channel tunnel rail link and with the hybrid Bill. The European Community has designated the project one of the 14 top-priority trans-European network projects, and I welcome the Commission's decision to give it £13.6 million worth of support in 1995.

The scope for attracting private-sector investment to transport projects is not limited to industries that are already in the private sector. We have sought new ways of developing partnerships between public and private sector, and have already made great progress. Some £100 million of private-sector money was invested in the railways last year; on the road network, the Queen Elizabeth II bridge between Dartford and Thurrock was built entirely by the private sector at a cost of £150 million.

The success that we have achieved through greater involvement of the private sector in transport encourages and inspires us to further progress in that direction. In 1996-97, the radical transformation of the railway resulting from the Government's privatisation plans means that responsibility for the bulk of investment will lie within the private sector: Railtrack, the rolling stock leasing companies and projects such as the channel tunnel rail link will all be in private hands. Railway businesses will be freed from direct public-sector expenditure controls and will be able to focus on providing services that are more in line with customers' needs.

Our arrangements for franchising passenger services are consistent with our aim of delivering a high-investment railway for the future. Franchisees will have a clear interest in new investment that will bring them the opportunity to improve services, attract more passengers on to the railway and increase revenue. They will be able to work with the rolling stock leasing companies and Railtrack to develop proposals for new investment. Early signs are already promising. I am particularly encouraged that the bids that the franchising director has received for the first three franchises include some constructive and imaginative proposals for investment and service improvements.

Mr. Wilson: The Secretary of State knows as well as we do that he is whistling in the dark. Virtually the only bids that he has had for the first three franchises are from

management buy-outs in which people have been compelled to compete for their own jobs. Would the Secretary of State care to comment on the views of James Sherwood, president of Sea Containers, who has consistently said that a seven-year franchise period would not allow for investment, and that—as the Government insist on that period—he wants nothing to do with a deteriorating railway? It is difficult to portray James Sherwood as a mad-eyed Trot.

Sir George Young: It is the hon. Gentleman who is whistling in the wind. Sea Containers was not successful because there were better bids. That is good news for the passenger and the taxpayer but it is bad news for the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Dafis: Will the Minister give way?

Sir George Young: No, because I should like to make some progress.

Last week I announced the sale of the former British Rail passenger train fleet, the rolling stock leasing companies—ROSCOs. That was Britain's largest ever privatisation by direct sale. The new owners are demonstrating a strong commitment to the development of a competitive market for passenger rolling stock. In addition to taking over the existing train fleet and the networker express fleet that is currently on order, the new owners bring access to additional funds to finance new trains and refurbish existing rolling stock. Their position in the industry, each company having a nationwide customer base and a spread of newer and older trains, should stand them in good stead to invest in renewal and to seek new growth opportunities. I am delighted, and I hope that the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson) is also delighted, that ROSCOs have already begun discussions with potential franchisees on the need for future co-operation.

We set up Railtrack to own most of the track, signalling and associated infrastructure, including the stations and to operate 14 of the major stations. Railtrack will be floated on the stock market next spring. The company will no longer be competing with, for example, hospitals and schools for limited public sector funds. It will receive regular income through access charges and will be able to tap new sources of private funding to carry out its investment plans. Railtrack has been established with a level of funding and a regulatory regime sufficient to allow it to fund its investment programme, which includes necessary maintenance and renewal of the infrastructure.

I shall now deal with the matter raised by the hon. Member for Glasgow, Rutherglen (Mr. McAvoy). I was surprised to read in this morning's press suggestions that Railtrack may be holding back £1 billion that might otherwise be used for investment in the current year. That article was based on a profound misunderstanding of the difference between real cash flow and the accounting treatment of Railtrack's investment budget.

Railtrack is spending more than £1 billion this year on infrastructure renewal and maintenance. As a result of surveying its assets, Railtrack has drawn up long-term plans for developing that infrastructure over five years for stations and over 10 years for tracks and signalling. That longer-term approach to investment planning is a key advantage of privatisation and represents the liberation of industry from the straitjacket of public expenditure controls. Yet again, the truth about rail privatisation is being obscured by unfounded reports that attracted comment in the morning before disappearing into oblivion by lunchtime.

We have restructured the industry in such a way that the financial regime that is in place will allow Railtrack to fund the necessary maintenance and renewal of the network. The regime of the rolling stock leasing companies has clear incentives for them or others to invest in new rolling stock. I am confident that, as a result of these new financial and regulatory regimes, investment will increase, as with all other privatisations. Overall funding in future years will, I am sure, enable the industry to meet its objectives of developing and improving the network and improving services to users.

In addition to the benefits of privatisation, we can expect further benefits to the railways from the private finance initiative. One beneficiary will be the west coast main line, the strategic arterial railway route connecting London, Birmingham, Manchester, Liverpool and Glasgow. The last comprehensive re-equipping of the line was in the 1960s and 1970s, and that investment is coming to the end of its economic life. At the end of 1993, we announced that private finance would be used to modernise the line. A feasibility study analysing performance standards and investment options for the line was completed at the end of last year. It recommended an investment programme of modernisation works involving complete resignalling and comprehensive renewal of the track and the electric power supply and other infrastructure work.

In March, we approved the development of a new state-of-the-art signalling system for the line. Development work for that signalling system will take place while Railtrack is in the public sector and will form part of the private finance initiative. The project has generated considerable interest, and Railtrack received a good response to its tender invitation. It expects to award the contract early next year.

It is hard to overestimate the economic importance of the channel tunnel rail link and the west coast main line—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I have warned Front-Benchers before. I am getting tired of seated interventions. If the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson) or any hon. Member wishes to intervene, they must do so in the time-honoured fashion.

Sir George Young: The figure will be announced when the contract is awarded. The hon. Member for Cunninghame, North cannot expect the Government to give away their negotiating hand by revealing, while discussions are still taking place, how much they are prepared to pay.

It is hard to overestimate the economic importance of the channel tunnel rail link and the west coast main line. Along with the channel tunnel, those two lines will form an industrial artery running through the heart of Britain to the continent—a wonderful boost for British industry. In recognition of the line's importance, almost £7 million has been allocated to the improvement programme as part of the European Union trans-European networks programme.

Privatisation will deliver a railway for the 21st century. Increased flexibility and investment will encourage people and freight to move from the roads to rail.

[Sir George Young]

On roads, we are making progress.

Mr. Andrew Miller (Ellesmere Port and Neston): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir George Young: I must answer many of the points that have been made by hon. Members who have been in the Chamber for slightly longer than the hon. Gentleman.

We are also making progress with the design, build, finance, operate initiative for the highways. Earlier this evening, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister announced the preferred bidder for the first of those projects, the A69 between Carlisle and Newcastle. That status has been given to a company called Roadlink, with which we expect to sign contracts shortly. Because of the first tranche's success, we have already followed that up with competitions for four more. Bids for those have just been received. In all, eight projects will provide capital investment of more than £500 million.

There has been criticism of the private finance initiative from sectors of the industry that say that it causes delay. I sympathise with that, because deals can take time, but the PFI provides funding for projects that would not otherwise take place, and substantial delay is not a charge that can be laid against the DBFO initiative. We have made progress with the competitions in a short period.

What the industry really wants is what it calls "deal flow" so that it can spread risk. We are seriously contemplating another tranche. One attractive possibility would be to extend the DBFO technique to a chain of improvements, allowing companies wider scope to operate efficiently.

It is worth reminding the House that the last two Labour Governments closed 655 stations and lines, whereas we have opened 244. On 26 October, I wrote to the hon. Member for Ladywood, asking her to set out clearly Labour's policies for the railways. I have not received the courtesy of a reply. I hope that she will reply to that letter, answering all the questions that I put to her in it.

Ms Short: I am pleased to know of the right hon. Gentleman's letter. In the past few weeks, I have been terribly busy, as I am sure he will understand. Of course, I will reply to his letter, but I am sure that he will understand that I have had a lot of other intensive reading to do.

Sir George Young: I understand that and I look forward to receiving that reply. The hon. Lady says that she has been very busy in the past few days, but, in that time, most of the press releases seem to have come from the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North rather than from her.

Old Labour is alive and well. We had an astonishing threat from the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North not to renew franchises, even if that means a worse deal for passengers and for taxpayers. What an absurd, unpopular and dogmatic policy to insist on returning control to the railways, even if that costs more for the taxpayer and produces less for the passenger.

It is a bit rich of the Labour party to criticise the Government for lack of rail investment when the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) has said:

"There can be no guarantee from any Government that such a subsidy will continue indefinitely at that level."

How much would the Opposition spend on the railways? When are we going to hear a figure on that to back up some of their commitments? It is misleading of the Opposition to claim that they would invest more than the Government on the railways without giving any idea of their figures.

We all know that the hon. Member for Ladywood is an honest socialist politician. It is precisely because of her honesty that she has already resigned twice from her Front-Bench team. How long will it be before, as an honest socialist, she will have to resign again because the shadow Chancellor of the Exchequer will not let her make the commitments that everyone in this Chamber knows she would like to make?

It is also ridiculous of the Opposition to criticise us for a lack of investment when they want to deny others the opportunity to invest in the railways. No sooner do we have the private finance backing for ROSCOs, Red Star and the other old parts of British Rail that we have sold, than the Opposition leap on their left-wing bandwagon of renationalisation. That shows how little they want private investment in our railways.

If investment in the railways is not to come from the private sector, where would it be found under the Opposition if they were in government? It would have to come from the public purse. Are the Opposition really saying that, when investment is called for in the railways, they will stump up the cash rather than giving it to hospitals, to schools or to pensioners—because that is what keeping the railways in public ownership would mean. It will be a continuing struggle, and their policy on the railways will get them nowhere—

It being Ten o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.

Debate to be resumed tomorrow.

PETITION

Child Prostitution and Pornography

10 pm

Dame Peggy Fenner (Medway): I beg leave to present the following petition.

To the Honourable the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Parliament assembled.

The Humble Petition of the National Council of Women of Great Britain at its Centenary Conference assembled in the City of Nottingham, from 10-12 October 1995, in conjunction with Action for Children Campaign,

Sheweth

That we, the undersigned, re-affirm the Resolution entitled "Action for Children in Prostitution" proposed by The Revd Graham St. John-Willey (Director, Action for Children Campaign) and seconded by Mrs. Joan Belcher (Chairman of the International Council of Women [Great Britain] Committee) and passed (nem con) at the 1993 Annual General Meeting, which was based on the text of the Early Day Motion "Children in Prostitution and Pornography" tabled in your Honourable House on 11 November 1992 and re-tabled in each session since [receiving the support of a majority of Honourable Members, more than has ever been obtained by an EDM on a Child Welfare issue], that:

The National Council of Women in conference assembled:

1. expresses its deep concern at continuing reports that citizens of developed nations travelling abroad may be encouraging the use of children in prostitution and pornography;

2. affirms its commitment to the principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child which seeks to protect children from sexual exploitation; and

3. calls upon Her Majesty's Government to seek to play an active role in bringing about concerted international action to tackle this problem, and, in particular to examine ways of ensuring that individuals involved in such exploitation are brought to justice within the United Kingdom.

Wherefore your Petitioners pray that your honourable House do introduce legislation to ensure that citizens of the United Kingdom who commit serious sexual offences against children abroad can be prosecuted in this country.

And your Petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray, &c.

I introduce this petition this evening on the sixth anniversary of the United Nations convention on the rights of the child. Can there be a more noble purpose on such a day?

To lie upon the Table.

Employment (Chester)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Willetts.]*

10.3 pm

Mr. Gyles Brandreth (City of Chester): I am grateful to have this important opportunity to raise an issue that is of fundamental concern to every one of my constituents, to their standard of living, to their quality of life, to the way that they live now and to the way that they and their children will live in the future—employment in the city of Chester.

Only a few days ago, at the very outset of the debate on the Queen's Speech, I was privileged to be given the significant opportunity of extolling the virtues of my unique constituency. I touched on its 2,000 years of history. In tonight's debate, I want to consider Chester as it is today, and perhaps as it may be in the future. I want to look at its achievements, consider its potential and face up to some of the very real challenges that confront us.

Essentially, ours is a success story. In recent years, unemployment in the city has been falling and inward investment rising. It is perhaps worth examining the level of inward investment and its quality to see the lessons that we can learn for future potential increases in employment in our area.

One notable example of inward investment, which included the personal involvement of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and the wholehearted commitment of the Government's inward investment team in the north-west, has been the arrival in Chester of the Maryland Bank of North America. It is instructive to consider why MBNA and others have chosen to come to Chester.

Executives of the Maryland international bank examined sites across Europe and throughout the United Kingdom and the British isles before deciding to build the new headquarters for its financial services and credit card operation at the Chester business park. The bank's move to the 150-acre landscaped park is one of the largest American investments in the United Kingdom for a number of years.

Why did it come to Chester? Tom McGinley, MBNA's chief executive, said:

"We chose Chester because of the readily available workforce; a young and enthusiastic group of people of exactly the type we like to bring on board."

The quality of the work force, therefore, is one of the reasons that firms come to Chester.

The arrival of MBNA adds to quite a long list of companies based in our city. We also host the headquarters of Marks and Spencer Financial Services, Shell Chemicals (UK) and BICC Cables. Financial services are a particular strength. The NWS bank—North West Securities—has been in the city since the 1950s. Pearl Assurance is also based there.

Our success is not only in the sphere of financial services. We have also been successful in enticing manufacturing businesses to our part of the world. Cacao Barry (UK) Ltd., a member of the Barry Group, opened a new factory three years ago on the 84-acre Chester West industrial and commercial site, after looking at 16 different locations in the north of England, which is where

[Mr. Gyles Brandreth]

most of its market lies for the bulk of its production of high-quality chocolate for use in biscuits, cakes and confectionery.

The company says that the Chester plant, which was built in the record time of only five months on eight acres and which now employs nearly 100 people, is the most technically advanced chocolate factory currently in production. Marc Donaldson, its commercial manager, says that Chester best fitted the company's location criteria, partly because the city is within 45 minutes of the international airport at Manchester. It is within easy reach of good communications. He also cited the culture and quality of life in our community.

Two more American firms worth mentioning have come to us recently. Original Bradford—soapmakers—and NEBS Business Stationery are also located on the Chester West site. More recently, a firm called Strix has settled in Chester. It is a remarkable company, which I mentioned last week. It has invested £10 million and created a large number of jobs—upwards of 100 to date. One item that it makes is switches for electric kettles—for 70 per cent. of all kettles in the world, in fact.

Ed Layne, the managing director of Original Bradford, said:

"We considered sites throughout Europe. Manchester airport was a very strong factor in our decision. In fact, it clinched the decision in favour of the North West."

Mr. Andrew Miller (Ellesmere Port and Neston): The House will know that my constituency includes part of the city of Chester, as does the constituency of the right hon. Member for Eddisbury (Mr. Goodlad), the Government Chief Whip.

The hon. Member for City of Chester (Mr. Brandreth) has mentioned the importance of Manchester airport twice. Does he agree that, as mentioned in the previous debate, rail links to Manchester airport and improved links on the west coast main line are desperately needed as part of the transport infrastructure? Does he agree with companies such as Shell and Kemira, which are both based in part in the city of Chester, which say that they could greatly improve their businesses and the environment through greater access to the railways?

Mr. Brandreth: I entirely agree with the hon. Gentleman. There is no doubt at all that having a quality transport infrastructure is essential to the continuing success of our part of the world. Indeed, I shall refer that in a moment.

The traditional twin pillars of retailing and tourism in Chester have been boosted by the emergence of a much-needed third pillar—commerce. Of course, retail and tourism remain vital to us. In the city centre in recent years, significant retailing investment has been made by Marks and Spencer plc—with more to come, I am pleased to say, on its Foregate street premises—by Littlewoods, C. and A., BhS, Argos, Grosvenor Estate Holdings, Liberty Properties Ltd., Refuge Assurance plc, Scottish Widows, as well as new arrivals such as HMV and the Virgin megastore.

We have seen a growth in tourism. Six million people visit Chester. We have had many motorised visitors in the past few days because the Network Q Royal Automobile Club rally has been racing through Chester at a most bodacious speed.

How have we achieved our successes to date? Key elements are clearly the quality of the people, the place and the communications infrastructure, and the determination of the local community to see Chester thrive. The word "partnership" is used all too glibly by politicians these days, but in Chester we have a very real and active partnership. It has been developed over a number of years and is a partnership for the future founded on an understanding of Chester's special needs and a commitment to protect its interests while moving forward into the next century.

The partnership that has come together to work on the Chester action programme includes the chamber of trade, the chamber of commerce, the Chester, Ellesmere Port and Wirral training and enterprise council, the business club, the civic trust, the cathedral, housing associations, the economic development forum, the voluntary sector organisations, the environmental forum, the Chester hoteliers association, the Chester and Ellesmere Port enterprise agency, the Rural Development Commission, and, of course, the county council and the city council.

I underline the admiration that I and others have for all the people who are giving time and energy to that work—notably, from the city council, the chief executive Paul Durham and the head of economic development unit Barbara Mothershaw.

As well as the people I have mentioned, those involved with the partnership include a wide range of people involved in businesses of all kinds large and small. Under my chairmanship, we have been getting together at a series of meetings that we have called the Chester jobs summit. At those meetings, we have been looking at ways in which we can make our city even more successful and ensure more and better employment—sustained and real—for those in our community.

As a result of the Chester jobs summits, we have had a series of meetings with Ministers to tackle specific issues, ranging from the future of the Army pay and personnel centre at Queen's Park to the vital need to make rapid progress on improving the essential rail links between Crewe and Chester and beyond. I am glad that the hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Mr. Miller) raised that issue, and especially glad that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport addressed it head on in the previous debate on the Queen's Speech.

Earlier this year, as a result of the jobs summit initiative, we met the Minister of State, Department of Employment, as she then was—my hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone (Miss Widdecombe)—and my hon. Friend the Minister for Small Business, Industry and Energy, as he still is. The firms remain small, but his stature grows as the weeks go by. He subsequently visited our business link in Chester.

The issues we raised concerned employment opportunities in Chester in general, and employment training in particular. We want an extension in the training available for adults returning to work. We want an increase in employment training for disabled people, and we want more concerted action to deal with the particular problems of those who have been unemployed for a long time.

The Chester action partnership wants to establish an enterprise fund to help new and small businesses to develop, and to retain vital technological skills in our area.

I am delighted to say that, as a result of the meetings I have mentioned, a two-person team has been seconded to us by the Government office for the north-west.

Mr. Miller: The importance of technology in the area cannot be understated, and I hope that the Minister will respond on that point. Last week, I had the privilege of chairing a conference organised by CEWTEC, the local training agency which was referred to by the hon. Member for City of Chester (Mr. Brandreth). It encompasses companies from the Wirral and Chester which specialise in the development of information technology in their industry. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that we need greater emphasis on this part of Chester's potential from all players in the community, and, indeed, from the Government?

Mr. Brandreth: Yes, I agree with the hon. Gentleman. One of the developments I look to see is greater diversity in the economic life of the community. In that regard, I salute British Nuclear Fuels plc, which is looking at ways in which to produce the seedbed for allied small businesses. It is looking at different ways in which to extend its product development centre, IES, and other projects. I endorse what the hon. Gentleman says.

Another achievement of the Chester action programme and the jobs summit initiative is that we played a part in securing the single regeneration budget challenge fund for regeneration in west Chester. Already it has been a real success. There have been 14 new business starts, the creation of a community business and the creation of 10 jobs. Assistance has been given to 19 voluntary organisations and 300 or more students, and young people are benefiting from projects to enhance personal development.

At the most recent meeting of the jobs summit, the chief executive of the Chester, Ellesmere Port and Wirral training and enterprise council, Alan Moody, brought us his report on the economic prospects, as he saw them, for Chester and as a survey had revealed them to be. In general, the Chester area economy is the most vibrant of the three in the CEWTEC area. That reflects the concentration within it of the rapidly expanding financial services sector to which I referred and of tourism, which is benefiting from a growing trend towards short-break holidays and from the essential quality of a visit to Chester.

The manufacturing base in Chester has suffered, despite the high-tech focus. That reflects the dependence on the aerospace industry, which has suffered from the ending of the cold war and from the intense competition for civil aircraft orders.

Business confidence is generally high in Chester. Some 63 per cent. of the firms surveyed by CEWTEC expected turnover to be higher next year than this, against 7 per cent. who expected it to be lower. Some 48 per cent. of the businesses surveyed expected to increase investment next year, which is good news, whereas only 5 per cent. thought that they would reduce their investment levels.

The major single constraint on the development of businesses in Chester is the shortage of suitable finance. Interestingly, that was cited by 32 per cent. of the 202 businesses surveyed, and we must address that issue.

Many firms in the survey with financial constraints appeared not to have business plans. Such plans must be seen as an obvious prerequisite, not only to identifying the amount of finance required but to raising that finance. This could well be an area in which business link and CEWTEC can play a role, and I know that they want to see that possibility developed further.

There is no doubt that, in common with many cities—but perhaps contrary to the popular image of the city—Chester has pockets of high long-term unemployment, particularly male unemployment. This is a matter of concern to CEWTEC, the Minister and me. There is no doubt that we need to attract more development and create jobs for men in particular, as well as for managers and mature professionals. We need to encourage young men to come on to the job market with greater skills.

It is worth pointing out that CEWTEC told me that, in terms of foundation skills, the achievement of young people in Chester is better than the national average. CEWTEC deserves to be saluted for what it has achieved in recent years. From being one of the lowest-performing areas in 1990, our area has grown into one of the most successful, with end-of-year results showing significant increases in skill levels achieved through training. A total of 1,352 young people, an 8 per cent. increase, and 1,770 adults, an increase of one third, achieved NVQs, so I hope that we are moving in the right direction.

Comparative performance figures issued recently for the 81 TECs across the country showed substantial improvements, particularly in achieving value for money. The figures showed that CEWTEC is among the best. There has been a 36 per cent. improvement in the number of school leavers obtaining NVQs through local training schemes, and CEWTEC helped 28 per cent. more adults to learn new skills and earn qualifications through its training for work programme.

CEWTEC is working with a wide range of people. To cite one would be invidious, but I do so nonetheless. One company in the area—Barratts of Chester—has recruited five trainees after being unable to take any in the previous two years. Those trainees are being provided with work through the Construction Industry Training Board, which is helping Chester construction companies to ensure that there is an adequate supply of properly trained people. There are currently 14 Chester trainees on their first-year programmes at the Mowlem training centre in Birkenhead and the West Cheshire college. Last year, there were only two trainees, so we are moving in the right direction.

We face challenges, and we have exciting opportunities. But Chester does not operate in isolation, and our achievements must be in the context of the national economy. There is no doubt that part of our achievement is in the context of our being in a world of sustained growth with low inflation. That is a real achievement, and allows businesses to plan to expand. One of the reasons for short-term attitudes to financing is uncertainty about the future.

If one lives in a world of high inflation and fluctuating interest rates, how can one plan for the future? One of the greatest achievements of the Government under this Prime Minister and this Chancellor has been to transform the situation, and that is one reason why I have such hope for the future.

I do my very best to avoid party politics at the jobs summit, but I am not so constrained here. One of the concerns put to me by people in my community—particularly those in the retail and tourism industries—is the threat that they foresee from the social chapter and the

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minimum wage. They see those measures as a threat because they have not been given any hard and detailed information from Opposition politicians about what they might involve, so all they can see is the worst of them.

Sir Rocco Forte understands the hotel industry, and he has excellent hotels serving my part of the world. He points out:

"The essence of a healthy tourism industry is flexibility in the use of its labour force so that it can serve the customer effectively and charge prices which are competitive in the international market. In this respect the UK has great advantages over its Continental neighbours. Social security costs make labour 50 per cent. more expensive in France and Germany and 100 per cent. more expensive in Italy. The introduction of the Social Chapter and the imposition of a national minimum wage would have a devastating effect on the flexibility and competitiveness of this industry, which is one of the largest providers of employment in the UK."

I am seriously alarmed at the prospect of something that would have, in the words of someone who knows and has been brought up in the hotel industry, "a devastating effect" on employment in my community. That is the prospect of the down side.

The up side is simply that Chester is a unique asset to the north-west and the United Kingdom. We have a proud record in inward investment. We have the best people in the country in the best city in the country. Our prospects for the future are exciting indeed.

10.25 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment (Mr. James Paice): It is a rare treat for the House to be reminded twice in one week of all the great features that Chester has to offer. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for City of Chester (Mr. Brandreth) on the juxtaposition of the two speeches, but also the way in which, in the first speech that we all enjoyed last week, he looked back at the great history of Chester.

I must admit that I was slightly relieved that he did not embark on that again tonight, not least because I might have been forced to wax lyrical about the city of Ely in my constituency, which has a history just as illustrious. I also congratulate him on the way in which he has seriously dealt with the many issues tonight. I am sorry that, on last week's occasion, the House was packed because it was the Queen's Speech, but tonight it is less full because of the Princess's speech.

The starting point for Government policy, and the point to which my hon. Friend referred, is the Government's belief that jobs are created only by profitable businesses which produce goods, products or services at a price and quality that a consumer wants. The Government's role is to regulate at the minimum level necessary commensurate with reasonable business and employment standards.

It is for that reason that unemployment in Britain is now less than in Germany, France, Spain or many other countries in the European Community. It is why, as my hon. Friend rightly reminded us, the Government have stood resolutely against the social chapter.

It is important to remind the House, my hon. Friend and his constituents of the absurdity of the notion asserted by the Leader of the Opposition last week, that he would sign up to the social chapter but would not necessarily go along with everything that was within it. The simple fact is that the social chapter involves majority voting. Once Britain signed up to it, we could be outvoted and forced to go along with burdens and regulations on employers. The Government's role is to create the right environment and framework for businesses to prosper. My hon. Friend has reminded us of the excellent state of the economy. I will not go through that again.

One matter to which my hon. Friend did not refer is our industrial relations record. It has been transformed. I am sure that we all forget, until we sit down and spend a little time reminiscing, how seriously bad it was in the late 1970s. Since then, Britain has been transformed into a paragon of industrial relations for the rest of the world. On top of that, we have slashed red tape and placed great emphasis on the growth of small businesses. We have developed a network of support organisations, to which I shall refer.

My hon. Friend referred to INWARD. I am grateful to him for acknowledging that INWARD, together with strong support from the local agencies was instrumental in persuading MBNA, the financial services company to which he referred, to locate in Chester. That is a tremendous success for Chester. It is the company's first operation outside the United States of America. It is a massive investment, with a substantial number of jobs. Most importantly perhaps, it is a tremendous success because the investment was won against strong international competition. It was helped, but not conclusively, by a Government offer of £7 million of regional selective assistance. Perhaps most importantly, in the words of the company, it

"selected Chester for the right people and education infrastructure, high quality business environment, and first class transport and communication links."

My hon. Friend referred to the unemployment situation. Sadly, it is higher than the national average, but it is changing fast. Indeed, since the peak in December 1992, unemployment in the United Kingdom has fallen by nearly 17 per cent., but Chester can beat that. Over the same period, unemployment there has fallen by more than 23 per cent., and it fell substantially again last week. The jobs summit that my hon. Friend convened—I salute him for his initiative in doing so—is going a long way towards tackling the needs of businesses and how to create those new jobs in the Chester area.

The single regeneration budget, to which he also referred, is playing a central part. A bid of more than £2 million for the Chester action programme will be used to create new jobs, more qualifications, new businesses, to enhance the achievement of more than 5,600 pupils and to build 100 new dwellings. It is an excellent example of the public, private and voluntary sectors working together.

My hon. Friend and the hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Mr. Miller) referred to the Chester, Ellesmere Port and Wirral training and enterprise council—CEWTEC. My hon. Friend will know that, as Minister responsible for training and enterprise councils, I take a great pride in their achievements and in the way in which they have all improved their performance. I recognise and pay tribute to the improvements that CEWTEC has made, of which my hon. Friend reminded the House. This year, in the Chester area CEWTEC is providing 50 business start-up places, 1,400 adult training places, and 75 modern apprenticeships.

The survey to which my hon. Friend referred showed that 50 per cent. of companies in the Chester area had no training plan for their work force, and only 40 per cent. had provided any training in the past 12 months. That is why the Investors in People standard is the most important of all the initiatives and programmes run by CEWTEC.

Mr. Miller: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Paice: No, I am afraid that I have not got time. I would happily do so otherwise.

The fact is that six businesses in the area are recognised as investors in people, and another 30 are committed to achieving the standard. As my hon. Friend said, the business link organisation is also helping to develop new businesses and jobs.

My hon. Friend referred to the threat of the national minimum wage. The one question that its advocates have never answered is on differentials. If we upgrade the skills of the work force of Chester and everywhere else in this country, those skills must be recognised by adequate differentials in their pay. If one raises the lowest pay, one has to raise differentials. The inflationary consequences are staggering, and the Opposition have not dealt with that problem in their advocacy of the minimum wage.

My hon. Friend was entirely right to draw the attention of the House to the threat that the social chapter poses to jobs in Chester and the United Kingdom. He has done a great service to his constituents by bringing to the House full recognition of what has been achieved and of the great success in developing the economy of Chester and the surrounding area. I congratulate him on the way in which he did so, and on the way in which he represented his constituents here—

The motion having been made after Ten o'clock, and the debate having continued for half an hour, MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-seven minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 21 November 1995

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

ENVIRONMENT

Water Supply Disconnections

1. **Mr. Clifton-Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the trend in water supply disconnections for non-payment of bills. [730]

The Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. John Gummer): The downward trend in disconnections is continuing. In the six months from 1 April to 30 September 1995, domestic disconnections were down 55 per cent. compared with the same period last year.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I thank my right hon. Friend for that encouraging answer. Does it not show that disconnections under the privatised water companies are on a continuing downward trend, and that the privatised water companies have a caring, sensitive attitude towards their customers? Is it not a disgrace that the Opposition continually denigrate the privatised water companies on the basis of the number of water disconnections?

Mr. Gummer: It is odd that, with very similar numbers in 1979, there was no complaint from the Opposition. Why are they complaining now? Because they want to smear the privatisation that works immensely well. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) does not realise that there was an election in 1979, and we won it, as we shall win the next election.

Mrs. Helen Jackson: Is it not the case that any household without a regular supply of decent, clean running water is unfit for families to live in, and any disconnection is one too many? May I suggest that the Secretary of State's concern that Yorkshire Water does not leave houses without a proper running supply in the next few weeks actually shows that he agrees with our position on disconnections: they must not, and should not, happen?

Mr. Gummer: The hon. Lady should note first of all that during the whole period in which the Labour party was in power, it accepted that disconnection as a last resort was necessary to ensure that people who could pay but did not were not encouraged to live off the backs of those who did pay. The situation is quite simple. Disconnections take place only where somebody has not paid when they could have paid. That seems to be perfectly reasonable. When we go to ask the other customers, overwhelmingly they say that they do not want people who could pay not to pay, because in the end those who do pay, pay for those who ought to pay.

Mrs. Peacock: My right hon. Friend will be aware of the position in Yorkshire at the moment, where Yorkshire Water is going to disconnect many people by introducing rota cuts every other day. Will he assure the House and my constituents in Batley and Spen that he will not allow that order to be implemented until every source of water allocation has been very well explored?

Mr. Gummer: I willingly assure the House of that. It is the last resort of all last resorts, and the Government have ensured that we have regular reports from independent people to see that we give every possible piece of help to Yorkshire Water, which is also pressed to use every possible means of avoiding such action.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: Does the Secretary of State agree that the Government's policy on water is in a mess? In Yorkshire, people are not getting water, and the Government have no idea of the time scale for coming up with a payment system for future water payers. In the south-west, the chair of the water consumer committee, Jessica Thomas, has said that, if the cost of environmental improvements continues to fall solely on South West Water payers, £150 will be added to each individual's bill, rather than £15 if the cost were spread evenly across the country. Will not such a policy lead to more disconnections?

Mr. Gummer: For the hon. Gentleman—whose party's scheme to connect water rates with the council tax policy would increase the cost of water for the poorest—to make such a comment is interesting. The hon. Gentleman has no policy on water at all, except to complain about the Government in circumstances where one has to say that the water companies have dealt better with the worst drought that we have had for 500 years than at any time when water was nationalised. He really talks nonsense.

Compulsory Competitive Tendering

2. **Sir Michael Grylls:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what savings have been delivered by compulsory competitive tendering. [731]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Sir Paul Beresford): Savings totalling £400 million have been made to date. This allows the local authorities concerned to invest in services or to reduce bills.

Sir Michael Grylls: That is a worthwhile saving. Is it not significant that the Labour party has consistently opposed competitive tendering policies, and, I believe, still does? On reflection, I do not find that altogether surprising, as four Labour Members are sponsored by trade unions and are therefore putting the unions before the good of local people.

Sir Paul Beresford: I entirely agree. It is intriguing that, when it comes to propaganda, Opposition Front Benchers promote competition, but when it comes to the reality of Labour local authorities, they reject it at every opportunity.

Mr. Bennett: How much has that saving cost central Government? Will the Minister confirm that, as a result

of compulsory competitive tendering, many people take home lower wages, thus qualifying for housing benefit and family credit? We want to hear the full figures, not just the saving to local government.

Sir Paul Beresford: The hon. Gentleman should reflect on the local economy. The almost parasitic drawing of some direct labour organisations on the local economy has been offset; we have better business, better management and lower costs, and the general productive business in the community has therefore been able to improve standards.

Mr. John Marshall: Does my hon. Friend agree that those who seek to get rid of compulsory competitive tendering will force local authority taxpayers to pay more, and bring about poorer services? They are concerned only with jobs for the boys in the unions that sponsor them.

Sir Paul Beresford: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend, who has clearly lived or suffered under a local authority run by either Labour or the Liberal Democrats. The reaction of local authorities to the opportunity to serve their local communities rather than the unions is extraordinary.

Local Authority Land

3. **Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what guidelines for good practice his Department provides regarding disposal of open space and undeveloped land in local authority ownership. [734]

The Minister for Construction, Planning and Energy Efficiency (Mr. Robert B. Jones): Guidance to local planning authorities on the release of underused or vacant sites is set out in planning policy guidance note 4 on industrial and commercial development and small firms, and in PPG 3 on housing. Guidance on the disposal of open space with recreational value is set out in PPG 17 on sport and recreation.

Mr. Hughes: Does the Minister believe that, if a local authority decides—as Southwark did recently—that it wants to get rid of green space open land or other land in its ownership, it is right for it to make the decision in a secret meeting, treating it as a confidential item and neither giving information to the public nor engaging in consultation? Does the Minister agree with the proposition that any disposal of open space—particularly green space—and of council-owned land should be the subject of public consultation, and should feature on an open agenda for council meetings, before any proposal is made?

Mr. Jones: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman would not expect me to comment on a particular case, but I certainly agree with his general proposition that such matters should be dealt with openly. Indeed, PPG 17 makes specific provision for such a disposal to be advertised in local papers two weeks on the trot, and for the local authority to take into account any objections that are made.

Sir Sydney Chapman: I welcome the initiatives taken by the Department to utilise and develop derelict and vacant land, especially in inner-city centres; but will my hon. Friend stress the importance of keeping a proportion of that land as open space for the amenity and enjoyment of people living and working in the area? As national tree week is approaching, will he also stress the importance of planting trees in such areas in our townscapes, as well as in the countryside?

Mr. Jones: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who has a long history of commitment to such causes. I certainly agree with his proposition. In fact, although it is clearly right in the interests of sustainable development for us to concentrate new development in existing urban areas, we also want to ensure the protection of open spaces, particularly recreational open spaces. However, it is not just a question of keeping what we have. We also want to encourage more open space in urban areas. It is interesting to note that, in an advertisement in *The Times* today, the London Docklands development corporation claims that docklands contains open space equivalent to 160 new football pitches. We are making progress.

Mr. Sheerman: Will the Minister join me in congratulating a Labour local authority, that of Kirklees, on taking a piece of waste space and building, by way of a public-private partnership, a wonderful stadium that yesterday won first prize from the Royal Institute of British Architects for the best new architecture this year? Will he take a message and give it to his Front-Bench colleagues—that it would be impossible to start such a partnership today because of the regulations that the Government have since introduced?

Mr. Jones: I certainly do not agree with the hon. Gentleman's last point, because we have introduced more flexibility precisely to encourage local authorities to go down the partnership road. Of course I agree that it is right that the hon. Gentleman's local authority and others should utilise vacant space for developments that are of use to the community and, for that matter, to get new commercial development as well, because that is very much in the interests of sustainable development.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: Does my hon. Friend agree that perhaps he should have been more effusive in response to my hon. Friend the Member for Chipping Barnet (Sir S. Chapman) who, of course, initiated the campaign "Plant a Tree in '73" when he represented another constituency? Does the Minister accept that open spaces in urban areas are precious and that there should always be a bias against any development of them? I am not speaking about derelict land: the question does not relate to that. Will he give me the assurance that I and others seek, that school playing fields which become surplus to education requirements will not be developed for housing or similar projects but will be developed for recreation and other such purposes for the community?

Mr. Jones: I am sorry that my hon. Friend thinks that I was not effusive enough in reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Chipping Barnet, who certainly has a long and distinguished record. In reply to my hon. Friend's main point, of course we want to protect recreational open space. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I recently rejected an otherwise excellent project in London precisely because it would have led to a loss of metropolitan open land. My hon. Friend may rest assured that we shall certainly take such matters into account every time we judge such an application.

Local Government Finance

4. **Mr. Austin-Walker:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the total capital receipts currently held by local authorities in England (a) from sale of council homes and (b) from sale of other properties and assets. [735]

The Minister for Local Government, Housing and Urban Regeneration (Mr. David Curry): The stock of usable capital receipts from all assets stood at £1.5 billion at the end of March this year. About 90 per cent. of those receipts are held by authorities whose responsibilities include housing, but it is not possible to say exactly how much of the total derives from the sale of houses. No figures for set-aside capital receipts are available.

Mr. Austin-Walker: Is it not madness that this money sits idle when thousands of families live in squalid housing conditions? Is the Minister not aware that that money could build about 18,000 homes, which could house at least half of those who are currently in temporary accommodation?

Mr. Curry: The hon. Gentleman makes two fundamental mistakes. First, the money is not sitting idle: it is being used—for example, for capital projects. The idea that somehow a great pile of gold coins is under somebody's mattress is a fundamental misunderstanding. Secondly, only a proportion of the money comes from the sale of council houses. Local authorities are required to set aside money from their revenue accounts for depreciation, and I hope that the hon. Gentleman does not intend to lay his hands on that.

All that the Labour party demonstrates by that argument is how little it understands about local authority finance. Opposition Members would be much more plausible if, instead of banging on about that matter, they would just once tell us how much of the capital receipts they would spend over what sort of period, and how they would deal with the problem that the overwhelming amount of these receipts is in the shire districts or the outer London districts. They will not answer any of those questions. All they do is whinge and that, like the rest of their policies, has no substance.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: Have we not today had a display of the Opposition's total ignorance of accountancy, and of local government finance in particular, which shows why they are not suitable to govern? We have heard precisely from my hon. Friend that the sums involved amount to slightly over £1 billion, but the other side of the local government balance sheet shows £37 billion of local government debts. Therefore, the money is a mirage: it does not exist.

Mr. Curry: The Labour party cannot come to terms with the fact that, if a local authority has got rid of its debt, it can spend the money on what it likes. It must be a fundamental first charge on any revenues to discharge responsibilities for debt. Once that is done, a local authority has complete freedom. That is merely prudent housekeeping.

Mr. Dobson: Why will not the Government allow councils to invest those enormous funds to build new homes for the thousands of people who have nowhere decent to live? Last year, the Government restricted councils in England to building just 414 houses and flats, compared with the 54,000 new homes that were started under Labour in 1979. If the Minister says that we are wrong in saying that those funds should be used to fund new building, why did the Deputy Prime Minister, when Secretary of State for the Environment, promise that that was exactly what would happen to those funds, and why is that exactly what has happened to them in Scotland throughout the whole period?

Mr. Curry: The funds that are attributable to the sale of council houses, which is a proportion, but nowhere near the entire amount of the money, are not used for building new homes, because we do not believe that local authorities are the best providers of housing. [HON. MEMBERS: "Ah!"] There is no mystery about that. We have spelt that out for years. The best providers of housing are housing associations. It is interesting that we have just had a great success because Manchester Labour council has promoted the transfer of one of its major estates to a housing association, which shows that our view is being increasingly accepted.

If the hon. Gentleman is so concerned about housing, if that is such a Labour preoccupation, how is that it, in all the time devoted to discussing the Queen's Speech, Labour is not devoting one single minute to the subject of housing? It is all blather; it is all rhetoric. There is no substance, because the Labour party has no policy that it can defend.

Mr. James Hill: Is it not true that the city of Southampton has £12 million on deposit, but is in debt to the Government in relation to housing for £90 million? Could it not be made clear to the public that councils that have spent, spent and spent must be brought under control and that capital receipts, from which they can receive interest, should be held until they balance their books?

Mr. Curry: That is quite clearly the case, but my advice to councils such as Southampton is to follow the example being pursued by a number of Labour councils, and to recognise that transferring their stock to the housing association movement is a win-win deal for the council that receives the receipt and for the tenants who receive a major refurbishment programme. The last word lies with tenants. That is tenants' choice in action.

5. **Ms Eagle:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what discussions he has had with business concerning the 1996-97 national non-domestic rate. [736]

Sir Paul Beresford: I have received representations from a number of businesses.

Ms Eagle: Does the Minister agree that next week's rate support grant settlement will mean that businesses must pay higher business rates, that council tax payers must pay higher council taxes, all for fewer services, and that, year on year, under the Tories people must pay more and get less?

Sir Paul Beresford: I find that extraordinary coming from an hon. Member on the Opposition Benches. If one considers Labour authorities and their behaviour, one would expect the scenario that the hon. Lady has spelt out. If one considers the period just before the uniform business rate, in Liverpool council, Labour-controlled, and Wirral council—which includes Wallasey—Labour-controlled, there was no concern by Labour local

authorities for business—none at all. In Liverpool, the rate was 38 per cent. above the national average. In Wallasey, it was 40 per cent. above that average. Where was the concern?

Mr. Nigel Evans: Does my hon. Friend agree that it is important to protect small businesses from local authorities such as Labour-controlled Lancashire county council, which is interested only in spending money and not in the level of services that it provides? Does he agree that it is important for us to look at extra ways of helping to protect small rural businesses from the unified business rate? Does he agree that the announcement in the rural White Paper will be extremely important for those small rural businesses?

Sir Paul Beresford: I agree completely with my hon. Friend, but I would not limit it to rural businesses. We can look back to another example from 1988, 1989 and 1990 to an area which includes Holborn and St. Pancras. We can compare Camden and Westminster. There were filthy streets in Westminster—*[Interruption.]* Sorry, there were filthy streets in Camden, but the business rate in Camden was 34 per cent. above that of Westminster.

Homelessness (London)

6. **Mr. Gapes:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the measures that he intends to introduce to reduce homelessness in London. [737]

Mr. Curry: Up to now, we have received 227 replies to our consultation on the future of the rough sleepers initiative and we shall outline our further proposals in the new year.

Mr. Gapes: How can proposing to change the obligations on local authorities to provide housing for the homeless in any way assist the poor and their children? How can cutting the funding for the Housing Corporation or putting further restrictions on what housing associations do assist the homeless? Is it not true, as the Rowntree Foundation's recent study reported, that all that does is simply rearrange the scope of homelessness while doing nothing to combat it?

Mr. Curry: If the hon. Gentleman follows these things, he will know that there has recently been a House of Lords ruling which states that there is no safety net for the homeless. The Government's legislation—we decided before the House of Lords ruling to invite the House to take the decision—will try to create a single route into housing with a philosophy and idea to which Shelter subscribes.

We intend to create an obligation to house people for a year, which will be renewable, so that for those in need, irrespective of whether the need arises from homelessness or other circumstances, we will look at the underlying basic problems and everybody will feel that their needs are being assessed on a fair basis. I have had detailed discussions with Shelter and other parties to explain how it would work. I believe that many people have been reassured, but I believe firmly that it is in the interest of all those in need that they should feel that their case is being dealt with fairly and on absolutely equal terms.

Mr. Harry Greenway: Does my hon. Friend agree that, as well as Shelter, the Salvation Army has done a good and effective job by taking homeless people into hostels, some of them on a temporary basis, and then finding permanent homes for them such as flats or other housing? Does my hon. Friend agree that that has reduced homelessness in London by a substantial margin?

Mr. Curry: I certainly pay tribute to organisations such as the Salvation Army and St. Mungo's. I was at a Drinks crisis centre in Bermondsey this morning. Such organisations do magnificent work helping the homeless. One must be cautious. For some who are in grave need—for example, those with drug, drink or mental illness problems and sometimes combinations of those problems—it is not sufficient just to provide accommodation. They cannot survive autonomously. They need continued sheltered accommodation and those organisations are particularly good at providing that, and we work in close co-operation with them.

Mr. Raynsford: Why will not the Minister recognise that the number of homeless households accepted in London, as in the rest of the country, is double the level accepted back in 1978-79 when Labour was last in power? Why does he intend to make what is already a disastrous situation far worse by his proposed changes to legislation on the homeless? Those changes have been condemned almost universally by all the organisations, including those that the Minister has quoted, which represent tenants, local authorities, housing associations and the Churches. They have all condemned the proposals as being disastrous for the homeless, causing them misery and an appalling degree of deprivation that we have not seen since the era of "Cathy Come Home".

Mr. Curry: I knew that the hon. Gentleman would end on that note. It is not the case. The people dealing with homelessness every day say that creating a single route into housing is the sensible thing to do. The argument then is how to deliver that; how to provide assessments of underlying needs so that people have all their needs taken care of; and how to ensure that, when housing allocations are made, the particular problems of the homeless are identified.

When the hon. Gentleman examines the Government's regulations and the guidance that will go with them, he will see that we are determined to ensure that those underlying needs are looked after and that nobody finds himself in a situation where he is permanently without permanent accommodation. We shall ensure that that does not happen.

Mr. Dunn: Does the Minister agree that homelessness in London would be significantly reduced if Labour-controlled local authorities managed their housing stock more efficiently and effectively, instead of allowing thousands of flats and houses to be empty for months and months?

Mr. Curry: My hon. Friend is right. It is important that local authorities get to grips with the basic tools of sensible management—collect rents, ensure that they have the minimum number of voids and bring empty property back into use. If those things are done, that will make a significant contribution to housing in this country.

Housing Strategy (London)

7. **Mr. Soley:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what proposals he has to develop a housing strategy for London. [738]

Mr. Gummer: Every London borough has its own housing strategy supported by significant taxpayers' investment. I have had no request from any leader of any London council to take such strategy out of their hands.

Mr. Soley: Do the Government accept that leaders of the business community, as well as housing experts, have been saying that the lack of affordable rented housing in London, especially central London, is leading to recruitment and retention problems with employees, as well as to social problems? If the Secretary of State is not prepared to resource local authorities, will he allocate responsibility to the Housing Corporation so that someone can take overall responsibility for meeting housing needs in London?

Mr. Gummer: This year, the total Government capital resources for London housing are over £800 million. Over one third of the national housing investment programme resources go to London local authorities, even though they have only about one seventh of the housing stock. The hon. Gentleman must accept that we are already making a particular effort in London, which is out of proportion to the rest of the country, specifically because of London's special needs.

Mr. Congdon: Does my right hon. Friend agree that a key part of housing policy in inner London is to ensure that inner London boroughs manage their council housing stock properly, collect rents and reduce the number of empty properties, instead of whingeing and blaming the Government for their own errors?

Mr. Gummer: All that list is right, but the collection of rents, in particular, is an important aspect. Local authorities that do not collect the rents are in fact removing their opportunity to help those in greatest need. Collection would help considerably.

County Hall

8. **Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps he is taking to safeguard the future of county hall; and if he will make a statement. [739]

Mr. Gummer: The planning system and English Heritage are together safeguarding county hall.

Mr. Banks: Oh, really? Is the Secretary of State aware that the riverside building at county hall is an empty shell from the second floor upwards and there is no sign of the hotel for which the Shirayama organisation put in planning permission? It is busily building an aquarium for which it has not yet applied for a license from the local authority, and it has not approached the Department for any Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species licence for the keeping of sea mammals. The whole thing is a catastrophe and a scandal for which the Government are entirely responsible. When Labour is in government, it will hang this round the neck of the right hon. Gentleman. If he wants to protect himself, he ought to do something about what is going on at county hall now.

Mr. Gummer: The fact is that two contracts have been let, one involving the preparatory work for the aquarium according to the arrangements suggested by Shirayama and the second involving the initial work on the hotel. The hon. Gentleman should face the fact that considerable works have to be done there, not least to get rid of the asbestos. I assure him that we are keeping a very close eye on the matter. English Heritage last visited county hall on Friday; I have been there myself and will certainly go again. I can also assure him that we are keeping a close watch on the valuables that he removed from county hall, which were on his mantelpiece but which are now in safe keeping.

Sir Patrick Cormack: Will my right hon. Friend assure the House that the glorious buildings at Greenwich will not suffer a similar fate?

Mr. Gummer: I am quite sure that the plans to make that exciting world heritage site even better will proceed as well as they can with the greatest partnership possible. My colleagues are now considering the opportunities that will become available.

Ramsar Convention

9. **Mr. Viggers:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many locations have been nominated for consideration as protected sites under the Ramsar convention. [740]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. James Clappison): The United Kingdom has listed more sites than any other member of the Ramsar convention—95 wetlands of international importance, including three sites in the United Kingdom's dependent territories. The Government are currently considering a further 32 United Kingdom sites, which have been proposed by the statutory conservation agencies.

Mr. Viggers: Is my hon. Friend aware that the local residents of Gosport and Portsmouth were pleased when the Portsmouth harbour area was designated a special protection area for birds and that we are proud to provide a home for so many red-breasted merganser, Brent geese and dunlin? However, the millennium funding of more than £40 million will provide literally one chance in 1,000 years to develop the Portsmouth harbour area. Should it be necessary for the local authorities to ask for some concession at the margins from the Ramsar convention and other environmental regulations, will my hon. Friend consider that request sympathetically?

Mr. Clappison: I shall certainly give careful consideration to any such points and set them alongside the important nature conservation interests represented in Portsmouth. I am sure that my hon. Friend will join me in welcoming the considerable progress and leadership that the United Kingdom has given to the Ramsar convention in this country and elsewhere.

Local Government Finance

10. **Mr. Thurnham:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what recent representations he has received about the area cost adjustment factor; and if he will make a statement. [741]

Mr. Curry: I have announced an independent review of the area cost adjustment.

Mr. Thurnham: Will my hon. Friend speed up his review of that most unjust subsidy, which is now costing

the people of the north more than £1.5 billion a year? Is it not high time that we northerners ceased subsidising southerners to quite such an extent?

Mr. Curry: My hon. Friend will understand if I am not tempted into that particular form of global warfare. He will appreciate that the area cost adjustment is in place to try to compensate for the additional labour costs in London and the south-east. All those who get it think that it is inadequate, and all those who do not think that what is given is unjust. That is why the only way forward is to set up an alternative. Provided that it is robust and delivers the results that we want, and provided that the local authority associations are able to agree that it is robust, which is asking quite a lot, it can go into the formula for the revenue support grant the year after next.

Mrs. Anne Campbell: Does the Minister recall that, when I came to see him with an all-party delegation of councillors and hon. Members earlier this year, he gave us an undertaking that the research into the area cost adjustment would be effective for next year's settlement? Is that still the case? Will he take on board the fact that the people of Cambridgeshire are utterly fed up with the way in which their standard spending assessment is so much lower than that of neighbouring counties?

Mr. Curry: No. What I told the hon. Lady, which is what I told the House, was that we were seeking an alternative and that, if it proved robust, it would be used. We considered whether a travel-to-work concept would work, and the Association of County Councils was also pursuing an alternative methodology. Neither stood up to robust analysis. That is why we have to look to an entirely different approach and why I set up the review. We hope to have the results of that next June so that they can go into the following year's settlement.

Mr. Rathbone: When considering those matters, will my hon. Friend remember that the area cost adjustments were originally set up to compensate county councils such as East Sussex for the additional costs that they have to bear? Will he ensure that those additional costs will be met in future—provided of course that East Sussex county council is more efficient than it is at present?

Mr. Curry: It is a basic misunderstanding to assume that the area cost adjustment is just £1.5 billion off the top, from which, if it were not applied, everyone else would be able to benefit. If one did not have the present method, one would still have to calculate the additional cost in London and the south-east. That would clearly have to come out of the total settlement. So people must be cautious before they assume that there is a bonanza available for redistribution. I am determined that the method we use will be robust, stand up and compensate the real costs. The purpose of the inquiry is to identify actual costs, wherever they are incurred, in a fair way.

Ms Armstrong: Although the Minister has not yet established the review and identified members of the review body, will he ensure that they address not only the unfairnesses already mentioned, but those concerning the manner in which areas of deprivation are identified? Nobody, but nobody, accepts that Westminster is the fourth most deprived area in the country.

Mr. Curry: I am sorry that the independent report which said that is inconvenient for the hon. Lady, because it means that the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) has spent all these years peddling something that is patently untrue. I am afraid that that is just hard luck; it is untrue.

European Community Directives

11. **Mr. Steen:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many statutory instruments have been passed through Parliament as a result of European Community directives in the past year. [742]

Mr. Gummer: For the period from 21 November 1994 to date, the total is nine.

Mr. Steen: As European directives are drafted in general terms, and member states are left to implement them as they think best, will the Minister explain why we tend to gold-plate directives in this country, adding to them, and making non-compliance by individuals and companies a criminal offence? No other European country does it. Why do we do it? Will he see that his Department stops it?

Mr. Gummer: I have a very strict rule that no European legislation is gold-plated in my Department. In addition to that, we impose only the same penalties as we would for internal national legislation. There are no exceptions to that and I am checking whether any might have been made in the past. I am prepared to point out to my hon. Friend how we look at each detail in every case to ensure that it is right.

Mr. Barnes: What action is the Secretary of State taking to ensure that when one of his Ministers votes at a meeting of the Council of Ministers, it is recorded in this House so that we understand what they are doing in Europe? Democracy needs to be open and details must be reported back to hon. Members.

Mr. Gummer: I am always willing to answer any question asked by any hon. Member on that subject. I am surprised that the Labour party has decided that, because it loses at Environment questions so often, it wants to knock another quarter of an hour off the time available. The day has been changed. The Labour party is afraid of the answers because it loses every time.

12. **Mr. McFall:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what progress has been made on EC environmental directives. [743]

Mr. Clappison: The United Kingdom has led the way in Europe with directives covering a number of important areas, including integrated pollution control, air quality and packaging, as well as many other important areas.

Mr. McFall: The Minister will be aware that the United Kingdom has the poorest record, matched only by Portugal, in implementing EC directives. That is regrettable enough. Indeed, some of the finest areas of the country, such as the fens area, Loch Lomond in my constituency and the Caledonian pinewood forests, are excluded from such directives. Does he not accept that that is wrong and that those omissions should be rectified? Will he at this late stage ensure that we add to the number of sites covered by the habitats directive, so that it applies equally throughout the country and to the most precious sites?

Mr. Clappison: It is a shame that the hon. Gentleman cannot recognise the very real progress that this country

has made in enforcing European directives here, bringing real benefits in terms of improving river quality and bathing standards, reducing greenhouse gases and curbing emissions. All those are important areas in which we have made real progress and it is a shame that the hon. Gentleman cannot recognise that this country is now well on the way to being the clean man of Europe.

Mr. Batiste: Does my hon. Friend agree that although it is desirable that there should be increases in the purity of drinking water, it is even more important that supplies of drinking water should be guaranteed to consumers in West Yorkshire? Is it not appropriate that there should be greater local discretion in such matters?

Mr. Clappison: My hon. Friend makes an important point on behalf of consumers in West Yorkshire. I am sure that he knows that drinking water quality standards in this country are high and that through our actions, they will continue to remain at a high level.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Matthew Taylor:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 21 November. [760]

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): This morning, I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mr. Taylor: Can the Prime Minister confirm that despite the Government's policy of not issuing entry visas to senior representatives of the Nigerian Government, on Sunday, the Nigerian Attorney-General, no less, and a senior legal adviser to the leader of the Nigerian military Government were admitted into this country? What signal does that send about this Government's determination to address the killing of Ken Saro-Wiwa and his colleagues?

The Prime Minister: The action taken at the Commonwealth conference has made it clear how we feel about the matter. On the specific point, I was not aware that the two people concerned were granted visas, and they did not see me. I will, however, make inquiries about the hon. Gentleman's remarks.

Sir Donald Thompson: At the risk of sounding disloyal, does my right hon. Friend realise that, despite pressure from both sides of the House, he completely failed to make it rain in Yorkshire this summer? Will he therefore ensure that he and his Cabinet colleagues see to it that there is no impediment to prevent Yorkshire Water from filling the reservoirs by any means possible?

The Prime Minister: I know that Yorkshire Water is making great efforts to ensure an adequacy of water. My right hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment and Countryside is taking a close interest in the practical action that is under way.

Mr. Blair: Will the Prime Minister confirm that, as a result of the 21 different tax rises introduced by him since the general election, which he fought on the platform of cutting tax year by year, the average family tax bill has risen by £800 a year or by at least 7p on the standard rate of income tax? Is that figure of 7p on the basic rate of income tax correct or not?

The Prime Minister: As the right hon. Gentleman knows, for I have said it in the House before, we increased taxes in the recession and we did so to protect people who were vulnerable. [*Interruption.*] I am bound to say that, if the decision to raise taxes to protect people who were vulnerable in the recession—I believe that that was the right decision—had not been taken, we would not have been able to get interest rates down from 15 per cent. to around 7 per cent. and we would not be in our present position this year, when people on average earnings will see an extra £250 a year in net disposable income.

Mr. Blair: As the right hon. Gentleman said that the purpose was to protect the vulnerable, will he confirm that, in the 10 years from 1985 to 1995, with all the Tory tax changes, those on incomes of more than £100,000 a year have gained massively, whereas the vast majority of families on average income have either gained little or lost money? Does not that show that the real divide is not between high and low tax, but between fair and unfair tax, and that the Tories are the party of unfair taxation?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman may try very hard, but he will never convince the people of this country that his party—[*Interruption.*] Hon. Members would be wise to wait. He will never convince the people of this country that his party will not spend more and tax more than the Conservative party. Alas, the deputy leader of the Labour party is not with us this afternoon, but a year or so ago he admitted:

"There's . . . going to be a higher top rate than we have . . . High income levels are going to pay considerably more".

That is not, I may say, what the leader of the Labour party told the Confederation of British Industry last week.

Mr. Blair: If the Prime Minister wants to prove that he wants fair taxes, why does he not abandon his long-term objective of abolishing capital gains tax and inheritance tax, which would benefit only a few people at the top, who have already benefited greatly, and agree with us that the money could better be used to help lower and middle-income families through a lower starting rate of tax?

The Prime Minister: We have widened the band dramatically, and people start at 20p. Many people in this country pay tax only at 20p in the pound. But

"Britain needs successful people in business who can become rich by their success through the money they earn"—

[*Interruption.*] I am surprised to hear some comments from the Opposition, because I was quoting what the leader of the Labour party said a few days ago.

It is not credible for Opposition Members to ask day after day, in intervention after intervention, for more spending—in their speeches 40 per cent. of them ask for more spending—and then to pretend that Labour would even hold taxes steady, let alone reduce them. Labour is the high-tax party, and always has been—and it would be the high-spending, high-tax party in the future, if it ever had the chance.

Mr. Whittingdale: Will my right hon. Friend join me in expressing the sympathy of the whole House to my constituents, Mr. and Mrs. Paul Betts, whose daughter Leah died last week? Will he confirm that the war against

drugs remains the Government's highest priority, and does he share the hope of Leah's parents that her death may serve as a warning, and may help to save the lives of other young people?

The Prime Minister: I am sure that the whole House will join me in sending sympathy to Mr. and Mrs. Betts for the appalling loss that they face. There are those who believe that Ecstasy in particular, but also other soft drugs, are harmless. I do not share that view. The vast majority of people who move on to hard drugs do so through the medium of soft drugs, and it is important that people up and down the country, especially young people, understand that. I hope that, as a result of Leah's tragic death, that matter will get the publicity that it deserves, and that young people will realise that there is nothing glamorous whatever about soft drugs. They are dangerous, not only in themselves but because they can lead on to hard drugs, which are potential killers time and time again.

Q2. **Mr. Purchase:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 21 November. [761]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Purchase: The Prime Minister will know that the figures released yesterday for the third quarter show that the amount of unsold goods in industry is rising, that imports are growing faster than exports and that, unfortunately, unemployment has plateaued. The level of activity in the economy is slowing down, and construction figures are falling. Does the right hon. Gentleman realise that those facts illustrate clearly an economy running out of steam? Or does he believe that those figures represent merely a state of mind, just as the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry believes that unemployment and the fear of unemployment are simply a state of mind?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman knows that the economy grew by 4 per cent. last year, faster than any other western European country; the economy is growing again this year, and it is forecast to grow faster than the others next year. Manufacturing investment is rising, export volumes are up by more than 6 per cent. and unemployment has fallen by more than 700,000. There are more people in work in this country than in any other major country in Europe, and we have a lower rate of unemployment than any major country in Europe.

That has been achieved while underlying inflation is at low levels never dreamed of by the Labour party. The reality is that we have a platform for prosperity for the future that has been hard to achieve. We propose to sustain that platform, which offers an opportunity for long-term prosperity for all the people in this country.

Sir Peter Hordern: If this or any future Government were to sign up to the social chapter, would not this country be bound by majority vote within the Council of Ministers? Would not that make it impossible to pick and choose the directives that should apply to this country? Does not that make total nonsense of the claims made by the Leader of the Opposition last week?

The Prime Minister: My right hon. Friend is entirely right. I fought for—and won—the right to opt out because I wanted to put British jobs and British business first. For that reason, I will not sign the social chapter. The social chapter is not just a set of principles. It is not something that one can pick and mix, by deciding to have the bits one likes but not the bits one does not like. Most of the measures may be decided by qualified majority voting, and the British vote on its own would not be sufficient to block matters that the British Government may not like. It is for that reason that we are right not to sign the social chapter. Were we to do so, we would be creating unemployment for a lot of people who have jobs at present.

Q3. **Mr. Canavan:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 21 November. [762]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Canavan: If the Prime Minister refuses to disown the President of the Board of Trade for his insulting comment that job insecurity is just a state of mind, will he be hiring a team of psychiatrists for himself and the Cabinet when we come to the next general election?

The Prime Minister: I can assure the hon. Gentleman that my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade is determined, as I am, to continue with our policies to bring unemployment down and to ensure that people are in work, as they are in higher numbers not only in Scotland but right across the United Kingdom because of the policies that we have followed, and not the policies advocated by the hon. Gentleman.

Q4. **Mr. Robert Banks:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 21 November. [763]

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Banks: Does my right hon. Friend agree that Britain's international status and prosperity depends upon our having a powerful and constructive role within the European Union? Does he further agree that the development of the Union must be based on control over Brussels bureaucracy, and that the synchronisation of economies—which may take years to achieve—is essential before a single currency can be contemplated or made workable by the leading members of the Community?

The Prime Minister: I want to see a strong Britain in a strong Europe, and I believe that that means looking at the values in Europe that create jobs. We must ensure that Europe is competitive, and increase the existing job total. There are at the moment more than 20 million people unemployed in Europe, and we need to get that figure down dramatically. We must look at any proposal for a single currency in the light of Britain's own national economic self-interest. Last night, I spelled out some of the fundamental questions that underlie the implications of a single currency. Those issues must be answered within the EU before the decisions are made on whether anyone should proceed with a single currency or not. The price of error if those questions are not answered is very high for Europe collectively, and for each country individually.

Mr. Trimble: Will the Prime Minister confirm that it is and will continue to be the policy of the Government that, before Sinn Fein-IRA can move fully into dialogue,

it must establish its commitment to exclusively peaceful methods by beginning a credible process of actual decommissioning?

The Prime Minister: My right hon. and learned Friend the Northern Ireland Secretary spelt that out in his speech at Washington. The hon. Gentleman is clearly referring to the Washington three conditions. That remains the Government's position.

Q5. **Mr. Rathbone:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 21 November. [764]

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Rathbone: As First Lord of the Treasury, will my right hon. Friend bang a few heads together there in order to stop the bureaucratic interference in the private finance initiative, so that more customers, clients and patients can benefit from it?

The Prime Minister: I will certainly be happy to continue doing as my hon. Friend has said. The private finance initiative is central to the plans for improving the country's infrastructure. My hon. Friend should be in no doubt about our determination to succeed. Later on this afternoon, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health will make a speech on the PFI. I welcome his determination to increase the amount of contribution to the health service from private finance. I think a similar contribution can come from the PFI across the Government's programme.

Question Time (Madam Speaker's Statement)

3.30 pm

Madam Speaker: I have a short statement to make. On 24 February last year, I informed the House that I intended to take action to ensure swifter progress at Question Time. I was concerned that there was a growing tendency to regard Question Time as an opportunity for debate rather than for question and answer. As a result, the number of questions reached on the Order Paper was gradually diminishing. I informed the House that I would seek to enforce the recommendation of the Procedure Committee in 1990 that the length of both ministerial replies and supplementaries should be curbed and that supplementaries should not become a dialogue of queries.

I sought the co-operation of all Members on both sides of the House in seeking to make better progress in order to protect the interests of those Members with questions lower down the Order Paper, who I believe have a legitimate expectation of being called.

The initial response was most encouraging, with a significant improvement in performance. More recently, however, we have slipped back. Therefore, I renew my appeal for co-operation from all Members, including Ministers and those on the Opposition Front Bench, in the expectation that we shall be able to make better progress this Session. For my part, I shall not hesitate to intervene when I consider that Members are abusing the spirit of Question Time. We are at the beginning of a new Session. Let us make some good progress in this area.

Orders of the Day

Debate on the Address

[Fifth Day]

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Question,

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, as follows:—

Most Gracious Sovereign,

We, Your Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Parliament assembled, beg leave to offer our humble thanks to your Majesty for the Gracious Speech which Your Majesty has addressed to both Houses of Parliament.—*[Mr. Hurd.]*

Question again proposed.

Social Affairs

Madam Speaker: Before we commence, I have to tell the House that I have selected the amendment in the name of the Leader of the Opposition. I have had to restrict Back Bench speeches to 10 minutes.

3.32 pm

Mr. David Blunkett (Sheffield, Brightside): I beg to move, as an Amendment to the Address, at the end to add—

"But humbly regret that the Gracious Speech made no reference to developing a partnership between schools, parents, local education authorities, churches and others in the community to raise educational standards, gave no cast-iron guarantee of nursery places for four-year-olds and set no targets to provide places for three-year-olds, offered no proposals to improve access to training, higher education and work, provided no measures to prevent crime and tackle disorder, failed to encourage partnership between the police and local authorities, offered no legislation for a statutory crime prevention duty to be imposed on local authorities, proposed no measures to deal with criminal anti-social neighbours, set out no strategy for tackling youth crime, announced no plans to tackling delays in the Court system, contained no proposals for regulating the private security industry, outlined no new measures to help the victims of crime and sought to reinforce rather than diminish social division by failing to refer proposals on asylum and immigration to a Special Standing Committee of the House."

In moving the amendment on behalf of my right hon. and hon. Friends and myself, I register my interest as a parent, as a citizen and as an active member of Unison.

Britain faces the greatest peacetime challenge in our history. We have a choice of the kind of nation, the kind of economy and the kind of society that we wish to become. We have the choice which is faced by other nations across the world in developing knowledge-based economies which offer their people the opportunity of being at the cutting edge of economic and industrial change; of taking on the challenge of new technology; of offering their young people the prospect of jobs; of having a high-wage, high-added-value, high-tech economy. Instead of taking on that challenge, the Government, as spelt out in the Queen's Speech, are aiming for a low-wage, low-tech, low-added-value economy. *[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. There is a lot of noise in the House, which makes it extremely difficult to be heard, especially for Front-Bench spokesmen. I ask the House to come to order.

Mr. Blunkett: Instead of the opportunity that is offered in other parts of the world, our Government, as exemplified by the Queen's Speech, offer the nation a low-wage, low-tech, low-added-value economy, based on the belief that we can attract investment only if we pay our people less than people are paid in other developed countries and offer them a less substantial investment in their public services; and especially in the way that we equip people for taking work and taking on the challenge of enterprise and innovation; in other words, the investment we place in education, training and the prospect of employment.

As a nation, we face enormous divides, which are reflected in the division that exists between our successes and those of the nations that we compete with in Europe and across the world. France, Germany, Japan and many countries of south-east Asia achieve double the number of successes at GCSE and advanced qualification levels that this country achieves.

Lacking opportunities, hope and expectation, many young men and women turn away from the education system and from the community in which they live: 70 per cent. of those under 25 who commit crimes have dropped out of the formal education system. They have no prospect of a job and no hope of contributing to the society around them, so they feel undervalued and disregarded. In those circumstances, it is not surprising that the existing divisions are exemplified all too tragically by what happens on our streets, and by the lack of hope in our schools.

The league tables published this morning show an increasing divide between those succeeding and those failing—a divide which leads one in 10 young men to get no qualification at all at GCSE level, not even a grade G. The number of people who do not get any qualification whatsoever at the age of 16 has risen by 7 per cent. this year. The divide between schools succeeding and schools failing has grown again. There is a twelvefold gap between the top 20 per cent. and the bottom 20 per cent. in our schools. That gap is not seen in the same way anywhere else in the world.

Mr. David Shaw (Dover): Would the hon. Gentleman state unequivocally that he fully supports the decision of the leader of his party not to send his children to Islington schools but to a grant-maintained school—the Oratory school in Kensington—some eight miles away from the terrible Labour-run Islington council's education system?

Mr. Blunkett: I shall answer that question, but I think that it is tragic that, when I am trying to spell out the fact that tens of thousands of children got nothing from the education system this year, and talking about lessening the divide for 7 million children in school, the hon. Member for Dover (Mr. Shaw) is interested in scoring a cheap political point at the expense of one child in one school in this capital city. Let me answer his question.

I have no problem whatsoever about any Catholic parents offering their child the chance of going to a Catholic school—a chance that, under the London Government Act 1963, brought in by the Tories, a child could have taken up at any time over the past 32 years. If the hon. Member for Dover wants to make cheap jibes at the expense of a sensible debate about how to lift standards and achievement in this country, let him do so; but it will be at the expense of his party in the general election.

I am talking about the major divide that exists in this nation between those succeeding and those failing, which is exemplified by the income that people can earn, and by their prospect of a job. The education that people receive has a direct bearing on their ability to get a job, the amount that they will be paid, and whether they are likely to keep that job.

For every year in post-16 education, there is a definable 14 to 16 per cent. increase in the amount that one is likely to earn. For those who have no qualifications, the prospect of getting a job is sinking like a stone—the number in work who have no qualifications has sunk from 59 per cent. last year to 55 per cent. this year.

Let me spell it out in terms of income. Disregarding housing costs, in the past 16 years the bottom 10 per cent. of earners have seen a 17 per cent. drop in their disposable income, while the top 10 per cent. have seen a 62 per cent. increase in theirs.

The unfairness that exists all around us is exemplified in what is done by the Government and in the emphasis that they are placing in the Queen's Speech on the proposals before us. There is nothing to tackle unemployment, to overcome insecurity or offer people the chance to earn, rather than rely on welfare benefits.

There are none of the type of changes that we need in training and the development of skills for technology. In fact, because of changes that the Government have introduced, in the past year the number of new starts achieved through training and enterprise councils for young people with special needs has dropped—in some TECs by as much as 50 per cent. On average, it is a 10 per cent. drop.

The successful are getting more successful, and the vulnerable and those in need are being disregarded by the Conservative party's measures. It is a tragic explanation of the difference between that party and ours and of the opportunity that we seek to offer, compared with the denial that people face in their everyday lives, day in and day out.

Nothing could better exemplify the difference than the Prime Minister's decision to double the assisted places scheme, so that 60,000 children can "escape"—the word used by the Deputy Prime Minister—from the inadequacy of inner-city schools. In disregarding the interests of 7 million children and being prepared to divert £220 million of public money to 60,000 children, the Government have shown exactly why we were right to say that we would invest in lowering class sizes and ensuring that no child between the age of five and seven is taught in a class of more than 30, so that they can have a chance of learning those basic skills—to read, write and add up—that are the birthright of every child and which offer them the real opportunity of succeeding.

Instead, what do we have before us? The hint of the Prime Minister's promise on 12 September in Birmingham that all schools would have to face being forced into grant-maintained status.

Mr. James Pawsey (Rugby and Kenilworth): I am obliged to the hon. Gentleman for giving way. I have listened to his rhetoric with some interest, but will he now say exactly what are his policies and those of the Labour party, and how he intends to fund them?

Mr. Blunkett: I have become used to the Conservative party treating us as the Government and itself as the

[Mr. Blunkett]

Opposition, but I was under the misapprehension that we were debating the Queen's Speech, which was drawn up by the Cabinet, not the shadow Cabinet.

I should be happy to spell out our policies, and I will do so in a few moments, but first I will talk about the Queen's Speech, which I should have thought Conservative Members would have been proud to debate. If the hon. Member for Crosby (Sir M. Thornton), the chairman of the all-party Select Committee on Education and a long-standing Conservative, is anything to go by, however, the policies of the present Secretary of State for Education and Employment do not meet his desire, or that of many other Conservative Members, for a change in education policy.

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): Will the hon. Gentleman explain, as he is moving the amendment tabled by the Official Opposition on the motion on the Queen's Speech, why such a large number of his own Back-Benchers are so dissatisfied that they have tabled an amendment of their own? An amendment has been tabled by the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn). Why do those Labour Members have to table a separate amendment?

Mr. Blunkett: May I seek your guidance, Madam Speaker? Is the term "prat" unparliamentary? *[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. I would not recommend it. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman has a very wide vocabulary, and he can do rather better than that.

Mr. Blunkett: Let me answer the question in this way. Anyone who could put that question in the way that the hon. Gentleman did has no intention of debating the Queen's Speech, which his right hon. Friends have put together and moved. If a Government can suggest that the main priority for education, training and employment is to open up divisions that have already damaged the education of so many children by returning to grant-maintained status, by emphasising that the Government want to take away parental rights by denying parents in schools throughout the country the opportunity to vote on the status of their school, it is no wonder that Conservative Members are keen to get off the debate.

Mr. John Carlisle (Luton, North): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Blunkett: No: I shall make a little progress, and then I will happily give way.

Grant-maintained status, what might be described as GM, or "Gillian's misery", has no relevance whatever to the needs of children throughout the country. To suggest, as the Government are doing, that they should take away the right of Church schools to be able to determine, through the normal mechanisms, through the decision of parents, their status and their future is a disgrace.

Let me remind Conservative Members what was said on 19 April last year. I shall quote, as I think it is important:

> "We have constantly emphasised the centrality of parental choice in our education reforms. It is built in to the legislation governing the arrangements for grant-maintained status and there must be no further legislation this Parliament. Parents decide. Governors and parents may initiate. But it is the body of parents who ultimately must decide."

That was said 18 months ago by the then Secretary of State, the right hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Mr. Patten).

I never thought that I would see the day when the present Secretary of State outstripped her predecessor in right-wing ideology, but here we have a Government who are consulting—well, they use the term "consult"—on the suggestion that 4,000 voluntary aided schools should be forced to become grant-maintained; on whether parents should be denied the right to decide whether they should become grant-maintained or whether rights that they already have should be taken away.

It is no wonder that the Anglican Church has condemned it and that the Catholic Church has described it as discriminatory and divisive, because that is precisely what it is. It discriminates. It divides. It undermines the education service and the partnership we applaud between Churches and local education authorities, among all schools, working together in the interests of their children and their community.

Mr. John Carlisle: What would the hon. Gentleman say to my constituents, who are voting with their feet and are applying to Icknield high school, a grant-maintained school in my constituency, in such enormous numbers that its waiting list keeps rising each year? That school has achieved excellent results as a grant-maintained school in the league tables that were published this morning. Would the hon. Gentleman deny them the right, to which he so proudly commits from the Opposition Benches, to go to that particular school?

Mr. Blunkett: I am terribly sorry, but the hon. Gentleman must have missed the point. We are not denying anyone rights; it is Conservative Members who propose to deny parents the right to choose, and Churches the right to operate in the system that they already have. As in "Alice in Wonderland", the word "choice" means what the Government say it means. It means "no choice": it means removing rights and diversity.

It is clear from what the Prime Minister said in Birmingham on 12 September that he and his Secretary of State are completely at loggerheads about how to proceed.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Blunkett: If there were as much activity in the hon. Gentleman's brain as there is in his legs, we should make much more progress.

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Blunkett: In a moment. I want to make some progress first.

The Queen's Speech contains a proposal to allow grant-maintained schools to borrow against their assets. Well, only against some of their assets: they cannot borrow against core activities, or—according to the Prime Minister—against the playing fields that he has frequently appealed to them not to sell. Nor can they borrow against their major activity in delivering a service: they cannot borrow against more than 5 per cent. of their total assets.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Blunkett: No, not now. I will in a few moments.

The proposal appears to be that the breach in the previous definition of the public sector borrowing requirement is to amount to a grant-maintained school's borrowing against the price of the front gates. That is about the measure of it. Let me make it clear, however, that by changing the rules and presenting their new proposals, the Government open up all sorts of possibilities.

I am not talking about the possibility of dividing the education system, so that some schools are given opportunities that are denied to others, and some are given resources to invest in repair and maintenance—to restore a roof and stop leaks, for instance—while others must put up with the inadequacy of the borrowing permission from the Secretary of State. Instead, all schools could be united, with the possibility of a public-private finance initiative that would enable us to overcome the problem of the £4 billion—at a conservative estimate—repair and maintenance bill facing our schools.

I look forward to hearing from the Secretary of State, on Second Reading, how the new rules will apply, and how the Treasury's "finger in the dyke" has been pulled out in terms of the definition of the PSBR.

Mr. Harry Greenway: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Blunkett: I promised to give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) first.

Mr. Cohen: I welcome my hon. Friend's commitment to a reduction in class sizes to a maximum of 30 for five to seven-year-olds, but I for one fear that it may not be sufficient. Many schoolchildren may not have the basic skills defined as necessary by my hon. Friend by the time they are seven. Will my hon. Friend assure me that, if he becomes Secretary of State for Education in a Labour Government, he will not close his mind to the possibility of limiting class sizes to 30 higher up the scale as well?

Mr. Blunkett: God forbid that I should have a closed mind on the improvement of standards, and the provision for all children of the opportunities available to those who buy private education for themselves and their children. In last week's report, the chief inspector said, choosing his words carefully, that class size alone—he used the word "alone"—would not determine the quality of education. Who could possibly disagree with that?

However, class size clearly makes an enormous difference to the time that can be allocated to a child with special needs, or with access to particular opportunities; it makes excellence available to each individual in the classroom. We shall do our utmost as part of our commitment to standards and opportunities to offer the many what has previously been available only to the few.

Mr. Harry Greenway: The hon. Gentleman says that Labour opposes the sale of school playing fields for development. Will he support my strong opposition to Ealing Labour council's strenuous efforts to sell the playing fields of Dormers Wells high school for housing development? Will he support my efforts to stop that council, because my Government are giving me good support?

Mr. Blunkett: The hon. Gentleman has the cheek of the devil. His Government have been pressing local authorities to sell their land and property to raise capital receipts. The notes to the Gracious Speech on the issue of grant-maintained schools show that the Government are so keen on grant-maintained schools that they will allow them to keep 100 per cent. of the receipts from the sale of land, property and playing fields, whereas local authorities can use only 50 per cent. of such proceeds.

If the hon. Gentleman is so keen to ensure that the people of Ealing are protected from his Government, he should approach the Secretary of State for the Environment and persuade him to ensure that Ealing gets sufficient allocation under the borrowing permission to ensure that it would not have to sell land and property in the borough.

The centrepiece of the Government's proposals on education, training and employment are the nursery voucher proposals which were floated by the Prime Minister at the Conservative party conference in autumn last year. He said that the delivery of the places through the voucher scheme would be "a cast-iron commitment".

On 2 November this year, when the Department for Education and Employment issued its consultative guidance notes on the delivery of the voucher scheme and the pilot project, it said that it could not give a cast-iron guarantee to provide places under the system for four-year-olds. Therefore, while the Prime Minister guarantees it, the Secretary of State denies it. But that is not surprising, because she is on record as saying that she thinks the scheme would be "unwieldy" and "a dead weight", and that it was not the appropriate way to proceed with the delivery of the promise on nursery places.

Who could have invented such a scheme? Some £545 million of existing local authority resources which are already providing places for four-year-olds are to be recycled at public expense under an expensive administrative procedure. It will be delivered through a piece of paper called a voucher that will provide £1,100 by way of a promissory note for a part-time nursery place, which in a nursery class costs an average of £1,300 to £1,500 and in a nursery school an average of £1,600 to £1,800.

Who could have invented a scheme that spends £11 million on the administration simply of circulating the vouchers, of clawing back the money? Who could possibly have invented a scheme that takes from those who already have, recycles it theoretically to places that do not have provision, provides no capital resources for the provision of facilities, invests no money in training teachers or nursery nurses, and results in recycling the money from those who are providing to those who cannot provide because they do not have the places? That subsidises only those who have the places because they are buying them with their own resources in the private sector.

The only people who could possibly gain from such a scheme are those who can afford to pay for places and are already paying. They will now receive a subsidy of £1,100, while everyone else will pay through the nose for the most convoluted administrative nightmare, which was invented not to deliver places for four-year-olds but to satisfy the right-wing ideologues who dreamed up the scheme in the first place. The whole thing is absolute nonsense.

Mr. Michael Fabricant (Mid-Staffordshire): Does the hon. Gentleman not realise that, in the little villages of

[Mr. Michael Fabricant]

Staffordshire, people regard this not as right-wing ideology, but as a practical way of getting nursery school education in small villages? The system that he is advocating could not work in rural areas.

Mr. Blunkett: With all due respect, it sounds as though the hon. Gentleman knows as much about the operation of the provision of nursery education as he knows about parliamentary procedure, as exemplified in "The Final Cut".

Mr. Fabricant: On a point of order, Madam Speaker. The hon. Gentleman calls one hon. Member a prat. He makes an insult to me. Is it not in order that, just occasionally, he should give an answer?

Madam Speaker: All hon. Members are responsible for their comments in this House. I cannot put words into their mouths. It might be a good thing if I could sometimes.

Mr. Blunkett: Fortunately, the hon. Member for Mid-Staffordshire (Mr. Fabricant) does not get three bites of the cherry, as he advises Members can in the television programme.

This is a tawdry little scheme. The pilot project alone will cost £5 million, operating in just four local authorities—£5 million that could have bought 4,000 part-time nursery places. The final scheme will cost £11 million to administer, which could have bought 8,500 part-time nursery places across the country, ensuring that children who are already getting nursery places are not threatened; that three-year-olds who are currently threatened by the scheme can continue to get them; and that special needs children are not denied the support they deserve because they receive no extra funding through the voucher scheme.

I am prepared not simply to criticise an administrative nonsense, not simply to say that the Opposition would provide an entitlement so that we would set targets for all three as well as four-year-olds to have a nursery place, whose parents wished it, but to offer the Secretary of State a way out. I would like to offer her this afternoon the opportunity to sit down with me, with the Pre-School Learning Alliance, with the private sector and with local education authorities up and down the country to work out a way, within the amount of money that the Government have declared they are prepared to allocate, of offering in the next two years a method of delivering a nursery place to every four-year-old.

I offer her the opportunity, without the voucher scheme, without capita management having to take up public expenditure that could go on nursery places, without the problems that she knows exist in the present proposals, to ensure that every child of four gets the opportunity that she and the Prime Minister have offered them and that we are totally committed to providing.

I will guarantee the co-operation of every Labour education authority in this country in planning the delivery of those places and in ensuring that those resources are put directly into nursery schooling, and that every parent is guaranteed that basic entitlement. I ask the Secretary of State this afternoon to take up that opportunity.

Mr. Fabricant: What about the rural areas?

Mr. Blunkett: All the Secretary of State's Back Benchers can do is shout, "What about rural areas?" The proposal that I have just made, the guarantee that we are giving, and the entitlement that we are offering to all parents, stand for rural areas just as they do for urban areas.

Mr. Fabricant: How will the hon. Gentleman pay for that?

Mr. Blunkett: It will, of course, be funded. We will fund it not only with the money that already exists in the system, but with the money that the Government have laid on the table.

We will do so not simply with the £150 million that is directly available but with all the administrative costs—the additional £20 million-plus that is available to operate and supervise the scheme. *[Interruption.]* If the hon. Member for Mid-Staffordshire, who is still burbling away, does not believe that that money can deliver the promise to all four-year-olds, how does he think the voucher system, using the same money—in fact, less than I am proposing—would be able to offer that cast-iron guarantee? Either he cannot add up, he is being mischievous or he is just very stupid.

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough and Horncastle): I am sure that the hon. Gentleman thinks that private education has a useful role to play. He has just given a commitment on behalf of the Labour party. Will he ensure that, under his new funding proposals, people will be able to cash his form of voucher at private nursery schools?

Mr. Blunkett: Nobody will have to cash anything except their entitlement to a free nursery place. It is as simple as that. There is money on the table. We are told that a paper promise will deliver the same pledge. We are told that it can be delivered without the money that will be spent on the administration of the scheme. If we would have £20 million more available through my proposal, presumably it will be accepted that there is £20 million more to ensure that the guarantee can be met.

The entitlement is absolute, but the availability of places can be guaranteed only by planning the facilities and by ensuring that there is a crash programme to train the teachers and nursery nurses. Without that, the paper promise that will be delivered through the door of every family with a four-year-old child just before a potential general election would not be worth the paper it was written on. That is the truth. I am calling the Secretary of State's bluff—either one believes that the scheme can work, in which case the places can be delivered, or one does not. It is as simple as that.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: Will the hon. Gentleman give way on that point?

Mr. Blunkett: No, I will not give way again.

Let us be clear about it. The entire sorry little package of measures in the Queen's Speech—which includes the off-balance-sheet student loans provision, which does nothing for access or opening up new opportunities and nothing to deal with the crisis that exists for students now with the Student Loans Company Ltd., which we will be debating next Monday—does nothing to address the future needs of our country or our education, training and employment systems.

This is a tired, worn-out and washed-up Government. They are a spent force, who ran out of steam a long time ago. They are a rudderless ship drifting starboard. The man in charge is issuing orders from the safe distance of the Admiralty, while the first mate expands his cabin as the decks are awash with the seas of fate. Captain Pugwash, blind-eyed and missing the signals from the port side, sails blissfully on into the rocks of Blair Point.

This time, the clouds will not clear, and the sun will not come out for the Tory party. The *Telegraph* will not signal victory, because the British people are crying out for a change. They are crying out for social cohesion, social justice and co-operation in our education system. They want to lift standards by offering opportunities for all our people. They want a world worth living in.

A Labour Government would offer everyone in Britain optimism and hope for the future, and that is why we condemn these tawdry little suggestions in the Queen's Speech. That is why the people of Britain will embrace our real promises and pledges for the future.

4.9 pm

The Secretary of State for Education and Employment (Mrs. Gillian Shephard): I welcome the chance to present to the House the Government's proposals for education legislation in the forthcoming Session. The proposals are consistent with the themes of all our education reforms of the past 16 years—competitiveness, standards, choice, diversity and encouraging aspirations.

I feel that I must comment on the extraordinary contribution from the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett). He presented an analysis that was steadfast in its ignorance of the facts. This year, the league tables show an overall improvement in all schools' performance, and the hon. Gentleman ignored the fact that 39 per cent. of schools have managed to reduce the number of pupils leaving school with no GCSEs—an important task for all.

The hon. Gentleman managed to ignore the fact of inward investment—90,000 jobs provided over the last year because of our flexible labour market and our well-trained work force. He managed to ignore the continued rise in standards in education and training. I had hoped to be able to say something complimentary about the hon. Gentleman's sense of humour, but I am afraid that he blew that in the last few minutes of his speech: he lurched from ships to Captain Pugwash to other things which, fortunately, there was too much noise for the rest of us to hear.

I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman's speech demonstrated yet again that the Labour party continues to set its face against diversity, choice and aspiration. It believes in choice, of course, but only for some occupants of the Labour Front Bench.

Mr. Bob Dunn (Dartford): Given that parents make choices for their children and that it is not always the fault of the children which schools the parents choose, is the Secretary of State aware that, out of 24 members of the shadow Cabinet, 18 were educated in grammar schools, in the private sector or in independent schools? Does she agree that the Labour party wishes to deny that choice to today's children?

Mrs. Shephard: I am delighted that their parents were able to exercise the choice that the Labour party wants to remove from other people.

The hon. Member for Brightside should realise that, at this stage, nothing is ruled in and nothing is ruled out in the context of consultation on the future of voluntary-aided schools. Unlike the Opposition, we are consulting the Churches. I believe that the Opposition did not do so before producing their so-called White Paper in the summer.

We believe in considering seriously how best to extend the benefits of self-government in schools to all children, and we are doing that now. Sadly, in his whole speech, the hon. Gentleman did not answer one question, and he seemed to admit that he has not the merest clue about how to set about providing nursery education. I will help him—that seemed to be the invitation he offered to me—and I am happy to sit down with him any time to explain how a successful nursery vouchers scheme will work.

For the hon. Gentleman's information, much the largest part of the £20 million that he mentioned is for inspection, not administration. We believe in quality, even if the Labour party does not.

Mr. George Stevenson (Stoke-on-Trent, South): In view of the statements that the Secretary of State has just made about nursery vouchers and the concern that has been expressed by Conservative Back Benchers, will she advise us how many additional nursery places in Staffordshire the voucher system will create—in particular in Stoke-on-Trent?

Mrs. Shephard: The hon. Gentleman should have given me notice of that question, because I do not know how many places exist at the moment. In due course, however, parents in Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire will have the right for their four-year-olds to have three terms of good-quality nursery education.

What did we hear from the hon. Member for Brightside? It was not a very good speech, I am afraid. Socialism still clings to him despite the best efforts of his leader to have him hide the fact. As *The Sunday Times* said, the jury is still out. After today's showing, I fear that that must be so.

Recently, of course, the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues have announced some new initiatives. I believe that they announced some new initiatives on youth training measures. It seems that there is a split in the shadow Cabinet on the matter—nevertheless, an attempt was made. We have heard something from the Labour party about associate teachers and something about an aim for nursery education—no proposals, just an aim, but never mind. We have heard about tough inspection and technology on every school's curriculum. The only problem is that the Government have done them all. Of course the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues would not have noticed. Why? Where were they at the time? They were in the No Lobby, voting against excellence, standards, choice and diversity.

It takes some cheek for Labour Members, in their house magazine the *Daily Mirror*, to wring their hands about the tiny percentage of failing schools and poor examination results. The Labour party would not even know about those things were it not for the Government's reforms, all of which the Labour party opposed. All the measures to raise standards and promote excellence were opposed by Labour.

Dr. Tony Wright (Cannock and Burntwood): In relation to what the Government have done, will the Secretary of State confirm what I took to be a whiff of retreat in her earlier remarks on the opt-out of voluntary-aided schools? Will she confirm that in fact the Government are retreating on the fast-track route and, if so, why? Will she also tell us why she thought about that in the first place when parents are under-represented now in voluntary-aided schools? Instead of decreasing their representation, why should she consider depriving them of their right even to vote on the future of their schools?

Mrs. Shephard: How the Labour party has converted to parental choice; how the Labour party hated it when we introduced grant-maintained schools; and how it loves parental choice now. Is it not wonderful to see so many people converted to our cause?

As for the consultation on voluntary-aided schools, we have suggested seven options for those interested in them and the 4,000 relevant bodies to consider. The consultation is not complete; until it is, nothing is ruled in and nothing ruled out.

Mr. Andrew Miller (Ellesmere Port and Neston): On the question of who has been converted to what, will the Secretary of State explain why Cheshire county council refused to adopt the nursery voucher pilot scheme? Is that not odd for a Conservative-controlled authority? Perhaps the truth is that Cheshire county council was right and the scheme was daft from the outset.

Mrs. Shephard: I think that Cheshire county council will come to regret its decision, whichever party controls it. It is depriving parents of four-year-olds in Cheshire of nursery education—the scheme could have been in place by April next year.

I was referring to the attitude of Labour Members. When we discussed the national curriculum, testing and inspection, where were they? In the No Lobby. When we discussed grant-maintained schools, technology colleges and improvements to teacher training, where were they? In the No Lobby. When we discussed the guarantee of training for young people and training programmes for the unemployed, where were they? In the No Lobby.

Where are many of the schools that are failing our children and denying them a decent education? They are in Labour-controlled authorities where years of socialist claptrap have allowed slipshod teaching to deny children the right to a decent education. They are in Hackney, where even a pupil-teacher ratio of 1:8 could not improve Hackney Downs school. They are in Lambeth, where secondary schools are so bad that Ofsted has to inspect every one. They are in Tower Hamlets, Newham and Bradford, the local authorities whose schools have more unauthorised absences than any others in England. They are in Islington, which has just come absolutely bottom in the table of GCSE results—the worst results of any local education authority anywhere in England.

Talking of conversions, no wonder the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) is using Conservative policies to send his own child outside that rotten borough. Yet he and it would deny parents without his level of income the right to send their children to schools of their choice. What a shame. That is Labour in office. That is its ambition. Although, of course, we heard nothing about Labour's plans from the hon. Member for Brightside, what Labour wants to do for Britain, it has done for Islington.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): Is it not a fact that the Government pledged money for teachers which was not forthcoming? On the assumption that it will be forthcoming next year to pay teachers the increase which is their proper due, will the right hon. Lady assure me that, despite the arcane matters of revenue support grants, area cost adjustments, and so on, she has cleared the way for that money to be paid after adjudication, and that there will be no undue rocks or difficulties in the legislative process?

Mrs. Shephard: The hon. Gentleman—it is surprising from him—has forgotten the existence of the independent review body that looks at teachers' salaries. As for the overall financial settlement, he will have to possess his soul in patience until next week like the rest of us.

The contrast between the record of Labour Members and our record of consistent reform could hardly be more marked. As I said, for the past 16 years, four themes have underpinned our reforms: competitiveness, standards, choice and encouraging aspiration. In the Gracious Speech, we announced a number of measures to extend those themes. First, we announced the introduction of vouchers for nursery education, through which we shall deliver our commitment to increase the number of pre-school places for four-year-olds.

Good-quality nursery education benefits children's academic, personal and social development. That is why we are planning for every four-year-old to have access to it.

Mr. Blunkett: Why, then, is the Secretary of State on record as saying that the nursery voucher scheme was not "the favoured option", and that she was against it?

Mrs. Shephard: Either the hon. Gentleman's memory of what I said or his memory of the press cutting from which he took what I said is faulty. I actually said that any scheme must be easily practicable; it must not be unwieldy. It must deliver the goods. The nursery voucher scheme answers all those points, and we shall be able to demonstrate that as the first phase comes into play.

Ms Margaret Hodge (Barking): If the Secretary of State is so concerned to deliver good-quality nursery education to all four-year-olds, why is she not doing the sensible thing and putting additional moneys into training teachers and additional capital into providing facilities so that children can be taught in an appropriate environment?

Mrs. Shephard: That was an authentic Islington voice, I believe. We want to put choice into the hands of parents—the kind of parent I am sure that the hon. Lady is. We do not want the choice to be made by institutions. Training is one of the issues on which we are consulting. We have had a large number of responses and we shall be making an announcement in due course. It is true that training is important—so is the range of qualifications that will equip people who will be delivering that nursery education to four-year-olds.

Every parent of a four-year-old child, regardless of his or her circumstances, will be entitled to a voucher which will be exchanged for three terms of good-quality nursery education at a recognised establishment of his or her own choosing. The purchasing power will be in the hands of parents, and there will be real meaning to the notion of choice. Parents will be able to decide between the state, the private and the voluntary sectors as they judge best

and the voucher will give parents the wherewithal to demand the kind of places that will suit their needs. Choice in the hands of parents will also act as a stimulus in the state, the private and the voluntary sectors. However, the initiative is about education and not about child care.

Mr. Jack Thompson (Wansbeck): What advice can the Secretary of State give me to pass on to parents in my constituency, some of whom have children who are three and who are in nursery schools because we have a Labour-controlled council that is enlightened and tries to encourage and expand the whole nursery education system in the county? It looks as if those parents will be deprived of this opportunity, especially in areas in which there is social deprivation and in which children really benefit by being in nursery schools at the age of three. What advice should I give those parents?

Mrs. Shephard: I do not entirely understand the hon. Gentleman's question. The initiative is starting with four-year-olds. Some £185 million of new money, additional to what local education authorities already provide, will be provided. If local education authorities so wish, that additional money will enable them to enhance the three-year-olds provision that some of them may already have chosen to put in place. Given that, they will have extra resources.

Ms Joan Walley (Stoke-on-Trent, North): Given the concern that has already been expressed about nursery school education in Staffordshire, how will the right hon. Lady's proposals ensure that parents throughout Staffordshire get access to the nursery places that they want? We do not have them at the moment on the scale that is needed, either in Stoke-on-Trent or in the rural areas. How does the right hon. Lady propose to have a level playing field and how will there be fairness? She knows, from the delegation of Staffordshire Members of Parliament, that we are at least £300 per child per year worse off than people in the south of the country.

Mrs. Shephard: That is another RSG question, part of which will be answered next week. It is a thousand pities that the Staffordshire LEA did not choose to take part in the pilot scheme. If it had, four-year-olds in the hon. Lady's LEA would have had the benefit that my four-year-olds in Norfolk will have as early as next April.

We shall put in place a quality assurance regime to which all establishments wishing to exchange vouchers will be subjected. They will all have to work towards the same learning outcomes and they will all be inspected on the basis of a single inspection framework which will combine rigour with the minimum of bureaucracy.

Mr. Iain Mills (Meriden): Does my right hon. Friend recognise that the calculation of the standard spending assessments will mean, for example, that Solihull will lose 90 per cent., because the scheme covers only four-year-olds? According to my calculations, there are at least 42 local education authorities that will suffer in the same way but that already provide excellent nursery education.

Mrs. Shephard: Indeed, Solihull is providing good nursery education, some of which I have seen, as my hon. Friend knows. I know that he understands that the scheme is a new way in which to provide nursery education. It puts the consumer and the parent, rather than the institution, at the heart of the system. No LEA will be worse off if it continues to attract the same number of children of nursery age. I hope that my hon. Friend agrees that we should put the interests of children and their parents—their choice—before institutional interests.

The guiding principle of the initiative will be good-quality education and value for money. Rightly, it will be for the Government to ensure quality and standards; for the providers, maintained, voluntary or private, to respond; and for the parents to choose.

Mr. Michael Connarty (Falkirk, East): The Secretary of State said in reply to a question that all parents of four-year-olds would be able to have three terms of good nursery education. How, for £1,100, could someone purchase or a local authority provide three terms of good nursery education? Clearly, it costs £2,500 to £3,500 to provide proper nursery education at the moment.

Mrs. Shephard: The figure has been calculated according to the average of costs across local education authorities, so I can reassure the hon. Gentleman on that matter. *[Interruption.]* I shall now make some progress.

I shall now talk about grant-maintained schools, because choice is valued by parents. We know, of course, that the hon. Member for Brightside does not take that view, because a year ago to the day he said:

> "I am having no truck with middle class left-wing parents who preach one thing and send their children to another school outside the area".

I cannot imagine whom he could have had in mind.

Of course the hon. Gentleman's strictures have been disregarded—by his right hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair), and by his hon. Friends the Members for Peckham (Ms Harman), for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Kilfoyle), for Neath (Mr. Hain), for Blackburn (Mr. Straw), for Stoke-on-Trent, Central (Mr. Fisher), for Brent, South (Mr. Boateng) and for Barking (Ms Hodge), to name but a few. But that is the hon. Gentleman's problem, not ours.

Mr. Blunkett: I ask the Secretary of State to say now why she named my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Kilfoyle). What heinous crime has he committed in sending his child to the local school?

Mrs. Shephard: I understand that the hon. Member for Walton exercised a choice in favour of a school with elements of selection, and selection has been condemned by Opposition Front-Bench spokesmen. If that is wrong, of course I am happy to withdraw my remarks.

Mr. Peter Kilfoyle (Liverpool, Walton): I hope that the Secretary of State will withdraw her remarks, because, as has been made clear to no less a person than the Prime Minister, all my children have gone to local authority schools within the city of Liverpool. I exercised a choice so far as one was available within the confines of the system for selecting a secondary school for my son, who goes to a local authority comprehensive.

Mrs. Shephard: Those are two things that the hon. Gentleman and I have in common: we both believe in choice and we both sent our children to local education authority schools. [HON. MEMBERS: "Withdraw."] I have already said that I would certainly withdraw any accusation that made the hon. Gentleman feel uncomfortable.

[Mrs. Shephard]

We believe in new measures to help the development of grant-maintained schools, because we think that self-government puts power into the hands of those directly involved with the school—heads, governors and parents—and releases energy, enthusiasm and commitment. The control and management of resources, including a school's land and buildings, are crucial aspects of self-government.

That is why we are introducing legislation to allow grant-maintained schools to borrow commercially. That will give them a greater say in their own development and more opportunities for managing their capital assets. The proposals are practical and the required legislation is straightforward, so grant-maintained schools may be able to borrow on the open market as early as summer 1996. They have already demonstrated their ability to manage their budgets effectively and it is right that they should have the option to borrow, as do other self-governing institutions such as colleges and universities.

The borrowing will mean that more capital projects can be funded in more grant-maintained schools, and enable work to start promptly on projects that might have had to wait for traditional grant. It will also make it easier for schools to finance deals under the private finance initiative.

Mr. Gerald Bermingham (St. Helens, South): Will the Secretary of State ensure that her colleagues who run other Departments, such as the Department of Health, contribute the necessary funding for special schools—for speech therapists, for example? For eight weeks the special unit in my constituency has been a speech therapist short for four-year-old children with receptive hearing difficulties. Such a loss is detrimental for a child, especially as the educational cover is for three years only. Co-operation between Government Departments is needed to ensure the efficient use of educational facilities, especially where children are already statemented.

Mrs. Shephard: I agree that there should be the correct co-operation at ground level, and I am sorry to hear that that is not happening in the hon. Gentleman's area. I shall take the matter up with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health—but obviously encouragement needs to be applied at local level. I know that the hon. Gentleman will understand that.

The same theme of choice underlies our proposals for student loans. The student loans Bill will widen choice; we want to bring in the benefits of private finance and expertise. Adding choice, diversity and competition to the system cannot but benefit its users.

Mr. Michael Lord (Central Suffolk): I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for giving way before she moves off the subject of higher education. She recently said that it costs no more to teach a bad lesson than it does to teach a good lesson, and many people would agree with that. Although many Departments want more money, what matters in education is how the money is spent and how teachers perform in front of classes. Will my right hon. Friend assure me that the Government will never remove the A-level and that the standard of that examination will be kept as high as possible?

Mrs. Shephard: I began by explaining that our overwhelming concern has been with standards, from nursery education—hence the £20 million devoted to inspection of the system—through to the excellence of A-levels, which we certainly have no intention of getting rid of. We are giving close attention to quality in both the further and the higher education sectors, and my hon. Friend has raised a very important point in that context.

Students will be able to choose between a private sector loan and one from the Student Loans Company, and also between the various institutions involved. The private sector will provide a convenient and comprehensive service through the lenders' branch networks, and students will get a product tailored to their needs. The private sector, of course, will be part of a twin-track system. The Student Loans Company will still be there as a publicly funded body providing public loans for those who want or need them.

The company will be part of a twin-track, and not a two-tier, system. Similar preferential loan terms will continue to be funded on both tracks by the taxpayer. Interest rates will be limited to no more than the retail prices index, and students will still be able to defer repayments if their income is less than 85 per cent. of average earnings. Student loans are here to stay. One in three of our young people now gets a university education, compared with only one in eight in 1979. But the loans system has a cost which the taxpayer cannot meet alone, and it is right that students—who, after all, will benefit the most in their future lives—should pay their share through loans. It is also right that personal lending at this level is best done largely by private sector firms. It is, after all, their business.

I shall draw my remarks to a conclusion. The reforms proposed in the Gracious Speech build on what has been achieved. We have a national curriculum, against which the achievements of pupils can be assessed. We publish examination results, and inspection reports are now available to parents. Of course, these reports identify failures as well as successes—that is what they are for. But we can raise standards only if we know what is happening and we can identify which schools and which teachers are succeeding and which are failing.

We set up the Teacher Training Agency to ensure that teachers get even better. Only yesterday we were commended by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development for the measures that we have put in place to improve failing schools and to identify poor teachers. We have promoted excellence by allowing schools to develop specialisms, and by the introduction of technology colleges and language colleges.

The hon. Member for Brightside has tried to make something of what sees as deficiencies in the training systems; but the greatest benefit that any of us can give to our young people is to raise standards across the board in education and in training. Standards are rising now in what used to be Britain's Achilles' heel—craft training. Youth training delivers good-quality training and is meeting the needs of industry. Eighty per cent. of YT trainees go straight into jobs or further learning, while 73 per cent. get a qualification or a credit towards one. Four thousand young people are investing in their own future through modern apprenticeships. The prime purpose of education and training is to equip people for the workplace. We have invested heavily in education and training, and the dividend from that investment is being paid out in terms of jobs.

Mr. Connarty: The Secretary of State has not mentioned special needs training, a subject to which my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) referred. The problem with special needs training is that, because its funding method is output-based, children and young people who have difficulty in achieving that first output are seen as a burden because there is not enough money put in at the beginning of their training. In Scotland, many people are pulling out of their training course because they cannot make it wash its face. Are there any plans to improve the funding method so that special needs training is delivered to young people?

Mrs. Shephard: I hear cries from my left from the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland, my hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen, South (Mr. Robertson), who deals with these matters in Scotland, that that is not true. I cannot comment on what is going on in Scotland. However, I accept that there have been some problems with the new method of funding in training and enterprise councils in England. We are dealing with that because it is an important matter.

"The most competitive country in Europe today is the UK".

Those are not my words but the words of Jan Timmer, the president of Philips, the Dutch multinational. That has not come about through accident. For 16 years, the Government have pursued sound macro-economic policies and delivered a supply-side revolution. Above all, we have deregulated the labour market. That is why unemployment in the United Kingdom today is below that in Germany. In France unemployment is 11 per cent. and in Spain, 22 per cent. That is no accident because those two countries have both the social chapter and a statutory national minimum wage, as the Labour party proposes we should have.

In Britain, 68 per cent. of working age people have a job. That is more than in Germany, France, Italy or Spain and well above the European average of 60 per cent. More jobs are coming on stream. More than 230,000 new vacancies were notified to jobcentres last month alone, the highest number for six years.

Some of those jobs have been created by long-established UK firms such as Tesco, which has just announced 700 new jobs at nine recycling centres throughout the country. Others have been created by major inward investors who do not seem to share the view of the hon. Member for Brightside. Siemens is bringing 1,800 jobs from Germany to north Tyneside. Fujitsu is bringing 500 jobs from Japan to County Durham. Chung Hwa is bringing 3,000 jobs from Taiwan to Lanarkshire. Those firms are free to locate anywhere in Europe, but they have chosen Britain because, in the words of the chairman of BMW's executive board,

"structural change has made Britain by far the most attractive place to invest in Europe."

While the Government have been putting into place these reforms and pursuing our aims of choice, diversity, excellence and standards, where have the Opposition been? They have been slouching through the No Lobby, where no doubt they will be again tomorrow night, opposing yet again the choice, diversity and excellence which enhance opportunities for individuals and the competitiveness of our nation and which the Government will continue to pursue.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. Before I call the next hon. Member to speak, may I remind the House that there will now be a 10-minute limit on speeches.

4.42 pm

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): This debate combines education and Home Office affairs. While I intend to concentrate my remarks on Home Office matters, may I say initially that we all recognise from our postbags that a serious education crisis is facing this country. Parents, teachers, governors and pupils are showing their deep dissatisfaction with the education system. I very much regret that the Secretary of State again chose to denigrate Bradford. Is it any surprise that many of the young people in our district who face long-term unemployment, who come from families in which no one has been employed for years and who face serious urban deprivation get little satisfaction or reward from our education system?

I would have been grateful if the Secretary of State had given a clear assurance today that the next teachers' pay award will be fully funded by central Government. In Bradford, the fact that this year's pay award was not funded has resulted in our losing a substantial number of teachers. The failure of the Government year on year to give us enough capital allocation has meant that we have not been able to renovate the many old and crumbling schools in Bradford or replace the hundreds of temporary classrooms, many of which the Secretary of State saw when she visited Bradford some time ago.

I will be willing to heed the siren voices who tell us that large class sizes are not linked to education standards when schools such as Eton and Harrow tolerate for their pupils classes of more than 30. When they do that, other parents will be willing to accept large class sizes.

I am glad that the Home Secretary is in his place this afternoon. Will he tell us in his reply to the debate when he intends to take decisions on the transfer of Patrick Kelly and Michael O'Brien to prisons in Northern Ireland? He is well aware of the compelling case for their urgent transfer on compassionate and humanitarian grounds. I hope very much that he will be able to say, either later this evening or very soon, when he will take a decision on their case.

The House is well aware that the prisoner issue is of great concern to both nationalist and loyalist communities in Ireland. Sadly, the Home Secretary seems to regard movement on such matters as a reward rather than something which could play a key and central part in building confidence and support for the Irish peace process. Therefore, I hope that he will take early decisions not only on the transfer of prisoners to prisons in Northern Ireland but on the repatriation of Irish prisoners to the Republic of Ireland now that the convention has been ratified and implemented.

It is clear that, in being asked to accept the proposals on asylum and immigration, we are being asked to approve a definite move towards building a fortress Europe and a situation in which not only do we maintain frontier controls but we build more and more repressive and suppressive internal controls.

The Home Secretary yesterday rightly said that we should adhere to the 1951 convention on refugees and that we should be concerned about those who seek asylum

[Mr. Max Madden]

because they fear persecution if they are returned to their home countries. We must also be concerned about economic migration, which is an enormous challenge, and will be for the world well into the next century. I was interested to see that the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees warned all of us in her recent report:

"We live in a sophisticated world, but we are responding in a patchy and short-sighted way to problems of conflict and displacement".

She warned that at present UNHCR was looking after some 27 million refugees around the world.

I should have dearly liked the proposed legislation to reform what is widely recognised as an extremely restrictive immigration regime in Britain. For instance, I should have liked the primary purpose rule to be abolished. I should have liked to see the definition of public funds, the receipt of which would prohibit certain people from entering this country. I certainly should have liked to see family credit removed from the list of such public funds. Lastly, I should have liked to see the abolition of the so-called probationary year, which requires those who are allowed to enter this country legally to live with their spouse for at least a year before they become entitled to permanent settlement here.

I shall now deal with the benefit regulations that are being considered by the Secretary of State for Social Security. The Home Secretary yesterday told us that Nigeria was not going to be on the white list; we were all glad to know that. He was told by my hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw), the shadow Home Secretary, that only one Nigerian had been granted asylum here this year. I was told yesterday in an answer to a parliamentary question by the Under-Secretary of State, Home Office that that figure had doubled, and that two Nigerians were given asylum in this country in the first 10 months of this year and that a further three have been granted exceptional leave to remain.

I am extremely concerned to be told in another reply from the same Minister that—even though Nigeria has been suspended from the Commonwealth and is widely regarded as having committed serious and gross human rights violations—any Nigerian national who comes to Britain, applies for asylum, has an application refused and appeals to a special adjudicator will not be able to seek benefit during the period between the refusal of the application and the outcome of the appeal. That will also apply, if the regulations are approved and come into force in January, to a large number of other asylum seekers and their children.

I am told that some 4,000 to 5,000 children who are dependants of asylum seekers could, early next year, be left with no income at all. Is the Home Secretary asking the House to approve regulations that will mean that those people have no income at all for what could be a year or more, given the slow pace at which appeals are arranged and heard?

I move to the proposals that will affect employers who may be found guilty of employing an illegal entrant. As I spent considerable time today talking to the head of the immigration policy unit that is concerned with such matters, I have great reservations about the impact of the regulations. It seems that they will place substantial burdens on reputable employers.

The regulations will not be much of a problem for firms that have established personnel procedures and armies of personnel officers but for small businesses, they will impose a considerable burden and will certainly create a lot of big loopholes for the disreputable and unscrupulous to exploit. For instance, there is no need for anyone who is being paid less than £57 a week, or £247—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order.

4.52 pm

Mr. John Patten (Oxford, West and Abingdon): I warmly support the contents of the Queen's Speech in every respect but one. I warmly support my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment in the excellent programme that she has outlined this afternoon.

I give equally warm support to my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for the Home Department. I believe that his tenacity will reap its rewards—and the country will reap its rewards—in future years in more peaceful and secure streets and communities.

The one piece of the Queen's Speech that I cannot support is the proposals that it contains for divorce law reform, which are currently before another place. They are not party political in their nature. Indeed, it is unusual for any Government to legislate on divorce. In this case, it has been apparently done in response to the Law Commission's recommendations.

I regard divorce as very sad for everyone involved—for husbands and wives, and for their children, too, if they have families. I am sure that no one goes up the aisle or up the steps of the registry office with anything other than a lilt in their heart and a conviction that it is for life. Sometimes, alas, people subsequently divorce and children suffer from the after-effects. For all those people, one can feel only compassion and an urge to try to help.

We cannot hide the fact that divorce is one of the major social problems for the United Kingdom. We are the divorce capital of western Europe. I recognise, of course, that divorce is simply part of how we live now. Whatever my personal feelings, I do not seek to make divorce any more difficult than it now is. Indeed, I cannot recall one constituent in the 16 years that I have been in this place writing to me to seek a change in the divorce laws or coming to see me to suggest that divorce should be made easier.

I am fearful of the effects that any further legislation will have on the number of divorces and thus on the families, children and social fabric of our nation. I note that others are fearful of other things. Some commentators have said that the proposals are an essay in political correctness driven by the Law Commission and put matters of legal process above anything else.

Other commentators have remarked on the oddness of this Government, of all Governments, having come forward with legislation for which there is no popular demand of any sort. There is no demand for it from the ranks of the Government's supporters in the Conservative party and in the country, and it may thus alienate some of our supporters, while cheering only those who will never vote for us.

Yet further commentators believe that it is pretty eccentric that a Tory Government should make such legislation the centrepiece of the Queen's Speech in the last Session of Parliament before a general election, because it may well lead us to expend unnecessary ammunition up and down the Tory Benches which should be spent in proper and reasonable parliamentary battle with the Opposition. Friendly fire along the Conservative Benches is always to be decried.

I am most fearful of the practical effects, on which I rest my case, of the proposed legislation. I do not intend on this or on any other occasion to address the moral implications of stripping the marital contract of all meaning and making it a provisional or probationary contract, save to remind myself of what Antoine de Saint-Exupery wrote in his wartime "Letter to a Hostage". He wrote:

"Politics are meaningless unless they serve a spiritual truth".

I think that he was right.

The simple, practical fact, which is undeniable, is that every time since the second world war that the House has legislated on divorce, there has been an immediate surge in the number of divorces. This is apparently because the message sent out by the new laws has been perceived to be that divorce is meant to be easier and that the state backs marriage less and less. That fact has been brilliantly demonstrated by the principal of St. Anne's college, Oxford, Mrs. Ruth Deech, in a series of masterly surveys of post-war legislative experience. It is an empirical certainty that, if we legislate again, there will be another surge in the number of divorces.

That certainty will be compounded by the introduction for the first time of true no-fault divorce on demand, which is what the legislation is apparently designed to bring about. In the United States, where no-fault divorce was introduced in 16 states between 1965 and 1985, the number of divorces in those states went up, on average, by 20 per cent. Australia had exactly the same experience when it changed the law to introduce no-fault divorce in 1975, as did New Zealand when similar measures were introduced there in 1980.

To borrow and adapt a phrase from my right hon. Friend the Governor of Hong Kong, that is the double divorce whammy that I most fear. As far as I can find, there is no stated Government policy to reduce the number of divorces, yet the national interest would certainly be served by that policy, since all the available evidence from social analysts from left to right and back again right across the political spectrum is that in this country children who are brought up in unbroken homes do better at school, commit less crime, enjoy better health and get jobs more easily.

Among those who carry out the research there is a clear consensus. These are uncomfortable and even harsh-sounding things to say, but they are facts. Uncomfortable they may be, but undeniable facts they are. In these times, however, they are too often judged to be too politically incorrect to be mentioned in polite society. Given that divorce is so easy, those are the real issues against which any divorce reform procedures should be judged.

It is always wrong to proceed with changes in the legal process, be it in on divorce or anything else, in a social and economic vacuum. Without being set in such a context, the proposals will, alas, help turn us from the divorce capital of Europe, which we are now, to the divorce capital of the world. They will also prime a terrible social and moral time bomb, which in my judgment, and without claiming the benefit of hindsight or the ability to foresee the future, will explode somewhere between 2010 and 2020.

History will judge the proposals to be two things: first, relativism writ large and, secondly, the last and already deeply dated manifestation of the social thinking of the 1960s consensus, as embodied in the Law Commission. By the first decade of the third millennium, there will have to be a new consensus designed to pick up the pieces, which will stress that lifelong marriage is a proper policy for people and Governments of all colours to strive to promote.

The married family is of central importance to the life of our nation. Just as no hon. Member in this Chamber should ever claim to represent the patriotic party, so it is foolish and wrong for any of us on either side to claim to represent the only party of the family. There are those who hold the married family dear on both sides of the House.

Our boast as Conservatives that we are a party that is strongly supportive of the family is firmly grounded. I still believe it to be true, but we must judge the legislation on divorce contained in the Queen's Speech against that acid test.

5.1 pm

Mr. Don Foster (Bath): Following the Nolan report, the House may wish to know that, until we have clarified our rules, I have suspended my relationship with the two teacher associations with which I was involved.

The Queen's Speech has been an enormous disappointment for many of us. Undoubtedly, it has shown a Government who are not only out of control but out of ideas. The parts of the speech that deal with education show that they are also out of touch. I should have thought that everyone would accept that action to improve the education system is urgently needed. It can be no coincidence that the last of the publications of the national commission on education was entitled "Success Against the Odds".

I hoped that in the Queen's Speech the Government would find the mechanisms to reduce the odds for all schools. Earlier, the Secretary of State was fond of quoting the chairman of Philips. She would have done better to quote the recent world competitiveness report, which showed that our education system is 35th out of 48. Indeed, she mentioned recent league tables, but she will be aware from the analysis of such tables that we are even a very long way from the targets that the Government set themselves.

What has been the Government's response? What is in the Queen's Speech? There was certainly not a commitment to boost significantly investment in education and training, which there should have been and to which the Liberal Democrats are committed. Instead, we have a series of gimmicks and, amazingly, their sole purpose seems to be to draw attention to the areas in which the Government have been least successful in their education policies.

The three Bills proposed in the Queen's Speech fail to tackle the real issues. In one way or another, each is significantly flawed and will disappoint not only parents, teachers and governors, but everyone who wants our

[Mr. Don Foster]

country to succeed in the increasingly global market and who believes that, if we are to do so, it will be only by investing in the skills, training and education of the people.

It is also clear that the Government are rushing in all three Bills. For example, they are proposing legislation on student loans while they are still in the early stages of consultation about their proposals. What is more, in their consultation document, they suggest a number of different propositions. They are not even clear about the direction in which they intend to go. It is fairly clear that they have not thought through their proposals.

The House may wish to know that the consultation on the proposals for allowing grant-maintained schools to borrow money against their assets ended only yesterday. Clearly, the Government are rushing in again. So often, in recent years, they have rushed in with legislation and have had to make significant changes even while it is going through its various stages.

The third proposed Bill concerns nursery vouchers. When the Secretary of State made her statement, we were promised that the proposals that would eventually come before the House would be based on the outcome of extensive trials. As the House is well aware, only four local education authorities throughout the entire land have sufficient confidence in the proposals even to be prepared to be involved in the trials. Yet again, there is a real possibility that failed, ill-thought-out legislation will come before the House.

The three education proposals in the Queen's Speech are rushed and gimmicky legislation, which will fail to address the real issues that face the nation and every education service. As the House is well aware, the former Prime Minister, now Baroness Thatcher, advocated the introduction of nursery education for all three and four-year-olds more than 22 years ago. Yet 22 years later, we are getting nursery voucher proposals from the Government. I happen to agree with Baroness Thatcher that nursery education for all three and four-year-olds is what this country needs—especially parents who want that for their children. I also agree with her that it makes not only sound educational but sound economic sense.

To fulfil the dream that Baroness Thatcher and the Liberal Democrats have, we need a properly funded system that will truly provide high-quality early-years education for all three and four-year-olds. The Government are offering a scheme that is both bureaucratic and cumbersome and will do absolutely nothing for three-year-olds. Indeed, it could harm the existing provision for them. The scheme will not in any way expand provision, as no extra money is being made available within it for the development of much-needed new premises or to train the necessary additional teachers and ancillary staff.

In effect, the scheme is a total con trick. Amazingly, just before the next general election, people might receive through their letter boxes a voucher with a large sum of money—£1,100—written on it, but immediately after the election, they will find that in many parts of the country there is nowhere to cash it in. It is a con trick.

The Government are drawing attention to a policy that has failed. The opportunity for schools to opt for grant-maintained status was introduced in 1988. Since then, only one in 24 of our state schools have chosen to opt for grant-maintained status, despite the bribes that have been on offer by the Government and the various inducements and pressures that have been put on the governing bodies of our schools.

The Government are now consulting on yet another set of proposals, including a fast-track idea for Church schools to opt out without parents even being involved in a ballot. So fast track is it that the Government did not even take their own advice on the length of time that they should consult on the issue. They wanted the consultation to take place in a matter of just a few weeks, against their own Department's advice. They have already had to rescind that and agree to extend the period. It was hardly worth doing so, because I suspect that nearly all the responses that the Government received, even from senior officials in Church organisations, have been against that proposal.

I was interested to hear the speech of the right hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Mr. Patten). He told us that there was only one aspect of the Queen's Speech with which he disagreed. I hope that, if it is proposed to have a fast track with no parental ballot on whether Church schools should be grant-maintained, he will vote against that idea, because he has spoken eloquently in the past about the vital importance of parental choice and involvement in making such decisions.

In the legislation for grant-maintained schools, even if that idea is not added, will be a set of proposals to allow those schools to borrow money against their assets—the buildings, land and so on. What does not seem to have become apparent to the Government is that borrowing money is easy, but paying it back is difficult. I hope that some thought has been given to what will happen to a school that defaults on repayments. Will we see the Prime Minister or the Secretary of State present at the very first repossession of school buildings by a mortgage company? If so, what will be done to ensure the continued education of the pupils in that school?

I question the set of proposals in relation to the Student Loans Company. The Government propose to transfer the risk partially into the private sector, removing some of it from the public sector borrowing requirement. I have no objection to that in principle, but the problem is that they are transferring a cock-eyed system that does not provide adequate support for students. They are not transferring a system that is equitable and fair. It will not provide secure recovery to the lenders.

The Government, in their own consultation, describe a default rate of more than 20 per cent. as "catastrophic", yet the default rate on their own scheme is well in excess of that. I cannot see why anybody in the private sector would be interested in taking on the proposal that the Government have on offer. We shall have to wait to see the outcome of the consultation, as we do not yet know the details of the proposal. Sadly, neither do the Government.

There is no doubt that the Queen's Speech fails to address the real concerns of the nation about education. It fails to offer the desperately needed commitment of increased investment in the education service. It fails, as have the Government's education policies to date, to make any attempt to address the underlying problems that we have in this country; it fails to improve investment in the education service in the way that I have described and to which my party is committed. Because the Queen's Speech fails in so many ways, it does not deserve our support.

5.14 pm

Sir Malcolm Thornton (Crosby): Before I turn my thoughts to the Queen's Speech, may I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Mr. Patten) on his contribution to the debate? Many of the things that he had to say will receive a great deal of support, not only across the Benches but throughout the country. It was courageous of him to say what he did. I thank him for it.

In a very confident and assertive speech, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State clearly set out her vision of the way in which education should be going. I agreed totally with her comments about the speech of the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett), the shadow education spokesman—platitudes, no answers. Where on earth, as my right hon. Friend said, have the Opposition been for the past 15 years?

Perhaps one of the most notable achievements of the Conservative party in government since 1979 has been to bring the Opposition over into the common ground of education that we have sought to establish. That does not mean, of course, that there do not remain differences, but standards, inspection, quality, choice and diversity have been anathema in the past to a large element of the Labour party, at both local and national level.

Those of us who go back—

Mr. Edward O'Hara (Knowsley, South) *rose*—

Sir Malcolm Thornton: No, I shall not give way.

Those of us who go back 30 years in local and national government can find many such examples. If any hon. Member wishes to see them, please write to me. I should be only too pleased.

I shall address my remarks to two elements of the Gracious Speech. The first is nursery vouchers. There is a remarkable consensus on nursery education: on the need for high-quality, universal nursery education wherever possible. Successive reports have been there for all to see. The Select Committee, in two reports—one in 1988, and another that we briefly revisited earlier this year to fit in with the consultation procedure—stated clearly the all-party view that nursery education is a good thing in itself, and that it has education and social benefits that far outweigh the investment required at that stage. It gives tremendous value for money. There is widespread support for it.

No one, least of all me, would turn his back on new money for nursery education, but as I have said to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, if new money is to be provided—I accept that it is limited—would it not perhaps be better to think of widening existing provision than to bring in a new scheme against the background of limited money?

All members of the Select Committee who were privileged to see some of the nursery provision, which we visited during our inquiry, were impressed by its high quality. That in turn impressed on us the need for it to be central in any future provision. We have cast doubts, rightly, on the current system's ability to expand, without reflecting deeply on the need for good quality teaching and premises.

I say to my right hon. Friend and her colleagues that this is essentially a pilot to see whether the scheme can work, whether it can provide what we all want: an extension of nursery education. I ask her to look at it with an open mind; if it does not work, she should have the courage to say so and say that it should not be extended. If it does work, by all means let us have the extra resources to let it expand and develop. A pilot scheme must mean just that, not a commitment to introduce the idea in a blanket form in future regardless of the results that it may show.

My second point concerns grant-maintained schools. We could debate the merits and constitutional, institutional and education implications of grant-maintained status until the wee small hours, but I want to concentrate on a specific aspect.

The Secretary of State spoke of self-government for schools. I have yet to meet a head teacher or governor who would wish to return to the old days when the local education authority reigned supreme. The 85 per cent. delegation that we have today gives massive self-governance to schools, which are using it to expand provision, and enjoying more freedom and a greater say in their own affairs. Parents and other co-opted members of governing bodies are becoming involved in a way that was not possible before the introduction of local management of schools. The urge to go further is there, but I counsel caution for a number of reasons.

At present, an average of 12 per cent. of core services is retained by the LEAs; there is a minimum delegation of 85 per cent. I call this the "15 per cent. issue". What would happen if we created a system tomorrow under which all schools were grant-maintained and all the money was dished out? What freedom would that confer? Let me give some rather interesting figures relating to 1995-96. They apply specifically to primary schools, because I believe that we should be thinking particularly of them.

Primary school spending amounts to approximately £7,000 million. Local authorities' essential costs are approximately £850 million. Expenditure required by the Department for Education and Employment for such purposes as dealing with special needs, advisory inspections and delivery of the national curriculum—many of those requirements are statutory—is estimated at £350 million. The amount that might theoretically be transferred to schools is approximately £500 million.

Additional costs, however, would fall on the Funding Agency for Schools. In the case of primary schools, that would amount to about £100 million. The net amount would be some £400 million. If we divide that among 21,000 primary schools, we arrive at a figure of between £15,000 and £20,000 per school. That will not cover the employment costs of one teacher. Each school would also have to find, from its budget, the money for all the essential services that are currently provided by local education authorities.

If we are to provide freedom, let it be a genuine freedom; but I detect no enthusiasm for the idea of going much beyond where we are now. The debate has moved on since 1988. We have achieved most of what we set out to achieve. As we speak, LEAs are adapting to the new arrangements and trying to find a better way of working with schools to provide the quality of education that the country needs. Let us leave aside the other implications. Do we really wish to deprive parents of their right to choose? They are showing, in the way in which they are now conducting ballots—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman's time is up.

5.24 pm

Mr. Jamie Cann (Ipswich): My choice of subject may well clear the Chamber; if it does, I apologise. I want to talk about housing benefit, and the connection between it and homelessness. I intend to use the example of Ipswich—which I consider fairly representative of middle England—to illustrate the problem caused by those two factors, which I am sure other hon. Members experience in their constituencies.

Of the 42,000 households in Ipswich, 17,000 are tenancies—private, housing association or local authority. Currently, 11,000 of those 17,000 households are receiving housing benefit at one level or another. Ipswich is not a "loose" authority; the Government have recognised its good showing in housing management and the management of benefit. It is also a fairly normal area, and I therefore believe that the figures I shall give are representative of the general position, and give us all cause for concern.

From the time of the first world war until 1979, local authorities—and, increasingly, housing associations—were empowered to provide ordinary people with reasonably priced housing for rent, with the help of Government subsidies. In 1979, however, the Government decided that the subsidy should not finance the provision of buildings, but should be used to the benefit of those living in them—hence the term "housing benefit". The thinking behind that decision was that local authorities were warping the housing market, and that, if the housing market was freed by subsidies for ordinary people, the private sector would move in and build more properties for rent.

Fifteen years on—given all the disquiet that has been expressed by the Department of Social Security, and by many of us, about the mounting level of housing benefit payments—I feel that it is time to look at the matter again. That seems appropriate, as the Queen's Speech contains a proposal to deal with homelessness, and we can expect more from the Secretary of State for Social Security on the subject of housing benefit.

Between 1980 and 1993, the average earnings of a male manual worker in Ipswich have risen 2.47 times in cash terms. Council rents have risen 4.35 times, housing benefit to cover those rents has risen 6.91 times, and rent allowances for the private sector have risen 11.04 times. In other words, rent allowances have risen by five times as much as earnings under the present Government. Rents in Ipswich—a relatively low-paid area—are now £34 a week, on average, for a council house, £55 for a housing association property and at least £60 in the private sector. The burden of rental charges for all properties has risen much more than the average manual wage.

The Government have incurred a cost as well, however. Between 1989-90 and 1995-96, housing benefit payments in Ipswich have risen from £9.9 million to £23 million: they are now 2.3 times as high. The number of people receiving housing benefit has risen from 7,500 to 11,250. Because of rent levels, the popularity of housing association properties among people on the housing waiting list has plummeted. A council house costs £34 a week, while a housing association property costs £55 a week.

When I entered local government a long time ago in 1973, housing association properties were much more popular than council properties, but the reverse is now the case. Housing departments are finding it increasingly difficult to get people to accept housing association properties because of the rents. That must cause concern, because it ties in with the issue of homelessness. People who become homeless and draw income support are the only people who can afford to rent housing association properties.

We are building new ghettoes of people who depend on benefit, and that is the second element of the problem. People who can afford to live in housing association properties find it increasingly difficult to get a job and pay their own rent. I shall give an example.

I know a man—when hon. Members hear about him, they may not like him—who lives in private rented accommodation. He is not in a housing association property, but the figures are near enough. He has worked out that, to come off income support and lose all his housing benefit, council tax benefit, prescription charges and so on, he would have to earn £260 a week. But no one could get a job in his trade in Ipswich that would pay that amount. That man is forced to stay in that property, and the Government are forced to pay out a fortune to fund the family.

That man should be able to earn his own living, and that is precisely what he would do if he were given the opportunity. His situation is a direct result of the Government's policy of producing benefit for people rather than producing houses at reasonable rents so that people can move around and move in and out of the benefits system.

The policy was designed to produce more private sector rented homes, but it has not done that. Of course a few more privately owned homes are available for rent, but essentially, they are being provided by people who cannot sell their homes because of negative equity, have moved to find jobs elsewhere and are renting out their properties. The explosion that was expected 15 years ago in the provision of privately owned property at reasonable rents has not happened.

There is pressure on Government budgets. Housing benefit amounted to £7.9 billion last year, and it is climbing. There is also pressure on allocations, because fewer and fewer family houses are becoming available for rent, as a result of the right-to-buy scheme. People say, as I am afraid some Conservative Members are starting to say, that it is all the fault of 16-year-old girls who get themselves pregnant so that they can get a council house or a housing association property. That is the stereotype—weak authorities giving in to little girls who get themselves pregnant for a home—but it is not true.

In Ipswich, 973 people presented themselves as homeless last year, and 89 of them were housed by the local authority, 92 were housed by housing associations and 102 are in temporary accommodation. That means that 690 people were not housed. Approximately a quarter of those people were housed, and three quarters were turned away. They were not little girls turning up at the council offices with a baby; they were people whose homes have been repossessed, or women who have been let down by men who have moved away and about whom the CSA has been completely unable to do anything, because they have no income and they are divorced and float about.

There is such pressure on the allocation of properties that the Government must be careful in talking through their proposals on housing, because they are in danger of

pointing the finger at a hell of a lot of decent people that the system and Government housing policy are letting down. Let us not make scapegoats of homeless people. Let us re-evaluate housing and do a proper job.

5.34 pm

Mr. Iain Mills (Meriden): I am concerned about aspects of the education Bill, and I may not have time to refer to other topics that have been mentioned in the debate.

Grant-maintained schools are good, provided we follow through what the Secretary of State for Education and Employment said to me earlier and on other occasions about parental choice. There is a balloting procedure for that. I am not against the parts of the Bill that will allow grant-maintained schools to borrow money, but to consider going further—the Church schools in my constituency are concerned that we are considering doing that—and forcing parents and others to move to grant-maintained status would be a denial of their freedom of choice.

We have gone far enough with grant-maintained or grant-aided schools. The local management system has been brilliant. In Solihull, of which I represent half, while the urban half is represented by my hon. Friend the Member for Solihull (Mr. Taylor), it has worked extremely well. To force schools into grant-maintained status would be wrong. I have one grant-maintained school in my constituency. Every other major school has held a ballot and has decided not to go grant-maintained. How can I justify to my constituents any measure that would force them to move further in that direction?

I hope that there will be a definitive answer about Church schools, because my constituency contains several Church of England and Catholic schools, which provide excellent education. Metaphorically speaking, there are queues for places outside some of them. It is difficult to see why any demand management or market management should require any change in status for schools that are doing extremely well and are working hard, not only to be efficient but to develop sources of income apart from the LEA. They are doing that very well. I always present the prizes at the raffles. Perhaps raffles do not raise that much money, but they show the ability and willingness of the schools to raise money for themselves.

In the context of market demand, I should now like to deal with nursery education in Solihull. The Secretary of State agreed with me when I said in an intervention that Solihull provides excellent nursery education. She has seen it for herself, and I assure her that what she saw is an example of the nursery education that is provided throughout Solihull. I have had many letters and petitions, and I have been overwhelmed by the number of chairmen of governors, governors and parents who have come to my advice bureaux over the past couple of months. Other people with burning questions and problems have almost had to wait while I dealt with those delegations.

Bluntly, they were all concerned about why we should have a socialist, bureaucratic, central system of nursery vouchers dictated by the state, when individual local education authorities already have a good system. Why should a Conservative Government force a system upon LEAs? Why can there not be an opt-out, a "those who are not doing the right job" type of system?

Ministers shake their heads in disagreement. I shall read out a few concerns that are being expressed by my local education authority, which is one of the few Conservative-controlled authorities in the west Midlands.

We are not talking about a Labour authority, just to please my colleagues on the Opposition Benches. These are Conservatives, and I share their views and have been convinced. Their concern is that an increasing number of parents are being affected by the funding method, as it is

"principally by a deduction of existing Under 5's SSA using a methodology whereby only the current providers of education for 4 year olds"—

including Solihull—

"lose resources."

I hope that the Minister will take the trouble to respond to that. I repeat: the deduction of the under-five SSA and the methodology mean the current providers of education for four-year-olds lose resources. The letter continues:

"in Solihull, the deduction rate proportionally far exceeds the amount of SSA allocated for the Service. The effect of the methodology is that current low providers of Under 5's education actually retain their SSA, whilst their area receives a second injection of Under 5's funding, because the parents in their area also receive the £1,100 vouchers. Many LEAs retain 50-76% of Under 5's SSA while Solihull loses 90%."

We have run a computer programme that shows that about 42 local education authorities and boroughs have a similar problem. I have talked to Ministers. I have two letters from the Under-Secretary of State for Schools. I have spoken to the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, who tells me I am wrong. My own people, including the chairman of the education committee, who is here today, have told me that they are not wrong. Yet again, Solihull is suffering.

There is an additional problem. Earlier this year, I questioned the Secretary of State for the Environment about the settlement of council tax SSAs. He admitted that the calculation of SSAs on education for Solihull was unfair, so I reiterate that it is a blunt tool to use a national scheme on a local education authority that is providing good education.

Why are a Conservative Government forcing an excellent Conservative-controlled local authority, which is doing a good job, which parents, teachers and governors want, to accept such a scheme? I cannot support the education legislation. I will do everything possible to oppose it, both in the House and outside. [HON MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] I can see that colleagues like that thought.

Unless there is real explanation and some form of dispensation for councils such as Solihull, I cannot accept—unless the Government give me a complete answer—that such a scheme should apply, even if they say, as the Under-Secretary of State for Schools said to me earlier today, that it depends on one parent opting out of a four-year-old scheme and on all the arguments that I have in great detail on paper. Why on earth have we introduced a scheme that affects councils that are already doing a good job? Why not leave them to continue to do the job that they have been doing?

As a colleague, probably from the Opposition, said, the difficulties created by the Child Support Agency do not decrease. I put a marker down that I shall be writing again to the Secretary of State for Social Security to say that I will not accept the operation of the system and the blunt nature of this centrist, socialist doctrine.

5.43 pm

Mr. Gerald Bermingham (St. Helens, South): I congratulate the hon. Member for Meriden (Mr. Mills)—not in a political sense, I hasten to add, but in the sense that he has at least listened to his constituents and to his local authority. I agree with his comments about the Child Support Agency, which is a nightmare for many hon. Members. Many surgeries are full of cases where, clearly, the amounts charged are excessive and exorbitant. When one tries to engage in correspondence with the CSA, one is lucky if one receives a reply. If one does receive one, it misses the point. The agency is obstructive and rude, and does not manage in the interests of the children involved.

Often, there are children in the second marriage too, and the CSA forgets all about those. Of course it is not meant to take the new wife's income into account, but it does. Every rule we create in this House gets broken. Many Conservative Members would agree that the time has come for the whole system to be overhauled. It is a classic example of legislating in haste and repenting at length. Many people suffer as a result of our mistakes in the House, and I blame myself among everyone else when I say that.

I hope that the example of the hon. Member for Meriden will be taken on board by the Home Secretary when he deals with the various Bills in the Queen's Speech. I intend briefly to deal with them. Disclosure is of considerable importance. I declare an interest at this stage as a practising barrister who has both prosecuted and defended, and therefore it is a subject that is well known to me.

The problem with disclosure is that, sadly, there has been a wish to hide and to secrete away matters that could be of great value sometimes even to the prosecution, if they landed in the hands of the prosecuting lawyers, as well as often to the defence. Whether one is prosecuting or defending, there is nothing worse than having a long and detailed trial that collapses because something is suddenly disclosed. In such cases, there is such a great waste of money. When the legislation is introduced on this subject, I hope that we will consider it with great care.

The Court of Appeal rulings in ward and others were a guideline to the direction in which we should go, but they were not the definitive answer. I do not want a paper chase developing, with masses of unnecessary paper being copied. There are ways of dealing sensibly with this matter.

I hope that the House will take time—I make no criticism of any person when I say this—to debate the matters that arose in the Ordtech case and that will arise again in the Scott inquiry. Men went on trial—I do not know who is to blame, or point the finger on anyone at this stage—when documents that could clear them were clearly hidden for reasons of one sort or another.

I do not lay any blame, because one wonders what the prosecuting counsel and the judge were doing in the Ordtech trial, whether the judge ever saw the documentation, or whether prosecution counsel ever realised its value. Those matters need to be considered. We will have the matter of public interest immunity before the House when Lord justice Scott reports eventually.

I am extremely worried about the way in which the asylum and immigration legislation has been reported today. Not a single hon. Member wants the illegal immigrant, the guy who breaks the rules, to get in—I do not think anyone wants that. That is not and should not be a party political matter, but we must always remember that, from time to time, there are places where events occur, regimes come into power, decisions are made, and people are persecuted because of their ethnic origin, their colour or their creed.

There has always been persecution. In the early part of this century, the Jewish community in eastern Europe suffered enormous persecution and, before the second world war, this country took in 30,000 to 40,000 of those people. We took in some of the best brains and most skilled people that we have ever required because, often, with the immigrant come skills, brains and investment. We should never lose sight of that.

In persecuting the few, and I say "persecuting" because some of our procedures involve, on occasions, persecution, not prosecution or investigation—

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Michael Howard) *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Bermingham: The Home Secretary shakes his head. With respect, he has not the experience that I have of this legal sector and of cases that I have attended. Cases involving persecution are a minority, but we must have provisions for dealing with them.

To sweep a broad brush across all those matters, saying, "We will do this," is not always the right way to do things. That is why I ask the Home Secretary, before he rushes into legislation, to listen to the people who know, because hurried legislation is often bad legislation and bad legislation leads to injustice.

We have a place for and a history of protection, and of taking in the persecuted and oppressed from all over the world. I say that as someone who came into this country at the age of seven. I was not born and bred here: I was born in the Republic of Ireland. I am probably one of the few surviving hon. Members who were born there, but, even in my community, I have seen the division and discrimination. There seem to be some people in this land who do not appreciate the fact that all human beings are equal in the eyes of God—whichever God one follows—and I ask the Home Secretary to look carefully at the proposals.

I hope that the Home Secretary has had time to read *The Times* today, particularly the comments of the Lord Chancellor on page 4 about the problems of fixing minimum sentences. I have listened to the arguments in favour of the long brush. The Home Secretary knows my views only too well in respect of mandatory life sentencing and so on.

There comes a time when we must stand back and look at the division of functions within our society. I make no secret of the fact that my view has always been that Parliament legislates, bureaucracy administers and the courts adjudicate, and there is a clear distinction between the three. Therefore, when we look at these matters later in the year, we should look carefully to ensure that one area does not stray into another—that politicians do not stray into the land of the courts, that judges are left to sentence and review sentences, and that the various agencies such as the Parole Board and others are allowed to fulfil their function in full.

We must not go for the popular gimmick, the quick decision, because something has happened. The Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 is a classic example. It is a disaster, but regrettably it is not be reformed at the moment. If one legislates in a hurry, one repents at length.

I hope that I have kept within my time as usual. I raised those points because there comes a time when Parliaments must stand back and think. I hope that this will be one Parliament which, in one Session, will think about the matters that I have raised.

I must make a final cri de coeur from my constituency. The north-west needs investment. We are entitled to European money, and we need Government or other moneys to match it. Would it not be a nice idea if we began to use all the grants and moneys that are available to us to invest in this country and to get Britain working again? We would then solve many of our ills.

5.52 pm

Sir Anthony Durant (Reading, West): I wish to mention education, asylum and the construction industry. Some of us, including my hon. Friend the Member for Ipswich(Mr. Cann), have been locked in Committee on the Channel Tunnel Rail Link Bill for some 60 days, so our presence has not been very noticeable in the Chamber. I am taking this opportunity while the Committee is not sitting to say a few words before returning to deal with that Bill.

I want to talk about direct grant schools. I am worried by my hon. Friend the Member for Meriden (Mr. Mills) who was critical of the push for direct grant schools in his area.

Mr. Dunn: Grant-maintained.

Sir Anthony Durant: All right, grant-maintained schools.

I have experience of Prospect school in Reading, which I have supported. It was in a humble area, mainly council estates, rather than a smart area. That school has now become a city technology college and it is doing extremely well. It has a dynamic head. The Labour party fought the project all the way and behaved extremely badly at all the parents' meetings. My opponent fought the proposals all the way and I am glad that the parents threw my opponent out of the meeting because he behaved so badly.

Consequently, there is now an excellent school in which the attitude is remarkable. The children are enthusiastic and want it to succeed. They believe in it. The head has raised £500,000 from local businesses and has got them involved in buying equipment, and so on. It is becoming a dynamic school in an area that is not reputed to have high standards in education. I think that my hon. Friend the Member for Meriden is over-nervous about grant-maintained schools. I believe that they are excellent and I want to see more of them. I support the Government's developments.

I support vouchers for nursery schools. I have always strongly supported nursery education. It assists the child, it helps single parents and mothers who have to go out to work and it prepares children for full schooling. I have only two nursery schools in my constituency and, therefore, I welcome the idea of vouchers that can be used in private sector schools. There are some good private sector nursery schools where people could put their children if the vouchers existed.

Berkshire has refused to be part of the experiment and I regret that because, until now, it has been go-ahead on education. I condemn the county for that action—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster) may laugh at Berkshire refusing to take part in the experiment. The Liberal Democrats have powerful influence on Berkshire county council. It is no wonder that he is laughing.

I want to deal now with the asylum Bill. As a Member of Parliament dealing with individual constituents I am concerned about the time the process takes. If people come into this country and stay here for two or three years while their case is considered, that makes it much more difficult to ask them to leave. They will have set themselves up and become established; they will have found work or be claiming social security; they will have created a home. That means that it is much more difficult to take them away and send them back to their original place. That is why we must speed up the process.

I am chairman of the all-party construction group, which, funnily enough, meets tomorrow. I am worried about the state of the construction industry, because it is very flat. There is very little growth, particularly in the housing sector where there is very little movement. There are some areas of good news around the country where there is a stimulus, but it is very patchy. The industry needs a stimulus. I am saying this now in the hope that Ministers will tell the Chancellor of the Exchequer that I asked for a stimulus. Although they cannot commit themselves here, they can pass on my information to the Chancellor before the Budget and we might get some help for the construction industry.

The National Federation of Building Trades Employers said that, unless something happens soon, a further 100,000 people could be laid off in the construction industry. A total of 500,000 have already lost their jobs in the industry and I am concerned about that. I believe that there needs to be a concentration on private sector investment in construction work for the Government. It does not seem to have got going. It is a good idea and it is popular, but nothing seems to be happening. We should press for that.

I welcome the housing legislation, but I am concerned about some of the homeless aspects. Homelessness is on the increase. There were 1,157 homeless people in Reading last year but that has increased by a further 280 this year. I believe that one of the reasons for that increase is the break-up of marriages, which was mentioned by my right hon. Friend the Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Mr. Patten). I have looked at the reasons for the sudden increase in homelessness and it is a fact that violence in the home and the parting of husbands and wives are creating more homeless people; therefore, I listened with great care to my right hon. Friend. Some homelessness is caused by loss of tenancy or perhaps inability to keep up with the mortgage payments, but mainly the cause is the break-up of marriages.

There is mention of the Latham report in the Queen's Speech. It is a valuable report and I am pleased that parts of it have been introduced. Michael Latham was a colleague in the House. He produced a useful report on the construction industry. We have started by looking at debt and the payment of subcontractors. I welcome that, because subcontractors suffer from the long delay in obtaining payment from the main contractor. It is a move in the right direction and it will be interesting to see the wording in that Bill.

[Sir Anthony Durant]

I am concerned also about the landfill tax. I hope that it will not be too punitive, because we want recycling. We will not get recycling if there is a punitive landfill tax, because people will dump their stuff anywhere they can. We will go back to cowboys driving around in lorries and dumping rubbish in the streets, and so on. The landfill tax should not be exorbitant.

In general, I support all the proposals in the Queen's Speech. I shall vote for all of them, but I have reservations on the housing Bill—I would like to see what it actually contains. I hope that Ministers will remind the Chancellor that the construction industry is a big employer of people and it needs some stimulus.

5.59 pm

Mr. Edward O'Hara (Knowsley, South): Those of us of a certain age will remember an old popular song called "Three Wheels on my Wagon". I apologise to the House if that is banausic, but nothing is too banausic for the Government. In the song, cowboys are driving their covered wagons and being pursued by Cherokees. They lose wheel after wheel from their wagons and just keep rolling along. That is a good description of the Government, and nowhere is it more apposite than in those sections of the Queen's Speech that deal with education.

The proposal for the semi-commercialisation of student loans is a cheap conjuring trick—two feats of prestidigitation for the price of one. It would remove a large sum from the public sector borrowing requirement at a stroke, and would give the illusion of commercial success; finance houses, which previously would not have touched the scheme, will buy selectively into it because the interest rates will be subsidised. The important word is "selectively", because commercial organisations would not consider bad risks. It would be like the social fund—students most in need of loans would be ruled out by such commercial organisations.

The proposals are beside the point and have nothing to do with what is wrong with the student loan scheme, which is already inequitable and the cause of much student hardship. The proposals will not improve the situation.

I am a member of the Select Committee on Education. After the student loan scheme had been in operation for a year, we looked at a mass of evidence and at the allegations of hardship caused by the scheme. Unusually, the Committee split down the middle. I pay tribute to the chairmanship of the hon. Member for Crosby (Sir M. Thornton)—we usually manage to produce an agreed report. We could not do that on student loans because Conservative Members thought that the evidence of hardship was merely anecdotal. The Opposition issued a minority statement because, in their view, there was ample evidence of hardship.

The Government might have taken an interest in the emerging picture of hardship and corrected the shortcomings of the scheme. Instead, they pressed ahead at a dislocational rate with implementation. The scheme does not only cause student hardship; it causes student drop-out and some students do not even embark on higher education, including many from my constituency—for financial reasons and not on educational grounds. The scheme is a denial of opportunity; an impediment to social mobility through education; a rationing of higher education opportunity at a time of retrenchment; and a waste of the latent pool of national talent. If the Gracious Speech had promised a thorough review—and an eradication of the shortcomings—of the present operation of the student loan scheme, it would have been more appropriate.

Grant-maintained schools will be given the ability to borrow against their assets in the commercial market. That is a recipe for asset stripping, and for further inequalities and divisions in education. Those schools that are best endowed with property, in extent or in value, will be able to buy further advantage over those with less. That will widen the divisions of opportunity between schools in areas where property values differ. Even within Knowsley, a relatively poor area, there are vast differences between schools with constricted sites in areas where land values are low and those with relatively large tracts of land with a high value for residential development or retail shopping.

Schools may choose to sell off land as well as risk it as collateral against loans in the commercial market. What right have they to do that? The schools are only the current trustees of public assets which have been handed over to grant-maintained schools by a stroke of Government legislation. The schools do not have the right to put their assets at risk or out of reach of their successors. There are ample, joint-financing arrangements that can bring private money into education without putting valuable assets at risk, as the proposals suggest.

The big, unspoken issue concerning grant-maintained schools is the idea floated several times by the Prime Minister—the so-called fast-track route into grant-maintained status for schools in the voluntary sector. That is the most desperate proposal yet to try to breathe life into the failed grant-maintained idea, and it would be a betrayal of both diversity and choice. That proposal would, at a stroke of the pen, eliminate a valued educational option. In my constituency, certain areas have more voluntary schools than county schools.

The proposal would also artificially inflate one favoured option. It would be a betrayal of choice because parents would be denied any choice in the matter. On the vast majority of occasions when parents have been given a say, they have given a clear thumbs down to the grant-maintained option. The Churches oppose that option. A Roman Catholic bishop in my constituency, when there was an opt-out ballot, went so far as to publish a letter to parents which said that a proposal to try to beggar one's neighbour by obtaining grant-maintained status was contrary to the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church.

The proposal on nursery vouchers is the most cynical exercise in prestidigitation even by this Government of illusionists. "Never mind the quality, feel the width" might be a good description, but the situation is more serious than that. The Government know it. The scheme will stuff £1,100 promissory notes into the back pockets of recalcitrant Conservative voters in the shire counties, and shamefully, those £1,100 promissory notes will be taken from the budgets of local education authorities such as Knowsley, South.

Will the scheme provide choice? Will the scheme provide equal opportunities? Will it improve standards? Is the scheme being introduced for the sake of diversity? The answers to those questions are no, no, no and yes. The scheme will not provide choice for parents already exercising the choice of private pre-school provision,

probably because their LEA does not provide nursery education. The only difference is that those parents will be given £1,100 to pay bills that they are already paying out of their own pockets.

The scheme will not provide choice for parents in LEAs such as mine with a good record of nursery provision. Their choice of a place in an LEA nursery class will be taken away in many areas. Will the scheme provide equal opportunity? No, again. The £1,100 will not fully fund a nursery place. Some parents will be able to top it up, others who cannot will have to settle for second best and for what £1,100 will buy, especially if the LEA is not able to find funding to top up vouchers.

Will the scheme mean improved standards? No, again. When the Secretary of State for Education and Employment announced the scheme, to give the right hon. Lady credit, the words must have stuck in her throat. She talked of "revisiting standards" and having a "light touch" on inspection. In other words, the nursery vouchers scheme is a cowboys charter. It will produce diversity only of quality, just like all the diversity that the Government have introduced to education in schools in recent years. The truth about the diversity that the nursery voucher scheme will produce is that it will be patchy and divisive.

Today's news sums up the sad facts about the internal dynamic of the market system that the Government have sedulously introduced into education in recent years. In the league tables published today, the gap between high and low achievers in education is shown to be widening. That will be socially divisive. I look forward to the day when we can finally say that we once had a Conservative Government but the wheel fell off.

6.9 pm

Mr. George Walden (Buckingham): The hon. Member for Knowsley, South (Mr. O'Hara) made an intelligent and incisive speech; my pair always makes intelligent and incisive speeches.

This debate takes place against a background of historic events in the past few days—events that will, in one way or another, affect every citizen of the United Kingdom. I am speaking of yesterday's announcement by the Chinese President that he is moving his country decisively towards integration in world trade. It is notable that that announcement was not to be found in any British newspaper yesterday other than the *Financial Times*, which placed the story on the front page and printed an analysis and an editorial.

We, of course, were engaged in more important events—our palace intrigues. The Chinese also used to have palace intrigues, with public humiliations and public confessions and all that goes with them, but they decided to put them aside because they were part of a backward phase in their history. In the future, the Chinese will export to us the video equipment on which we shall follow our palace intrigues.

On education, and as I was talking about backward countries, it is extraordinary—the blame belongs to Conservative and Opposition Members—that we are arguing about a rather spatchcocked scheme to provide a little more partial nursery education to a few more people at the age of four. Although we are supposed to be a pragmatic people, it seems to take an awful long time for us to understand a simple fact about education: that it begins at the beginning.

A brief on the subject has kindly been provided for me. I was immediately struck by the figures. I understand that nursery education costs money. There were two sets of figures: the first shows that the Liberal Democrats were promising nursery education for all three and four-year-olds at a cost of £900 million, which is a large sum, and the second shows that our scheme will cost £750 million, of which £550 million has already been spent.

The difference between providing nursery education for all three and four-year-olds and the rather spatchcocked scheme that we have is amazingly slight. If the difference is only £150 million, let us cough up the money by taxing child benefit, for example, to provide nursery education for all three and four-year-olds. If we do so, perhaps we will not import quite so many Chinese videos as we seem destined to do.

One point that concerns me about nursery education as it will be practised in the United Kingdom is that the Conservative party seems to fail to understand the basic philosophical point—it is a dreadful expression to use, but it is the only one that actually fits—that one can have market forces with telephones but that one cannot blindly apply those forces in the cultural sphere, whether it be in broadcasting or education. Culture is a fundamentally different domain, a mistake of category—again, I am sorry for the philosophical phrase. The effects on the ground, however, are not philosophical but they are very simple.

When there are vouchers in this educationally backward society, people will use them to get out of the state system. They will do so for the very good reason that the state system is often very mediocre and is dominated by the wrong sort of egalitarian thinking. What I fear will happen with nursery vouchers is that the people who are hovering just below the level at which they can afford good-quality, structured private nursery education will spend that money in order to get out of the state system, or to get into a better system—which, by and large, I am sorry to say, tends to be the private sector.

In the end, there will be a bit more nursery education, but there will also be a growing gap, which characterises this country uniquely in Europe, between the quality of private provision, which, by and large, is pretty good, and the quality of the state provision, which, by and large, is pretty mediocre. We now risk building that split into our education system right at the bottom, and thereby—tne hon. Member for Knowsley, South mentioned this point—perhaps even widening it further up. That seems a pretty bleak educational future when other countries are moving geometrically ahead of us, not least in the far east. As the House knows, examination results in Hong Kong are already better than ours.

As for grant-maintained schools, it seems a little distasteful that we should even be thinking of having education on tick, which is what the borrowing facility in fact means. I can just about accommodate it in my mind because I am very much in favour of grant-maintained schools, but let us not forget that those schools will have to pay back that money. Pace my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, these schools, unlike universities, do not have incomes from which they can legitimately get more funds.

I am also afraid that some grant-maintained schools will go a little haywire with facilities. They get very excited about facilities—staff showers or anything else—but tend to get a little less excited about whether they are teaching grammar to the required standard.

[Mr. George Walden]

Finally, and most important, what worries me most about the Government's education policy is the extension of the assisted places scheme, for which I shall not vote. It is presented to us as a bridge between the state and private sectors. In fact, it will widen the gap between the two. I am amazed that there has been no discussion and, apparently, no rudiments of any thinking about it. It is a one-way bridge.

People will leave the state sector—many will be middle-class parents, and that is in itself a scandal—to go to the private sector. The scheme is a massive, and now doubled, subsidy to the private sector, which will maintain and even widen the gap, which is unique to this country, between the state and private sectors. It is the driving factor in the overall mediocrity that characterises our system. We shall never have high-quality state education in Britain while the richest and sometimes the brainiest 7 per cent. at the top of society have nothing to do with it and do not give a damn what happens there. Everyone knows that.

What I should like—I am sure that the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition would agree if they were free from party pressure—is for the £200 million to be put on one side and reserved for private schools that will open their doors to everyone on the basis of selective examination. We might then start to wear down the difference. One of the tragedies of this country is that members of both Front Benches would agree with what I am suggesting but cannot do so, and we all know why—the problem for Labour Front Benchers is selection and, let us face it, for us the problem is self-interest. The notion is, "Those private schools are our schools. That is where we send our children; they are not for you."

6.17 pm

Mr. Gerry Steinberg (City of Durham): I must declare an interest as a consultant to the National Union of Teachers and to the Association of Educational Psychologists.

I shall concentrate solely on nursery vouchers, the most deplorable proposal to come before the House in recent times. What I dislike about the system so much is the fact that the Government have never before had any commitment to nursery provision. For years, they ridiculed Labour Members who tried to persuade them that nursery education was important for the development of young children and constantly refused to acknowledge its benefits. In fact, some Ministers—especially ex-Ministers—were hostile to the very concept. Even now, I suspect that some are sceptical about it.

In 1989, the Select Committee on Education produced a report on education provision for the under-fives. The Government's response was anything but enthusiastic; in fact, it was decidedly lukewarm. The report stated that it should be the objective of central and local government to ensure the steady expansion of nursery education until it is available to all three and four-year-old children whose parents desire it for them.

Far from taking that advice, the Government merely took the credit for the amount of provision created—credit that should have gone to Labour local education authorities, which had increased provision for nursery education. The Government have done nothing to improve provision since; they have depended solely on LEAs to do it—especially Labour LEAs.

The Prime Minister's conversion on nursery education has nothing to do with the benefits to children: it is due to the fact that he now sees it as an important issue in the attempt to get the Tories re-elected. The benefits of nursery education were clear to everybody in education—especially to parents—and the Prime Minister's party was out on a limb as usual. Now that the Conservatives are looking for votes at the next election, he has capitulated on nursery provision.

If the Tories had believed that nursery education was important to the needs of children, they would not have introduced this con trick of nursery vouchers. They would have acted sensibly, providing capital expenditure for local authorities to build nursery schools and provide nursery classes, and revenue to run those classes and schools. They have not done so because they are not committed to nursery provision.

Further evidence of the Conservatives' hostility to nursery education can be seen by looking at where nurseries have been provided over the years. Figures clearly show that children aged three and four are three times more likely to have a placement in a nursery school or class in a Labour-controlled authority than they are in an authority under Conservative control.

I shall quickly look at what is on offer in this appalling vouchers scheme. For every four-year-old in each local education authority, £1,100 will be top-sliced from the standard spending assessment and handed over to a new quango—surprise, surprise, another new quango. Vouchers worth £1,100 will be sent through the post to parents by using information from child benefit records. Parents may use the voucher for a half-day nursery education or school place or for education provided by a voluntary group.

An inspection team—not the Office for Standards in Education—has to prove the eligibility of the organisation providing nursery education, but qualified teachers are not necessary. I wonder why. Perhaps it has something to do with the fact that it is a cheap method of providing nursery education. I leave hon. Members to think about that.

Some new money will be given by the Government—about £165 million. The scheme will not involve three-year-olds but will involve all four-year-olds, including those at school until the term after their fifth birthday.

Local education authorities will be reimbursed by an agency—again, surprise, surprise, another agency—which will send the vouchers to parents who will then return them to the LEA. What an absolute mess that will be. At best, it will be cost-neutral to LEAs currently providing nursery education.

It may be in the short-term interest of LEAs providing little nursery education to volunteer to obtain some new money, but most LEAs will not benefit in the slightest. The scheme is not only flawed but is morally wrong. It can only ruin nursery education in this country.

The Secretary of State has claimed in the House that provision in the state sector will remain free, but parents will have to top up the value of the voucher should they wish to buy provision in the private or voluntary sector where the cost exceeds £1,100. It remains—to me anyway—unclear who will foot the bill for a child who

continues in a maintained nursery class or school, or in a reception class in a primary school. What is clear, however, is that £1,100 for each four-year-old will be top-sliced from the local authority's SSA and handed over to a new quango.

The scheme is nothing but a pre-election bribe. The Tories are banking on people believing that they have been given £1,100 to spend. They hope that, when the voucher arrives through the letter box in the run up to the next election, people will believe that they have won the lottery. It is a con intended to trick parents into thinking that their children have been given a new nursery place when, in many parts of the country, no new places will be created—in fact, existing provision will be threatened.

Pre-school provision ranges from catering for around 22 per cent. of children in some parts of England and Wales to 97 per cent. in other areas, and there are more than 200 black spots in England where there is little or no nursery education and no provision available. Government plans skate over that. The reality is that local authorities that have invested in good provision will lose out under the scheme, whereas those that have not done so are unlikely to see any change in their provision.

No capital is being provided to enable the building of nursery schools, and therefore areas that do not have LEA-provided nursery schools will not be able to build any. What good will vouchers be in those areas? I cannot see where places will come from, other than, of course, from the private sector.

Nursery vouchers will provide a massive handout of public money—to parents who can already afford to send their children to private nurseries, to owners of those private nurseries and to the private company that will run the scheme.

That company stands to get £20 million of taxpayers' money for administration and—of course—profit. That money could have been used to provide proper nursery education. There is no money in the scheme to allow local authorities to build new nurseries where they are needed, and there is no cash to train new staff or to meet start-up costs.

This scheme could even result in the reduction of nursery provision in areas such as my local authority, Durham, which has a very good record of provision of nursery places, because every time a voucher is used for a private place the money given to the LEA will be cut by its value. A nursery place costs more than the value of the voucher. If a local authority's funding for nursery education is reduced to the value of the voucher, it will be forced to reduce provision. That is an obvious mathematical conclusion.

Parents should also remember that the scheme applies only to four-year-olds; there is nothing for three-year-olds, among whom there is some of the greatest need. We must remember that 95 per cent. of children who attend nursery school started going when they were three years old. So there is a real danger that the withdrawal of funding from local government will result in a squeeze in the provision already being made for three-year-olds by many local authorities.

We are told that £545 million is to be clawed back from local authorities and recycled through vouchers. The Secretary of State has pledged that no four-year-old will lose an existing place. She has not explained how local authorities will top up the cost of each place—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order.

6.27 pm

Mr. Winston Churchill (Davyhulme): I should like to touch on two matters in the limited time available—the first and foremost being the responsibility of parents for the criminal acts of their children. At a time of rapidly increasing juvenile crime—despite misleading official statistics that tend to suggest that the incidence of such crime is reducing, when all our constituents know very well from personal experience that the contrary is the case—and when, for instance, in my Greater Manchester constituency there are only 10 police officers on duty of a night time to cover a population of more than 100,000, it has become urgent to invoke parent power in the battle against juvenile crime.

In recent years, the Government have introduced a series of measures designed to extend the use of financial penalties against the parents of young offenders. In 1993, for example, parents were required to pay 6 per cent. of fines and 14 per cent. of compensation orders made against juveniles. It has now become urgent to extend that practice far more widely, to make it clear, especially to that irresponsible element of parents who do not match up to their parental responsibilities, that they will be held legally and financially responsible for the acts of vandalism and the criminal activities of their children who are under 18 years of age.

Only where parents or guardians can demonstrate that they have done their best to exercise such parental control should they be relieved of financial responsibility. In cases where the family in question is on benefit, the time has come for up to 20 per cent. of that benefit to be docked to pay fines and compensation. Only in that way can parent power be invoked in the fight against juvenile crime. Only in that way will parents ensure that they know where little Jimmy is tonight, what he is getting up to and with which friends he may be consorting. Parent power is the last but best hope of deflecting many youngsters from a lifetime of crime.

A key element must be the removal of the present absurd and outdated concept, which is central to existing legislation relating to juveniles, that children under 14 are presumed incapable of committing a crime unless the contrary is proved. In the face of the steep rise in the number of juveniles responsible for dozens or even hundreds of acts of burglary and theft, and in the face of the horrifying increase in the number of juveniles responsible even for crimes such as rape, that concept must be held to be untenable. The law must be changed, and I trust that my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary will take urgent steps to change it.

The second matter I address tonight is the immigration and asylum Bill proposed by my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary, which I broadly welcome in the terms he outlined in the House yesterday. However, there is a central and deeply disturbing point. Given that the cold war ended more than five years ago, it might be thought that, in recent years, the Security Service, for which the Home Secretary has a special responsibility, would have had some spare capacity to deal with the emerging areas of threat, specifically the terrorist threat to Britain's neighbours, allies and fellow democracies.

[Mr. Winston Churchill]

How has it come about that a Conservative Government have allowed our immigration and asylum procedures to be so abused that the United Kingdom has now become the acknowledged safe haven for a wide range of terrorist groups from different countries—groups bent on acts of terrorism against our partners, allies and friends? I ask that question because in recent months—

Mr. Howard *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Churchill: My right hon. and learned Friend shakes his head. I hope that, before our debate concludes tonight, he will explain how representatives of the Kurdish terrorist movement against our NATO ally, Turkey, have been admitted to the United Kingdom and are allowed to remain in this country despite their known involvement with acts of terrorism against Turkey. How is it that the radical—

Mr. Howard: I assure my hon. Friend that, where we have evidence of terrorist complicity, we exclude people before they enter the country on the ground that their presence is not conducive to the public good. Where we have information, on which we can act in relation to people in this country, about any complicity in terrorist action, we can take action to remove them from this country. The difficulty with the group of people to whom my hon. Friend has referred and whom he has in mind is that there may be many who sympathise with the overseas activities of terrorists, but who do not themselves engage in terrorist action. There is a clear distinction to be drawn between the two groups. Where no information links those people to terrorist activity, we do not act, and I invite my hon. Friend to consider the possibility that it is right that we should not act.

Mr. Churchill: My right hon. and learned Friend is sufficiently well versed in these matters to know the distinction between those who directly commit acts of terrorism and those who are active sympathisers, fund raisers and godfathers. I suspect that it is, above all, the latter roles that are the problem in this country. I refer not only to those involved on the Kurdish side against our Turkish allies, but to those involved with the radical Palestinian group Hamas, which is violently opposed to the recent moves to normalise relations between Israel and the Palestinians and Israel and its Arab neighbours.

Only this Sunday, *The Sunday Telegraph* reported:

"Israeli officials say they have accumulated evidence which proves that orders for terrorist operations are being issued from London by military commanders of Hamas, the group responsible for the recent spate of suicide bombings in Israel and the Gaza Strip.

The Israelis also claim that Hamas leaders are using London as a base to publish Islamic propaganda and raise funds to support terrorist operations."

Furthermore, there is evidence that Algerian extremists who have been involved as godfathers in recent terrorist outrages in France are based in this country. That is all deeply disturbing. I must ask my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary what MI5 and the Home Office have been up to in allowing those who engage or strongly support such activities to be based in this country.

Mr. Howard: My hon. Friend makes some serious allegations. He says that there is evidence. If there is evidence, he should supply it to the authorities. I must tell my hon. Friend, for whom, as he knows, I have great respect, that where there is evidence, we act. We recently deported from this country to France someone in respect of whom we had evidence of activity. We have taken action in relation to various Kurds present in this country in respect of whom we had evidence. Where we have evidence, we act. If my hon. Friend or anybody else with whom he is in touch has evidence in respect of people in this country, it should be drawn to the attention of the authorities and action will then be taken.

Mr. Churchill: I am grateful to my right hon. and learned Friend for that assurance. As he is well aware, it is obviously difficult to come up with clear-cut evidence in this area. All I ask is that he reinforces the resources available to him closely to scrutinise—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

6.37 pm

Mr. George Galloway (Glasgow, Hillhead): It takes some doing to outflank the current Home Secretary on the ground of illiberality, but the hon. Member for Davyhulme (Mr. Churchill) has done so. In so doing, he has raised the issue that I wish to pursue—the role of MI5.

I refer to the part of the Gracious Speech from which will flow a proposal to let loose MI5 on to the streets of this country as a kind of British FBI. That proposal has created a frisson, if not of fear, of definite nervousness throughout the land—from members of all parties in the other place earlier this week, through the nation's chief constables, through the upper reaches of Scotland Yard, through the civil liberties lobby, through the trade union movement and through many sections of the media, by no means confined to the liberal left.

There are two main reasons for that shiver along the national spine. The first is that the proposal has not been the subject of national debate. It has not been thought through properly and it is driven not by policing priorities, but by the need to find work for the newly idle hands in MI5 in the wake of the collapse of communism and in the wake of the Irish ceasefire.

The idea is driven, too, by the need to find something to do in the enormous white elephant, the spooks' palace at No. 11 Millbank, with its lavish furnishings, its squash courts, marble staircases and chandeliers, its £25,000 rock face in the trophy room and all the other amenities, none of which are enjoyed by humble police stations all over the country, including that in Davyhulme in which, as we have just been told, there are only 10 policemen available of an evening to police an area with a population of 100,000. Those facilities are not for our undermanned and under-resourced police stations.

The idle hands of MI5 are one of the reasons for the turn in Government policy, which has not been thought through. There has been no proper definition of the terms "organised crime" and "serious crime", which we are told that the "MI5/British FBI" will fight. No definitions have been laid, either, of the areas in which MI5 will be unleashed, and no structure has been agreed for the "new FBI". No relationship has been charted out between it and, for example, the national criminal intelligence service or the regional crime squads.

No wonder the chief constables are so uneasy about the development. Indeed, in the newspaper this morning we can read the following in a letter from the respected former chief constable of Devon and Cornwall, Mr. John Alderson:

"the Home Secretary, Michael Howard, informed us that our secret political police (MI5) would also now be diverted to police duties."

The writer says that to put such a building block of the police state into position

"in one week must be a record, outside war."

That is a serious charge.

Mr. Howard: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Galloway: Yes, but I only have a short time, so I hope that the Home Secretary will be brief.

Mr. Howard: Does the hon. Gentleman know the difference between a chief constable and a former chief constable?

Mr. Galloway: Yes I do, and I also know that the Home Secretary is aware of the anxieties about the proposals not only among serving chief constables but in Scotland Yard itself.

Mr. Howard *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Galloway: The Home Secretary can shake his head as vigorously as he likes, but he knows that in Scotland Yard and in the offices of chief constables all over the country, there is anxiety about the introduction of the political policemen, unaccountable and untransparent, who will be injected into the policing system of this country.

The second reason for the anxiety is the nature of MI5. It is quite an achievement to have changed the police in the 41 years of my lifetime from a force based on "Dixon of Dock Green" community policing, with public support and familiar faces down on the beat, with officers seeing where the crime was and being where the people were, to a system in which the buggers and burglars of Peter Wright's MI5 will take Dixon of Dock Green's place. Perhaps only the present Home Secretary could achieve that with the degree of arrogance that he is displaying this evening.

MI5 and dirty tricks have become synonymous in the public mind. MI5 is unaccountable and of dubious loyalty to the democratic process at certain times and in certain sections, with a dubious relationship to the law. In yesterday evening's mesmerising television performance, which struck at the heart of the British establishment, Her Royal Highness the Princess of Wales made clear allegations. She said that the tape recording of her conversation with Mr. James Gilbey had definitely been deliberately recorded and released into the public domain with a view to discrediting her.

Who, anywhere, believes that Britain's security services were not involved in the commissioning and execution of that crime, either directly or by using what they call their "alongsiders", in an attempt to change public opinion about the Princess of Wales? Her Royal Highness also said that the telephone was tapped at the home of Mr. Oliver Hoare, her former friend. She said that that was done by the local police station, but that cannot be true, because local police stations do not tap telephones, do they, Mr. Deputy Speaker?

Does anyone out there believe that MI5 was not involved in the tapping of that telephone, or in commissioning the Royal Marine who on "Kilroy" this morning said that he was deployed to spy on the Princess of Wales's relationship with Mr. James Hewitt?

Does anyone believe any longer that MI5 was not involved in acts of subversion against the elected Labour Government of the late Harold Wilson? Certainly the subsequent head of MI5 conceded to Harold Wilson in 1975 that sections of MI5 connected with Peter Wright had indeed burgled the offices and homes of the elected Prime Minister of this country, and bugged his telephone conversations and those of his associates.

Is there anyone out there who still believes that MI5 staff, including its present head, Stella Rimington, were not involved up to their necks in the subversion of the great miners' strike of 1984-85—a legal industrial action taken by hundreds of thousands of workers to defend their jobs? The strike was subverted by provocations and by the placing of agents in the miners union, all of which has been outlined in the brilliant work, "The Enemy Within: MI5, Maxwell and the Scargill affair", by Seumas Milne, the labour editor of *The Guardian*. *[Interruption.]* I commend that work to Conservative Members, who should read it before they pour scorn on what I am saying.

Is there anyone out there who does not believe that MI5 and its present head, Stella Rimington, were involved in trying to break the miners' strike, or that MI5 was not involved with Mr. David Hart, who is now ensconced as an unpaid civil servant in the Ministry of Defence, whence he is subverting British defence and manufacturing interests? Does anyone believe that in those days that adviser to the Secretary of State for Defence was not involved, in his role as a conduit for both American and British intelligence, in the subversion of democratic legal trade union activity in this country?

I put it to the House that such people—unaccountable and of dubious democratic loyalties—who were at large in MI5 then and, I believe, still are, are not the sort of people who should be introduced into the policing of this country.

If there is organised crime, and there is, it should be dealt with by the police—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

6.48 pm

Mr. Bob Dunn (Dartford): Thank you for inviting me to speak on the Loyal Address, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I can say at the outset that I welcome all the contents of the Queen's Speech and shall vote for it. Incidentally, my support is not conditional on the results of an election on Thursday.

I have fully supported the assisted places scheme both as a Minister and as a Back-Bench Member. Indeed, my hon. Friend the Member for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey) and I both served on the Committee on the legislation that enacted all its provisions. I believe that it is now time to see whether the application of the scheme should be specialised a little further.

We should consider whether the benefits of the scheme could be extended to children who suffer from disabilities related to hearing or sight, or from other handicaps. Could such children, through the agency of their parents, gain

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access to private schools and foundations dealing with those disabilities in particular, and supplying more specialised and focused education? That would be welcomed by many parents, who would see it as a real opportunity to extend choice at a time when some local authorities are politically hostile to the idea of funding places for local children in schools, and others do not have the necessary resources.

We have heard a great deal today about training, jobs and education, and I wish to refer to nursery education and the voucher system. But I wish to speak for a moment about the implications for the House and for the country of the social chapter. Many thousands, if not millions, of people outside the House do not really understand what the social chapter is. They see it as something benign that is maligned by the Government, who do not support it.

It is worth placing it on record that the Government decided in 1992 not to sign up to the social chapter of the Maastricht treaty. The reasons why they did not do so were very simple and straightforward. The Government believed that the social chapter would impose heavy labour costs on industry and business, and would therefore contribute to the destruction of jobs for our young people who were leaving school or higher education. But what is the social chapter? I feel that all of us—both Ministers and Back-Bench Members—have a duty to spell out the implications of the social chapter to people who may not understand the practicalities of its proposals.

First, the social chapter would compel companies to establish works councils. Secondly, it would lift the ban on the closed shop. Thirdly, it would lift the ban on "union labour only" contracts. Fourthly, it would abolish the legal requirement for trade unions to publish their accounts to their members. When it is spelt out in graphic and stark detail, we can see why the Labour party is prepared to sign up to the social chapter.

Across the European Union, Britain's opt-out is envied. The socialist and former President of the European Commission, Jacques Delors, said that, by opting out, Britain had become a "paradise for investment". Recent evidence has supported the Delors claim. Toyota, Xerox and Mazda from Japan have invested here. Two multinational companies from America have relocated jobs in Britain. In Europe itself, Rockwell, the print machinery producers, has moved jobs from Nantes to Preston. Black and Decker, the United States company, closed its plant in Germany in February 1994 and moved to County Durham. Hoover switched production from Dijon to Cambuslang.

Unlike Labour, the Conservative party opposes a national minimum wage on the ground that it will destroy jobs.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. This is all very interesting, but I cannot find anything in the Queen's Speech that deals with the social chapter. The hon. Gentleman should bear that in mind.

Mr. Dunn: I was speaking about nursery vouchers, and trying to link this subject with the education system. My point is that there is no point at all in having an education system that turns out bright, well-equipped and talented young people if there is a national minimum wage that destroys their job opportunities. There is no point at all in having a well-motivated and well-educated unemployed young work force.

In European countries that have a minimum wage, the rates of unemployment are much higher. In France, one in four of all young people are unemployed as a direct result of that country's minimum wage law. In Spain, unemployment affects nearly a quarter of the entire population, with one in three young people unable to find work because of Spain's minimum wage law. The Labour party would embrace everything that comes from Brussels, including the minimum wage and the social chapter.

Education has been a special interest of mine for some years, and I should like to emphasise my support for the choice and diversity of opportunity in our communities, and particularly in my constituency. Dartford's grammar schools have once again shown themselves to be committed to excellence, with an outstanding set of A-level and GCSE results. Those schools provide an academic education for pupils, regardless of income and background. Most local authorities are envious of Dartford's range of quality schools, and there is no reason to suppose that we shall not have equally good nursery schools under the voucher system as outlined in the Queen's Speech.

The Labour party wants to destroy the very qualities that make a good grammar school. If a grammar school cannot choose its pupils by identifying whether they would gain from a highly academic education and if it has its right to interview prospective pupils taken away, that grammar school will become a comprehensive school. Under a Labour Government, Dartford would lose what must be its most precious asset—the grammar schools.

We heard talk today—from Members on both sides of the House, surprisingly—about grant-maintained schools. Grant-maintained schools have many qualities, and I have nine such schools in Dartford—four grammar schools and five secondary schools. All the schools benefit from their financial and institutional independence, which is why I welcome the opportunity for grant-maintained schools to borrow against their non-core activities for future capital developments.

Grant-maintained schools also receive their funding directly from the funding agency, which allows them to control 100 per cent. of their resources. With those resources, they can and do employ more teachers and increase spending on books, equipment and resources. In grant-maintained schools, there is no wasteful bureaucracy and no political decision making, which provides better value for money and better education all round. Because of that, I shall be supporting the vote on the Queen's Speech, and I shall continue to support grammar schools in Dartford.

6.56 pm

Mr. Greg Pope (Hyndburn): The education proposals in the Gracious Speech were a disappointment to many people. They disappointed Opposition Members, and they appear to have disappointed many Conservative Members. The hon. Members for Meriden (Mr. Mills), for Crosby (Sir M. Thornton) and for Buckingham (Mr. Walden) made measured speeches that expressed their disappointment at the education proposals. I am sure that we shall hear from the hon. Member for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey), who will probably be disappointed because the proposals

are not right-wing enough. The hon. Member for Dartford (Mr. Dunn) ignored most of the proposals, but he was perhaps speaking to a wider electorate rather than to Opposition Members.

One of the disappointments of the Queen's Speech for many people was the lack of any proposals to limit class sizes. In my county of Lancashire, about 40 per cent. of primary-age children are being educated in classes of more than 31 pupils. If the Government believe that class sizes do not matter, why do so many Conservative Members choose to educate their children not in the state sector, but in the private sector, where the ratio of pupils to teacher is much lower?

John Coe, of the National Association for Primary Education, commented on the fact that the existing protection for children contained in the Education (School Premises) Regulations 1981 could be removed if, as is widely believed, the Government repeal the regulations later this month. Mr. Coe said that it is

"embarrassing for Government to have a standard and a deadline which many primary schools are unable to meet."

The only logical conclusion is that, far from responding to parental concerns about class sizes, the Government are paving the way towards allowing class sizes to increase. There is no doubt that the underlying causes behind the rise in the past year have been the cuts in the education budget that were agreed a year ago and the Government's refusal to fund the teachers' pay rise in full.

Last year, I went to see the then Minister for Schools—now the Minister of State, Department for Education and Employment—and he was commendably frank. He simply said that the Treasury agreed a cut and passed the cut on to the Department for Education. The Department passed it on to the local education authorities and it was up to the LEAs to pass it on to schools. That must be a real comfort to governors throughout the country who are finding that the books do not balance in their schools. Not only in my constituency but everywhere else in the United Kingdom, many schools are having to fund teachers' salaries out of their reserves. That is obviously not what the reserves are for, and there is a limit to how long the practice can continue.

Only yesterday, I went into St. Anne's and St. Joseph's school in my constituency, an excellent primary school. I spoke to the head, Mr. Keegan. He gave me a petition of 700 names, which I sent on to the Secretary of State. It objected to the cuts that the school has had to face in the past year. He also gave me a letter that he had sent to the Secretary of State, in which he said:

"we are extremely concerned about the prospect of not being able to afford the teaching staff our children need.

Over the past two years, the Governors of the school have been using reserves to maintain the provision established at the school. This action cannot be repeated as the reserves have been used up.

I realise that there will be many schools facing far greater difficulties than us and I appeal to you, on their behalf and ours, to do everything in your power to ensure that our children's futures are not adversely affected because of inadequate funding".

If that was an isolated incident, it could perhaps be dismissed. The blame could perhaps be laid at the door of the local education authority. Yet Conservative Members and Ministers must know from their experience in their constituencies that it is not an isolated experience. It is being repeated in every local education authority and every constituency in the country.

The words that I have quoted are not the words of some extremist or even a Labour party activist. They are the words of someone who has dedicated his adult life to teaching; someone who cares about what goes on in his school and now finds that he no longer has the tools to do the job to which he has dedicated himself. Even if Ministers ignore what we have to say, I implore them to take notice of what people in the teaching profession are saying.

I notice that proposals to allow grant-maintained schools to retain all the proceeds from property disposals are included in the Queen's Speech, even though 50 per cent. of those assets are currently returned to the local education authorities for debt redemption. I always thought that the Tories were fairly keen on debt redemption, but obviously they are not that bothered when it comes to doing a favour for their friends in the grant-maintained sector.

Perhaps more interesting is what is not included in the Queen's Speech, such as the proposal to fast-track voluntary-aided schools to grant-maintained status. The proposal is out for what passes for a consultation process under this Government. Although the consultation period is not yet over, it must be clear even to the set of Ministers on the Front Bench how determinedly hostile the Churches are to such a measure. The proposal is a sign of abject failure. Voluntary-aided schools have had plenty of opportunity in the past few years to opt out. Overwhelmingly, they have chosen not to do so.

Last year, only 15 voluntary-aided schools even went to a ballot. Of those 15, more than half chose to remain in partnership with their local education authority. In the light of that hostility from the Churches and from schools, the Government are considering the simultaneous opting out of all 4,000 voluntary-aided schools unless the governors operate a veto. Another idea in the consultation paper is to scrap parental ballots.

Whatever happened to parental choice? I sat through the Committee stage of proceedings on the Education Act 1993, in which Ministers parroted on about parental choice and diversity. We are entitled to ask: where is the choice and diversity in the proposals currently out for consultation? It appears that, if the proposals go ahead, parents of children in voluntary-aided schools will end up with no choice. If the Minister has his way, there will be precious little diversity either.

Hundreds of thousands of parents like myself have their children educated in voluntary-aided schools. On behalf of those parents, I should like to make an objection. How dare the Government consider altering the status of our children's schools without even bothering to consult us? There is an historical partnership between Church schools and local education authorities. Most Church schools value that partnership and have chosen to keep it. That is what rankles with the Government. They have given parents choice. Parents have exercised it and overwhelmingly rejected grant-maintained status. That is obviously not good enough for the Prime Minister. He wants to make parents do his bidding. I warn the Minister on the Front Bench that, if he forces voluntary-aided schools to opt out without consulting parents, he does so at his peril.

We now learn that the Government propose to allow grant-maintained schools to sell off surplus school premises. Given the dilapidated nature of most school

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premises, we shall be interested to see how that works. I do not think that there is a huge queue of investors out there eager to snap up the leaky schoolrooms that are the one lasting testament of the Government. The same daft proposals extend to selling off school playing fields. It was once said that the battle of Waterloo was won on the playing fields of Eton. It is obviously clear that any future battles will not be won on the playing fields of grant-maintained schools, because the fields will have been sold off and turned into Tesco car parks.

What is astonishing about all this is the sheer poverty of aspiration of the Government when it comes to education. Where is the programme that will give young people the skills that they will need in the next century? It is certainly nowhere to be seen in the Queen's Speech. Instead we have a student loans Bill which aims not to provide proper support for students but to bail out the fiasco of the student loans scheme. We have a nursery vouchers scheme that will not create a single new nursery place, but will create a huge bureaucracy of a kind which the Government have always said that they oppose.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment (Mr. Robin Squire): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Pope: I do not have time; otherwise, I would give way.

The Government's programme really is thin stuff, even by their standards. Young people deserve better. Sadly, I fear that they will have to wait until after the election.

7.6 pm

Mr. David Tredinnick (Bosworth): My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, through the Queen's Speech, has set out three priority areas: to make Britain the enterprise centre of Europe, to step up the fight against crime, and to increase choice in education still further. I strongly support all three of those objectives. I suggest that the success of the first is essential to providing funds for the second and third. Our success in creating an enterprise culture is amply demonstrated by the fall in unemployment and the increase in the number of those in employment.

The subject of the debate tonight is education and home affairs. Although education will not be the main thrust of my speech, I welcome the proposal to increase the borrowing powers of grant-maintained schools. That is right. I support the nationwide scheme for pre-school nursery vouchers, which has been much criticised by Opposition Members. The scheme will be welcomed in Leicestershire. I know that, in my constituency, schools will be looking to expand under the new system.

I support the proposal to double the assisted places scheme. I was at the Dixie grammar school on Friday, which to date has been excluded from the old scheme. I appeal to my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Front Bench to consider that school and other excellent private schools in my constituency which are anxious to broaden the base of their intake. I shall be writing on their behalf to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State.

I wish to focus on law and order, and in particular the Criminal Procedures Bill and the Asylum and Immigration Bill. I shall suggest some measures that should have been included. The Conservative party has been accused of playing the race card by introducing the Asylum and Immigration Bill. I spent some time at Oxford university looking at policing and public order in a multiracial Britain.

I wish to refer to that a little later on. First, I want to look back at two landmarks in policing in the past 20 years. The first is the Edmund-Davies report. I remind the House that, under the last Labour Government, through bad pay and neglect, 9,000 men left the police service. That is a stark contrast with what is happening now, with my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister committing the Conservative Government to creating another 5,000 police.

It was, of course, the Conservative Government that came into office in 1979 that implemented the Edmund-Davies pay recommendations in full, and stopped the haemorrhaging of the police. Since then, there have been 200 more police officers in Leicestershire.

My second point concerns the defining moment of the Brixton riots and the Scarman report. It was on the basis of the riots and the report that the Police and Criminal Evidence Bills of 1983 and 1984, which subsequently became the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984, were introduced. PACE responded to Scarman's fears about the police becoming detached from the public. Section 106 of that Act provided for the community consultative groups. The huge increase in neighbourhood watch schemes flows directly from that Act. There are 2,500 in Leicestershire, which I welcome.

In Earl Shilton, for example, in my constituency, the village self-appraisals and village profiling that have taken place as a part of the move towards community policing are both popular and successful. The appointment of a new beat officer in such a village, and its access to a sergeant and six officers from neighbouring Hinckley, and the appointment of an officer specifically responsible for strategy, show that community policing is working well.

One measure that I hope that Hinckley will benefit from is closed-circuit television. The town is on Watling street, and has Nuneaton across the way and Coventry not far away. I hope that Hinckley will become part of the new closed-circuit television camera scheme, and that that will be extended to Earl Shilton. I am amazed that the Labour group there opposes that proposal. Surveys across the country show the benefits of such a scheme: indeed, it is supported by the local police.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary, in a memorable speech at Blackpool in October 1993, set out 27 points on law and order that he intended to implement. He deserves to be congratulated as he comes to the Dispatch Box this evening, able to tell the House that he has completed action on those 27 points. I have no time to consider them—unless I had 27 minutes—but I suggest to my right hon. and learned Friend that soundings among my constituents show that there is a strong feeling, first, that criminals should always be forced to compensate their victims.

Secondly, prisoners should be made to pay for their keep in prison, where possible. Thirdly—I refer to the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Davyhulme (Mr. Churchill)—we need much greater parental involvement if we are to stop crime. That is all tied up with the breakdown of the family, but parents have to be made liable for the crimes of their children.

Fourthly, I want identity cards to be brought in. I have no doubt that an identity card with a fingerprint or DNA sample on it would be of huge benefit in identifying criminals, detecting fraud, eliminating under-age drinking and identifying accident victims. It could also contain medical information. In a society that is worried about law and order, we have to bite the bullet and take that measure. I would not object to the Department of Social Security implementing the scheme.

The Criminal Procedures Bill will assist with the rapid conviction of criminals. I welcome that, and anything that will speed up the justice system, which is a considerable concern. There is a feeling that justice is too slow. It is right that there should be retrials when jury nobbling occurs.

I referred to research that I did at Oxford in the 1970s into race relations. I am surprised at the stance taken by the Labour party on the asylum and immigration Bill. I have always believed that it is essential that the majority of the population, excluding the ethnic community, understands clearly what is and is not allowed. At the moment, the law is ragged.

Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, it is in the interests of the ethnic community that the majority communities do not perceive them as made of up of a great flow of immigration—in fact, that is no longer taking place, but that is the perception—and being topped up by illegal immigration, bogus asylum seekers and people on the fiddle. That does not help race relations. The Bill, in the long term, will go a long way towards reassuring all sections of the population.

The hon. Member for Glasgow, Hillhead (Mr. Galloway) made his speech on MI5. I am certain that my hon. Friend the Member for Colchester, South and Maldon (Mr. Whittingdale), who is not in his place, one of whose constituents has just died from taking ecstasy, would dispute the arguments of the hon. Member for Hillhead. I see no sense in officers of a security agency being unable to act against international drug traffickers. I welcome the moves that have been taken, but—and it is a big "but"—officers must be accountable to the normal process of law. Otherwise, the agency will be discredited and we will not be able to use it for the purpose for which it was created.

There is one other matter. My constituency will be affected by the housing construction regeneration Bill. Much of the council housing there has been made over to a housing association. That has meant that the capital receipts flowing to the council from housing associations have kept the rents down. Under a proposal of the Conservative administration that has just left office—

Mr. George Howarth (Knowsley, North): Did it leave voluntarily?

Mr. Tredinnick: Sadly, it has left office, but only temporarily.

The new administration has stopped what we call the trickle transfer scheme. I predict that rent rises will occur in Hinckley next year; they have to. I am worried that the housing associations will be able to sell properties in small villages. The threshold has to be lifted.

7.16 pm

Mr. Ronnie Campbell (Blyth Valley): I intend to speak about drugs, which were mentioned in the Queen's Speech. First, I must say that there is no way that any politician or anyone else could ever say that drugs should be legalised. That is for people other than politicians to say. Let me state clearly that there is no way that I would say that any drugs should be legalised.

There could be a debate about decriminalising certain light drugs. I heard last week that the Durham constabulary had agreed only to caution teenagers who were found with class A drugs on their persons, provided that they sought help. The problem is trying to find help, because there not many drug centres in the north-east for them to go to. It will be interesting to see how that policy develops under the Durham police force.

The question of drugs is one of supply. The Queen's Speech gave the Government's position on the supply of drugs. Of course, I welcome anything that will stop such drugs hitting the British mainland.

Drugs often come from war-torn areas. We have many accounts of drugs being sold to pay for guns, arms and munitions. In the conflict in war-torn Lebanon, there was evidence that arms sales were connected with the drug trade. Even in Bosnia, people sold drugs to get arms. In the case of Turkey and Kurdistan, there was evidence that the Kurdish rebels were selling drugs to get arms. The Colombian drug cartels are now, it is said, linking up with people in Russia. That market is seeping into northern Europe and through to Britain. Even the Italian mafia are into drugs and that is for sure, as everyone will be aware. China is beginning to push drugs hard, and is looking for partners in Europe—criminal partners I might add—to supply drugs. It is a big organisation, and I wish the Government well in trying to stop the supply. There are evil forces about and a lot of money to be made out of drugs, especially in regions of conflict.

We have to try to stop the flow and to hit demand, if possible. We have to take positive action, even if that means educating kids in schools and the medical profession. There is much that we can do locally to stop the spread of home-grown drugs.

We have a needle exchange in my area. The idea is that one takes a needle in and brings a needle out. I have this story on good authority—the best authority of the lot because it is from the police, and the Northumberland police get my praise for the way in which they have handled the drug situation. They have done a marvellous job with the resources they have. Two or three weeks ago, they raided a house on a council estate and found heroin, methadone, other drugs and one or two other things, and caught the culprits red-handed. It was a great capture, because it was a supply house.

Under interrogation—perhaps I should say questioning—the culprit was asked where they had got the 200 new needles that had been found in the house. The reply was, "From the needle exchange." He had gone in with 200 dud, used needles and was given 200 new ones. I suppose that that is new for old, but I cannot for the life of me see why a needle exchange should give someone that many needles. He was under questioning and is a criminal. He might be lying to the police, but that was the information that they gave me.

The police also told me that methadone is being used in the community, which is more interesting. The police could not understand why there were two dozen bottles of methadone in that house. Under questioning, they found that it is being sold to kids for a pound or two, which is used to buy heroin.

[Mr. Ronnie Campbell]

How are people getting it? It is simple. They put a urine sample in a little bottle and give it to a young lad to take to the local doctors, where he says that he is on heroin and there is the urine sample to prove it. The doctors test it and find heroin in his urine, so they give him methadone. They were also registering with four or five doctors in and around the community. They went to each doctor with a different name to get methadone. At the moment, it is all over the place. A chemist told me that addicts come in all the time.

I cannot understand what the health authorities are doing. There is an easy answer. The Home Secretary should demand that, when methadone has to be prescribed to heroin addicts, the daily dose is taken there and then in the clinic or on the premises—somewhere where they can take it without being seen, such as a pharmacy or a drugs centre, but it should only be the dose for the day. If they want another dose, they must come back the next day.

We must stop giving people the whole bottle. That creates a knock-on effect. They are giving it to kids, who take a swallow and that is their introduction to drugs. Cannabis does not even come into the picture any more. It is methadone. I am pleased that we have stopped people buying tablets across the counter, but we must certainly do something about the methadone problem.

There are also local drugs, which could be anything. We have lost 11 teenagers—young girls and boys—in my area. They died after taking a cocktail of drugs. With the help of local press and television, I have cried out for help but, sadly, the problem is on the increase. In the north-east, the drug problem is getting worse—perhaps because there is no work. Perhaps we need some employment to keep idle hands working. I do not know: it is for others to say, I suppose.

Before I came here today, I found 17 drugs in my medicine cabinet, which belong to me and my family. All I need to do is to go to Woolworth's and buy one of the little books that I have here, which tells us what drugs are, what they are for and what is in them. All I need is the book, the drugs from the medicine cabinet, a little bit of nous and some knowledge of chemistry.

All the school kids do chemistry, and nowadays they do not just get the Bunsen burners that we got; it is the real I am today. Any drugs can be crushed up, mixed together with a little bit of rat poison to make people a bit higher, and there we are with a home-made drug. We found that people are making drugs with ordinary tablets that one might find in the medicine chest.

That has got to be a warning. We often have amnesties, but I hope that the Home Secretary will note the problems, and especially that of methadone, and do something about it.

7.26 pm

Mr. Robert G. Hughes (Harrow, West): The whole House will have deeply appreciated the thoughtful speech by the hon. Member for Blyth Valley (Mr. Campbell), which has lifted the tone of the debate. We much appreciate what he had to say about his constituency, much of which is reflected in our constituencies.

This evening, I must make three constituency points. I crave your indulgence, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because the first is not related to the Queen's Speech. There was to be a by-election in the Ridgeway ward in my constituency on Thursday, following the resignation of a Liberal councillor. Tragically, this morning, the Liberal candidate, Mr. Norman Simmons, died, so it will not take place. I must inform the House and, through it, my constituents, that we are deeply shocked in the constituency and the Conservative party at the death of Mr. Simmons. We pay tribute to his work for the community. The party, our candidate in the by-election, Major Gerry Harsant, and I will of course be doing no campaigning for a period as a mark of respect for Mr. Simmons.

The second matter relates to the asylum Bill. Because of the by-election, I have been doing a lot of canvassing in that ward, which, like the rest of the constituency, is blessed with a rich racial mix. Many of my constituents have either family or first-hand experience of persecution and have come to this country as asylum seekers. Many—particularly those from Sri Lanka or Somalia—are worried sick about the fate of their families and friends in those countries. That is especially true of Tamils from Sri Lanka, who are worried sick about their relatives in Jaffna and about what I would regard as the campaign of genocide by the Sri Lankan Government against the Tamil people.

What comes through to me when I speak to people from all sorts of communities in my constituency is that they want a fair asylum system where bogus asylum seekers do not get in the way and clog up the system, stopping the genuine people coming. I absolutely support the measure proposed by my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary, because I genuinely think that it will help genuine asylum seekers. I am certain that it will be widely welcomed in my constituency.

My last point relates to the proposed broadcasting Bill and in particular our intention to amend media ownership rules to allow greater cross-holdings among newspapers, television and radio. The question that I wish to pose to the House is: what happens when the press distorts reality, intrudes into private lives or just plain makes up what is happening? I should tell the House that I am not interested in anything that the press has had to say about me; I have never made a complaint and I do not make one now. What confidence can we have in the Press Complaints Commission? If we are to look at cross-media ownership and allow more ownership of television and radio stations by newspapers, can we really rely on the PCC?

I wish to talk about the experience of a constituent of mine, Mr. David Rudnick, who lives in Harrow on the Hill. He is a freelance journalist and wrote an article for the September 1994 edition of the magazine *Euromoney*, which is part of the Associated Newspapers group, which includes the *Daily Mail*. His article, about St. Petersburg, was badly mangled by the sub-editor and was subsequently published with serious errors in it. No one disputes that fact or that anyone reading the article as printed would have to conclude that Mr. Rudnick simply did not know what he was talking about. The original article was factual and correct, but as printed it made him look incompetent.

Mr. Rudnick asked for an apology to be printed, but *Euromoney* refused. On 25 October 1994, he sent a detailed letter to the PCC. He explained in his letter that *Euromoney*, a financial magazine, had seriously mis-edited material that he had written. The changes included, for instance, a geographical area that wrote off as non-existent Russia's sea ports, which made his article

look a bit silly. The PCC agreed to accept the complaint under article 1 of its code, outlawing inaccuracy by the press. Two months later, it said that it would send the publishers a copy of the complaint to let the editor have the opportunity to settle the matter straight away. The PCC accepted that changes had been made to the copy, resulting in distortions, but rejected Mr. Rudnick's demands for a published apology in the monthly magazine, claiming that the distortions were

"not significant as to require correction under code"—

the PCC's code.

The PCC's spokesman, Mr. Christopher Hayes, told my constituent:

"The commission does not have a general duty to mediate in disputes between freelance journalists and editors."

Yet in an article published by the *UK Press Gazette*, the PCC director, Mr. Mark Bolland, said:

"I hope freelancers will be in touch with us if they think their copy has been seriously distorted."

Mr. Rudnick then suggested that it would be fairer to make the magazine issue corrections, which resulted in the PCC agreeing to reconsider the case. However, in April of this year, the PCC shifted its ground and pronounced that his complaint was a contractual dispute, which was beyond its competence.

In a letter to Mr. Rudnick, dated 19 April 1995, Mr. Bolland informed my constituent that the PCC saw

"no special reason for it to adjudicate in this case."

Yet the commission noted that the magazine accepts that the changes made to the copy resulted in some distortion, although it did not accept them as significant as to require correction.

The PCC plainly has no clarity of understanding of its role. The membership of the PCC makes it a very suspect body indeed. As the hon. Member for Bassetlaw (Mr. Ashton) once said, there can never really be an independent ombudsman while members of the PCC's jury have a vested interest in "not guilty" verdicts. Rogue editors know that and laugh at it. I absolutely agree.

While the decision was being made by the PCC, Sir David English, whose company owned *Euromoney* magazine, was present at the meeting. I accept the word of my right hon. Friend Lord Wakeham when he says that Sir David English took no part in the discussion, but the fact is that he was allowed to be there. How can anyone have any confidence in a decision that is made like that? The commission reconsidered the decision without Sir David English at the meeting, but, surprisingly, reached the same conclusion.

I think that the PCC needs to be judged on the way in which it treats cases involving ordinary people. The case of my constituent is that of an ordinary person who has been wronged by a magazine. That magazine refused to do anything and the PCC was completely unable or unwilling to do anything to help him. It should be judged on how it treats ordinary people, not necessarily on how it treats the reporting of an heir to the throne. Although I do not dismiss that, I remind the House that, even in the case of His Royal Highness Prince William, the judgment of the PCC did not last beyond the first good photo opportunity that presented itself to the press.

Here we have a body that is muddled, toothless, self-interested and, worst of all—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

7.36 pm

Mr. Clive Soley (Hammersmith): I have a lot of sympathy with the views of the hon. Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Hughes) on the Press Complaints Commission, but my comments today are about my disappointment that the Queen's Speech did not contain any significant policy on families and parenting. I shall come back to the proposed family law Bill in a moment.

For the past 16 years, to the best of my knowledge, the Conservative party has often made critical remarks about parents: it has accused them of not being capable of looking after their children when they get into trouble, are truanting or whatever. It also complains about the break-up of the family. Whatever one thinks of the Government's policies—in my view, they have hastened some of the collapses in the family—the reality is that there is no family policy in this country.

The previous Secretary of State for Health took it on herself to be the Government's spokesman for the family. When I took a delegation to see her, from the all-party parenting group, which I chair, we discussed the problem of the lack of co-ordination between Government Departments on family policy. I checked the Government's list of Ministers today, and no Minister is listed as having responsibility for the family. I hope to take another delegation from the all-party group and we shall again discuss that issue. One of the problems is that the Government seem to think that they co-ordinate policy on the family between Departments. Virtually every organisation that works with the family or deals with family matters does not think that the Government co-ordinate policy on the family.

The biggest single point that came up in the hearings that I organised in the House last year was that there was no co-ordination between Government Departments. I shall give a simple example. It is not in the interests of families when people with children are in short-term accommodation, be it bed-and-breakfast or temporary leasing, yet literally hundreds of children are in that position.

If we want to improve family relationships and ensure that families do not break down so easily, one issue that must be addressed is housing. We must address the issue of how children are brought up in temporary accommodation. One of the problems is that families who are just coping can be tipped over into disaster if they suddenly face long-term unemployment, loss of earnings or bad housing. If we really want to help families and promote good parenting, we should—among other things—take on the issues of poverty, poor housing and the prospect of unemployment. Those factors can tip a family that is carrying out what could be described as "just about good enough" parenting into bad parenting.

The Government thought that they had a nice simple answer to the problem of crime. They believed, rather naively, that increasing punishment would cut crime, but of course it does not work that way. Similarly, the Government believed that there was no connection between crime and unemployment. There is—although it has never been the direct connection suggested by some, and many of us have never argued that such a connection exists. It is not true that an unemployed person is more likely to commit crimes; what is true is that members of a family that was just about coping but has been tipped over into crisis by unemployment, low income and all that

[Mr. Clive Soley]

follows from it are more likely to become criminals. The most likely family members are children, which is why no direct link between crime and unemployment shows up in the unemployment figures.

If the Government are not prepared to adopt the economic policies that I consider necessary, they could at least consider the need for parenting and family education in schools. The issue really relates to "social relationship" skills. The Government are making a fundamental mistake; indeed, I would argue that the Conservative party as a whole is making a fundamental mistake—and a very strange one, in a sense. It assumes that marriage equals family and good parenting, but there is no such connection. The fact that a person is married does not necessarily mean that that person's family is a good, happy family, and it certainly does not mean that he or she is a good parent.

Common sense tells us that. A child whose parents are married but are deeply unhappy—perhaps fighting over the father's drinking—will experience bad parenting. The couple next door may not be married, but may get on very well together. I know that every hon. Member would choose to live with that couple.

I emphasise that that does not mean that marriage is unimportant. Marriage is a contract entered into by two people to whom it is important, and if it is important to them it must be important to everyone else. That is why I am happy to support the divorce law Bill, to which I shall return shortly. Marriage is not, however, the answer to the problem of bad parenting and unhappy families.

This is a strange mistake for the Conservative party to make, given that it claims to object to both social engineering and politically correct thinking. From time to time, the left has gone in for politically correct thinking and social engineering, but I must say that the right wing of the political spectrum does it far better: I have never seen such efficient social engineering and politically correct thinking.

Apparently, the policy is now to drive people into marriage. Incidentally, no Government should be involved in such matters: the state should not take a view on the way in which people choose to lead their personal lives. If we are to embark on that dangerous road, however, social engineering suddenly becomes involved. If people can be persuaded to marry and—according to the far right of the Tory party—stay married longer, the problem will automatically be solved. I must tell Conservative Members that that is not the case. It may be politically correct for them to say that people should marry and stay married longer, but that will do far more harm than good if it results in children living in consistently unhappy circumstances, especially when abuse or violence is involved.

If the Government really want to turn the clock back and return to the old days when marriages tended to last, they should change economic policy in a way that would put women back in the home and send men to work. Most of us would object to that, and the Conservative party would not be able to deliver such a change. The woman's role used to be clearly defined; she was locked into that role, and kept subservient to the man. That did not make the children any happier. When families were unhappy and breaking down, everyone—including the children—was trapped.

Let us stop thinking in terms of political correctness or social engineering, and recognise that people have a right to decide about the relationships in which they want to live. The role of the Government—any Government—is to do everything possible to support good parenting and happy families: if they get that right, we shall make a great deal of progress.

It is time that the Government put over a strong message that they have been reluctant to send in recent years—a message that applies particularly to fathers. They should make it clear that violence towards children in the home—and I do not just mean extreme forms of violence—is counter-productive. Violence begets violence. One of the commonest factors in a child who grows up to be violent is violence towards that child by a parent. Inconsistency and lack of love are two of the most damaging influences on children; if violence is introduced as well, the parents are well on the road to creating a psychopathic personality.

No parent is so good that he or she never hits a child—most of us have done it at one time or another—but the good parent knows that, when everything has broken down, it is better to apologise to the child and explain what has happened than to justify violence. That does not work.

I am in favour of the reform in divorce law. There are many issues for us to debate, but I ask the Government not to assume that dealing with the question of marriage will produce a family and parenting policy. The country desperately needs such a policy. It does not need moral lectures, particularly from a party that found itself in such a difficult position in regard to its "back to basics" policy when it was no longer acceptable for the Conservative party to lecture people on how to bring up their children and how to behave in society. We know what the priorities are; let us go for them.

7.46 pm

Mr. James Pawsey (Rugby and Kenilworth): The speech of the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) struck me as one of the poorest Opposition speeches that we have heard. It was short on content, and dealt with none of the policy matters that we sought to raise with the hon. Gentleman. In fact, all that it majored on was fairly cheap abuse. I do not think that it did the hon. Gentleman's case any good at all.

It is significant that the name of the shadow Chancellor is missing from the list of names attached to amendments on the Order Paper. I am not surprised. When I asked the hon. Member for Brightside how he intended to raise his funds, there was no answer. The shadow Chancellor clearly seeks to disassociate himself from the amendment that was moved today.

I have more reason than most to welcome the Queen's Speech, which refers to two Bills dealing with subjects that are of particular interest to me. I chair the Select Committee on the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration—

Mr. Fabricant: Hear, hear.

Mr. Pawsey: I am obliged to my hon. Friend for his support.

I also chair the Conservative Back-Bench education committee. The Queen's Speech referred to both subjects.

I applaud the fact that the Government have accepted the challenge of pre-school education. I also welcome the introduction of a voucher scheme, which will provide parents with additional choice. The scheme is imaginative, and will cost some £730 million. Parents will be given vouchers worth £1,100, entitling four-year-olds to three terms of good-quality pre-school education. There will be £180 million of new money; the balance of £550 million will come from the funds currently spent by local authorities on pre-schooling. That money will become immediately available to parents in the form of vouchers.

The new measures build on previous education reforms introduced by the Conservative party—reforms that have deliberately sought to provide parents with additional choice. In this instance, parents will be able to decide whether to use state, private or voluntary providers. The principle of the voucher is being introduced for the first time in Britain; if it is successful, it will doubtless be extended. I welcome the introduction of a pilot scheme that will commence in April 1996, with the main scheme coming on stream in April 1997. The voucher can be exchanged for a pre-school place for all children, beginning with the term after their fourth birthdays.

I hope that the Government will disregard the usual ill-informed and ritualistic Opposition attacks to which we have grown accustomed. We should remember that they opposed all the education reforms introduced by the current Administration. They opposed the national curriculum and testing, grant-maintained schools, Ofsted, improved teacher training and league tables. All those reforms had one thing in common—they were introduced in the teeth of opposition from the Labour and Liberal Democrat parties.

The Gracious Speech refers to raising education and skill levels, and to do so it is necessary to have a well-motivated and—dare I say it?—a well-paid teacher force. That is why I am particularly anxious that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment should ensure adequate funding for the forthcoming teachers' pay award. Hon. Members will recall that last year the award was 2.7 per cent., and that it had to be funded by efficiency savings within LEAs. I say without equivocation that there can be no second bite at that cherry. Funding must be found: otherwise, there will be teacher redundancies, and as a result class sizes will increase.

I now turn to legislation designed to extend the health service commissioner's jurisdiction. It would enable him to consider complaints from the public about two major areas of his activities that are currently excluded from his jurisdiction. The Bill proposes to enable him to examine complaints about family health service practitioners such as GPs, dentists, pharmacists and those who provide NHS optical services. Under the terms of the new legislation, he would also be able to consider complaints about matters relating to the clinical judgment of doctors, nurses and other clinical professionals.

The Select Committee of which I am Chairman welcomes the new measures and believes that they will materially help patients. I am delighted to see in his place a distinguished member of the Committee, the hon. Member for Falkirk, East (Mr. Connarty), who plays a valuable part in our deliberations. In the past, GPs and dentists have been outside the jurisdiction of the commissioner. All that will change, ensuring, I trust, that patients receive an even better service from the NHS.

I sound a warning note. If the commissioner's work load increases by the amount that I foresee, it will be necessary to ensure that adequate funds are made available. If the commissioner is to discharge his responsibilities properly he cannot operate on the cheap, and it would be a great mistake if the Treasury did not make the necessary funds available.

I said earlier that I welcomed the contents of the Gracious Speech, but I was disappointed to note that it did not refer to aircraft noise legislation. Coventry airport is in my constituency, and it is an increasing source of night flights, which are a growing nuisance. I welcome the presence in the Chamber of the hon. Member for Coventry, South-East (Mr. Cunningham).

Mr. Jim Cunningham (Coventry, South-East): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Pawsey: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will forgive me if I do not. I am pressed for time.

Noise pollution is substantial and growing, and I should have thought that time could be found to introduce a relatively small Bill based on the Department of Transport document, the main part of which proposes to encourage the preparation of noise amelioration schemes and to review the existing ones. The Department would also have an enabling power over airfields to establish and enforce noise control arrangements, including ground noise. Those and other measures would do a great deal to reduce the inconvenience and nuisance of aircraft noise.

I receive an increasing number of complaints from my constituents about aircraft noise. It seems that airports operate outside the normal constraints which affect—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I hesitate to intervene on a short speech, but I do so to remind the hon. Gentleman that we are debating the Queen's Speech and that it does not refer to Coventry airport or airport noise.

Mr. Pawsey: I am confining my speech to environmental considerations. The environment of my constituents will deteriorate substantially, as will that of the constituents of the hon. Member for Coventry, South-East, unless we are able to persuade the Government to provide time for a debate on this important subject. I am disappointed that it is not mentioned in the Gracious Speech.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. As the hon. Gentleman says, it is not in the Gracious Speech, which is what we are debating.

Mr. Pawsey: I shall conclude by saying that my hon. Friend the Member for Warwick and Leamington (Sir D. Smith), the hon. Member for Coventry, South-East and I met the Minister for Aviation and Shipping but, sadly, we were not able to persuade him that aircraft are noisy. I am anxious to see some proper control exercised in this area.

7.55 pm

Ms Margaret Hodge (Barking): The Government's programme for the coming year completely fails to address the momentous challenges that face our country. Unlike the hon. Member for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey), I believe that the failure is greatest in the sphere of education. The proposals in the Gracious Speech

[Ms Margaret Hodge]

are at best petty and irrelevant and at worst wasteful and divisive. In the short time that is available to me, I shall focus on the proposed nursery voucher scheme.

It is a sobering fact that we devote a mere 2 per cent. of education spending to children in their early years. In Germany, the figure is 7 per cent., France spends 12 per cent. and Sweden devotes 17 per cent. to such children. We have our priorities wrong.

Let us remind ourselves why early learning is important. Investing public money in the early years not only enhances educational and life opportunities for children but saves public spending later. There is plenty of evidence to support that. Perhaps the most convincing is the American research on the High Scope programme for disadvantaged children, which found that, for every dollar invested in children in their early years, $7 is returned to the taxpayer in savings on the cost of such matters as remedial education, juvenile delinquency, income support and unemployment.

A year ago, my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) asked me to chair a Labour party inquiry team into early years education. I visited dozens of nurseries, playgroups and other centres around the country, in rural and urban areas, in areas of great poverty and in areas of relative prosperity, in the public, private and voluntary sectors. I met all the different experts, from nursery nurses to teachers to academics and campaigners and from employers to the most important stakeholders—the parents. What struck me above all was the remarkable consensus about the way forward for early years services in this country.

The Britain of today needs high-quality early years experience for young children. If the quality is not good, the investment is wasted. Of course we should be expanding nursery education for four-year-olds and, indeed, for three-year-olds, but even that is no longer enough. We have to recognise that people's lives have changed. More than half the women with children under the age of five now work, and it is the duty of good government to facilitate and support the family as it changes. It is also the duty of good government to ensure the best possible start for our young children.

We should start to integrate care and education to provide a comprehensive, high-quality seamless service that meets the needs of children and their parents. That makes sense to the 3.8 million children who are under five. The children of today will become the community of tomorrow, and on them our future depends. The consensus for such a service is matched by an equally firm consensus that the proposal for a voucher scheme is at best a distracting diversion and at worst damaging dogma. It is no secret that the proposals were forced on an unconvinced Secretary of State for Education and Employment by the Prime Minister as part of his lurch to the right.

The proposal owes less to investing in the long-term hopes of a generation of four-year-olds than to investing in the very short-term hopes of a desperate and divided Tory party. Dogma has been allowed to triumph over common sense and it is our nation's young children and their futures who will suffer as a result.

When vouchers were floated a year ago, I thought that they were essentially an irrelevance. Now that the details are emerging, I realise that they will be deeply damaging. Most of the resources to fund the voucher scheme will be taken out of existing grant moneys that go to local education authorities to spend on under-fives. The way in which the funds will be withdrawn from local authorities is not widely understood, but it is utterly outrageous in its effect.

Each local authority receives an allocation for spending on the under-fives, but it is free to decide locally whether to spend it on the under-fives. Good authorities do so. The best spend more than the Government's allocation, but others use the money for other purposes: to subsidise other services or to cut council tax.

What on earth are the Government proposing? Authorities will lose £1,100 for each four-year-old in a maintained school, so the more places currently provided, the more money will be taken away from the council. What nonsense: punish the good performers and reward those who have failed. Ministers tell me that it is cash-neutral. Financial fiddle would be more accurate—a fiddle to benefit the rump of Tory councils that have failed to provide good nursery education for young children. The Government will penalise Labour Tower Hamlets, which has places for 84 per cent. of its three and four-year-olds, to benefit Tory Bromley, which provides for only 33 per cent.

The biggest losers of the scheme will be thousands of three-year-old children and their parents. Local authorities whose resources are slashed will have no option but to give preference to four-year-olds who attract a voucher, over three-year-olds who do not. Public funds that currently secure places for three-year-olds will be diverted to pay for years of neglect by Tory councils that have not invested in early years education.

To make matters even worse, whatever the Secretary of State says, there could be a decline in the quality of education offered to young children. The sum of £1,100 buys barely two and a half hours a day of an appropriate quality service, but most parents want their four-year-olds in full-time nursery education. The only way in which schools can deliver that is to change the ratio of children to adults. Instead of one adult to 13 four-year-olds, there will be one teacher to 30 children. That is not quality nursery education, but cheap child care.

What about raising standards? The Government propose the daft new concept of the "light touch inspection". That raises serious concerns about how rigorously standards will be upheld. I have seen some marvellous quality in all sectors. I have also witnessed poor standards of teaching and care, but parents have a right to expect decent services and a thorough system of inspection is a crucial means of delivering such services.

What about children with special needs? Last week, I visited Bective lower school, a primary school in Northampton, which had a nursery class and special unit providing full-time education for autistic three and four-year-olds. Its work with those autistic children was extremely impressive. Their opportunities were enormously enhanced by working with them early, but the cost of a place in that unit is £8,000 per child. What on earth are the parents going to do with a voucher worth a mere £1,100?

The only positive feature of the Government's proposals is that an extra £185 million will be injected into the system. What a shame that such a precious resource will go to fund such an ill-conceived scheme. We need more places for young children. That means

training more nursery teachers, providing good premises in which children can learn, play and develop, and working to break down the divide between care and education.

The Government have abandoned the pledge given nearly 25 years ago by none other than the Tory Secretary of State for Education at the time, Baroness Thatcher, to provide nursery places for all three and four-year-olds. I am proud to say that the Labour party remains absolutely committed to achieving that, and to doing more, as we know and understand that it makes sense, not only for our children, but for our economy, our community and all our futures.

8.5 pm

Mr. David Faber (Westbury): Like my hon. Friend the Member for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey), I am somewhat spoilt for choice this evening, having served under his excellent chairmanship of our Back-Bench education committee and having spoken, I think, in most of the education debates in the House since I came here. I should, however, like to dwell on one aspect of the Gracious Speech as it refers to nursery vouchers.

I am sorry that my hon. Friend the Member for Hornchurch (Mr. Squire), the Under-Secretary of State responsible for schools, has temporarily left the Chamber. A few months ago, I took a deputation from a small primary school in the village of Edington in my constituency to see him. Those people were fighting to overturn the local education authority's decision to close their school. Sadly, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment confirmed the closure, ironically on the same day that the Government White Paper came out extolling the benefits of small, local and village schools.

I should like to mention one point that my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Staffordshire (Mr. Fabricant) made earlier in an intervention. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will consider how nursery vouchers can help some of the smaller village primary schools. Those of us who represent rural constituencies are keen that they should be safeguarded and helped. There must be ways in which vouchers can be targeted to help children in villages to start a little earlier at school, and to ensure continuity in their primary education.

I want to speak principally on the Government's further welcome measures to fight crime as contained in the Gracious Speech. I congratulate my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary on his success to date and, in particular, on the fall of recorded crime in the past two years. I recently carried out a poll in my constituency through a newsletter, to which more than 500 people, I am happy to say, replied, and it showed overwhelming support for the majority of his policies.

Chronologically, the first duty of Government is, of course, to try to do all that they can to install crime prevention measures in villages and towns. I welcome the continuing commitment to crime prevention as contained in the partners against crime initiative. Some measures are obvious. The neighbourhood watch scheme is now part of the national psyche. Some 6 million homes play a role in that scheme.

Representing a rural constituency, I welcome the proposed introduction of neighbourhood constables. This country's specials have a long and proud tradition, and they will no doubt welcome the extra £4 million that is being made available to them. Why then not have them serve locally, in their communities and villages and on the streets that they know? I am delighted that, as an example of the benefit of neighbourhood constables, the rural White Paper mentioned a village in Wiltshire, where a neighbourhood constable is already in place.

I also warmly welcome the Government's policy on closed circuit television and, in particular, the £5 million that has been made available this year through the closed circuit television challenge scheme. I am happy that West Wiltshire council was successful in its bid and I pay tribute to all those who were involved.

Of the 1,000 new cameras that will be installed around the country this year, six will be in West Wiltshire. They will be mobile cameras that can be moved around the region. Dummy cameras will be left in sites where real cameras are not installed, and that should be a real deterrent to crime. I ask my hon. Friends to remember, however, that CCTV can be every bit as valuable in rural areas as in towns. I hope that they will consider that.

In the recent survey that I conducted, a staggering 94 per cent. of people who replied supported the Government's policy on installing closed circuit television. I hope that my hon. Friends, including my hon. Friend the Member for Bosworth (Mr. Tredinnick), who spoke earlier, will benefit from the 10,000 new cameras to be introduced over the next three years, as announced by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister.

I am pleased that the Government's policy for tackling drugs and drug abuse is again in the Queen's Speech. As many hon. Members know, I am closely involved in the war against drugs. I am proud to serve as a trustee of several drug charities and I warmly welcome the high profile that has been given to the fight against drugs in the White Paper, "Tackling Drugs Together". I have no doubt that the policy contained in the Gracious Speech of enabling the security service to assist the police in fighting organised crime will help greatly to tackle the drug pushers.

I see my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Home Office on the Front Bench. She is responsible for prisons. My hon. Friend may know that I am a trustee of a charity, the Addictive Diseases Trust, which is involved in the treatment of drug abuse in prisons. Her predecessor was kind enough to visit Downview prison where ADT has a pilot project up and running. I hope that my hon. Friend will be able to visit in the near future to see the excellent work that is being done.

However good crime prevention is, there will always be some who slip through the net and commit crimes. The public have a right to expect that they will be caught, convicted and subsequently punished. The Government have a proud record of support for the police and I am especially pleased that, over the years, Wiltshire has seen the benefit of increased police funding and officers on the beat. Since 1979 Wiltshire has seen a staggering real-terms spending increase of 154 per cent., the highest of any force in the country, which was translated into an increase in police numbers of 26 per cent.

As my hon. Friends on the Front Bench know, this year the new funding formula was not kind to us in Wiltshire, producing a budget increase of just 2.5 per cent. I have already expressed my concerns about that matter in an Adjournment debate, but I remind my hon. Friends that

[Mr. David Faber]

this year, once again, the funding formula does not take into account any rural sparsity factor and I urge them to look at that once again to see whether there is any way in which that can be included in future years.

As in many other parts of the country, the total of reported crime in Wiltshire fell last year by 5 per cent. Crimes of violence against people fell by 16 per cent. and burglary, vehicle crime and theft fell by 5 per cent. I should like to take this opportunity of paying a warm tribute to the chief constable and to all the officers in Wiltshire who serve the people of the county so courageously and effectively.

The public have a right to know that, once caught, the criminal will be convicted if guilty. Nothing demoralises the police more than seeing the guilty walk free. The Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 has already reformed the right to silence rule and the criminal procedures and investigations Bill will play a vital role in helping to ensure that criminals are convicted when that is the right thing to do.

The public will want to know that they will be protected from a criminal once he is caught and sentenced. Clearly, different offences merit different degrees of punishment. Prison provides that punishment and, undoubtedly, serves to cut crime. The chief constable of Wiltshire said:

"The majority of crime is committed by a known small percentage of offenders, and custodial sentences take them out of the game and are a significant factor in the decrease [in the crime figures]."

That is the chief constable acknowledging that prison does work.

Being locked up is punishment in itself. As my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary has pointed out, prison must be decent but austere. There is no place nowadays for slopping out, but nor is there any place for in-cell television.

Last year, a local prison, Erlestoke, just outside my constituency achieved some notoriety. A convicted rapist was allowed out on day release to cycle unattended to attend a course at Trowbridge college in my constituency. He cycled through some of the most rural areas of the constituency. The tabloids nicknamed him the bicycling rapist. I was grateful for the speed with which my right hon. and learned Friend and the Prison Service acted to have the visits stopped and, subsequently, to announce a new system of temporary release on licence.

Since the introduction of that new system in March this year, the number of grants for temporary release has fallen by 50 per cent. and, more importantly, the number of temporary release failures has fallen by an overwhelming 80 per cent. I know that my constituents are extremely grateful to my right hon. and learned Friend for that.

Parliament, at the instigation of the Government, has traditionally over the years significantly increased the sentences available to the courts. A life sentence is now available for rape, drug trafficking or going to a crime with a firearm. However, those sentences are pointless if the judges do not make any use of them. Did you know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that the maximum sentence available for burglary is 14 years, yet the average sentence handed down by a crown court to a burglar with 10 convictions is 18 months? That is a staggering statistic, which causes great concern to my constituents and throughout the country. There must be greater certainty in sentencing.

Given the reluctance to impose the sentences available, we have seen a growth in recent years of the resort to judicial review. I am not a lawyer, but I recognise the importance of judicial review and the role that it plays. A couple of weeks ago, we heard of the case of a man who had shot both his parents with a shotgun, having reloaded it once. My constituents and I felt that it was entirely appropriate for my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary to act within his powers to increase that man's sentence.

I shall quote the views of Lord Irvine of Lairg, the shadow Lord Chancellor. In a speech to the Administrative Law Bar Association he said last month:

"the danger with any extra-judicial claim of right to review the validity of any Act of Parliament is that to many it smacks of judicial supremacism."

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Time is up.

8.15 pm

Mr. Michael Connarty (Falkirk, East): I should like to mention a couple of things which are not in the Queen's Speech, but I shall not mention them at length. There is no Bill to give sub-contractors rights in the event of the bankruptcy of the major contractor. That has been subject to debate over many years. There is no specific proposal to pay interest on business debt although there is some comment about the need to introduce regulations.

I join my colleague, the hon. Member for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey), the Chairman of the Select Committee on the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration, and say that it is about time that the role of the health service ombudsman, who reports to the PCA Committee, was extended to look at clinical matters and actions in primary care. I wish to compliment the present PCA, William Reid, and his staff, who work very hard, probably with fewer resources than they deserve. As the Chairman of the PCA Committee said, they need to be well resourced if they are to take on the new role.

It is an important role, because we have seen that, in the United States of America, litigation is the way to deal with questions of clinical failure. It would be a great pity if we went the way of the United States and people were waiting outside hospitals with their lawyers ready to take on cases for profit. Hopefully, this will help to stem what could be an explosion of clinical litigation in this country.

What is also missing—it is something that we have been looking at—is a freedom of information Bill and a privacy Bill. We have not just a tired old Government, but we live in a tired old state. It is flawed and out of date, it is secretive and is held in deep suspicion, not in high regard, by most of its citizens. Perhaps in the future another Government will introduce the freedom of information Bill that we require.

There is also a proposal to give housing association tenants the right to buy. It is worth underlining that it is only proposed to give the right to buy to tenants in new stock. That is the proposal in the press briefing that I received following the Queen's Speech. I wonder why not all housing association tenants are included.

My hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Maryhill (Mrs. Fyfe), who is sitting beside me, will confirm that the principle of a voluntary purchase grant plus full market value paid back to the housing association which

must be spent on new housing is the proposal in the housing policy document that she and I drew up for public housing for the Labour party in Scotland in the 1980s.

If those principles are good enough for housing associations, are they not good enough for all public housing? Obviously, it is not in the Government's interest. It is their prejudice against public housing that will not allow them to give the same amount of capital back to the local authority with the clear instruction that it must be spent on building houses to prevent the depletion of housing stock.

The proposals are half-baked. The market demand for such use may deplete the stock available to rent in any specific area. As we know from contact with housing associations, certainly in my 13 years in local government, the type of houses they build is often driven by what is trendy at the time and by special needs of one kind or another. They may not be willing to use the money to rebuild houses in the same area. There could be shifting populations because of housing association trends and because the forward plans of the associations do not respond to filling the gaps where houses have been taken into the private sector.

There is no assurance in the Queen's Speech that special needs housing for people with disabilities will be ring-fenced. Will it be sold off, only to be replaced by local associations providing houses for single people or people emerging from mental hospitals or prisons, as seems to be the trend? The Queen's Speech is silent on that point.

The Queen's Speech mentions protection for small communities with fewer than 3,000 homes. It is ironic that the Government should propose such a measure, having presided over the decimation of rural communities in Scotland, England and Wales, where public housing has been sold off and then second-time buyers—possibly not indigenous, possibly big-city commuters or people looking for a holiday home—buy them up. That is the result of the Conservatives' sale of council housing, so promising to ring-fence a few housing association houses is just bolting the stable door once the horse is off and running.

The problem is how to revitalise rural areas and small communities. I suggest giving housing associations money and instructions to build homes for rent, and then purchase, or using staircasing arrangements for part-purchase, part-rent. That would be an improvement on proposals to ring-fence communities of 3,000 homes.

At the weekend, I addressed what was supposed to be a youth forum but turned out to be a front for the Scottish National party, whose policy is now to abolish council house sales altogether. That is rather hypocritical, given that thousands of SNP voters and hundreds of their representatives on councils have used the legislation to buy houses at a discount. Thank goodness I do not have to oppose them in government. It is a case of, "Do as I say, not as I do." The message from the SNP seems to be: "If you want the same rights as SNP representatives of the past, don't vote SNP in future."

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I can find nothing in the Queen's Speech about the SNP.

Mr. Connarty: There will not even necessarily be a Queen if the SNP gets its Parliament. I am just issuing a warning about a party that sits here under another guise.

The proposal to deal with anti-social neighbours is for a probationary tenancy period. Based on my experience, I would say that we must act throughout the United Kingdom before vigilante law erupts in our communities. A village in my constituency, which I shall call only the village of fear, was once a most desirable place for council tenants to live, with beautiful views and a rural aspect. Now four houses have been demolished leaving a gap site, five have been boarded up and two blocks of flats are empty. The eight flats have also been vandalised and everything worth selling has been ripped out.

Five families who went to live in the village and tried to make something of it found that they could not and were driven out—they have all been to see me. Twelve complaints have been made to me in secret, all from villagers who did not want their names given to the police or the local authority, or to the families responsible for problem. One older lady told me that two or three families who arrived in the village more than a decade ago are responsible. They were in the street at 2 o'clock in the morning shouting and fighting among themselves. When someone looked out of a window and they saw the chink in the curtain they shouted, "We'll be the last family in this village; we'll drive you all out."

I have written to the police; I have a complaints file more than an inch thick; I have written to the local authority. I am told that if no one is willing to come forward, to stand up and endure the vandalism, personal attacks and damage to property that go with standing up to these people, they cannot be taken to court. Clearly we need something more than a probationary tenancy period. The problem has existed for a decade and a half already.

Everyone in the village knows who the three or four families and their offspring are. The police tell me that these people know how to use the law. If anyone tries to take them on, they first cause a confrontation and then one of them slips away to the house and phones the police. When the police arrive, they have to charge the people confronting these families. The poor proposal in the Queen's Speech clearly does not go far enough.

Again and again, the Government have parroted their claim that class sizes do not matter. For many years, I taught in a school for children with special educational needs. Our classes were of 12 children, a number that was then reduced to 10. It is strange that high fee-paying schools have small classes as well. Are the Government telling us that only people with special educational needs and the rich need small classes?

On a level playing field, if there is one left after all schools' assets have been sold off, people should realise that smaller classes make a difference to every child. There is an Achilles' heel in the Government's argument. Professor Achilles, who conducted the Tennessee study, has clearly shown, based on a survey of England and Wales with particular reference to Castlechurch school, that class sizes make a big difference and are the right way forward.

How a nation performs clearly depends on how much it puts into education. That is what is needed—not just economic development but better education and skills.

We do not have grant-maintained schools in Scotland, but we do have two equivalents. Earlier, my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett), said that GM schools stood for "Gillian's misery"—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

8.25 pm

Mr. David Atkinson (Bournemouth, East): Most of my remarks will refer to the proposals in the Queen's Speech concerning home affairs; but first I give a warm welcome to the contents of the forthcoming education Bill, particularly the further encouragement for schools to become grant-maintained. I have visited all the GM schools in my constituency; the universal message is that freedom from local authority control, greater flexibility and more funding have resulted in better schools and better results for pupils. That is acknowledged by all concerned: governors, parents and teachers alike.

It is a tragedy that so few schools have taken advantage of such an opportunity—especially primary schools—often because of the campaigns of misinformation and scare tactics used by local authorities to preserve their own bureaucracy. Only one primary school has gone GM in my constituency—a voluntary-aided school whose headmaster told me that it was the best thing he had ever done.

Hence I welcome the prospect of a fast track to GM status for voluntary-aided schools. Church schools already enjoy a degree of independence. That is why they are in such great demand from parents. I hope that more Churches will allow them the full benefit of freedom in their own affairs, without the need for parental ballots. I hope that more primary schools will want to follow their success.

I also welcome the voucher scheme for nursery education. It is a shame that my Liberal Democrat-controlled LEA refused to take part in a pilot scheme that would have enabled our four-year-olds to enjoy the benefits of an extra year of education. The introduction of vouchers will enhance parental choice, and the resulting competition will raise teaching standards. I hope that vouchers will in due course be extended to higher education and eventually to all education, state and private.

I congratulate my right hon. and learned Friend on being the first Home Secretary in living memory to preside over two successive years of falling crime, against a background of a seemingly relentless and irreversible rise in crime. I am sure that the measures in the Queen's Speech will further encourage that downward trend. I welcome the legislation to enable the security services to support the police in combating organised crime, which is becoming ever more international. The trade in drugs is well known; less well known is the growing threat from crime organised by the Russian mafiosi.

To reverse these new and dangerous trends requires the utmost co-operation between the police and security services, nationally and internationally. Should Russia accede to the Council of Europe next year, as I expect it will, we must insist on its early ratification of the 1990 convention which outlaws money laundering and allows its proceeds to be seized.

Although I welcome the Asylum and Immigration Bill, to stem the flow of asylum seekers from countries where there is no serious risk of persecution, I hope that my right hon. and learned Friend will consult widely on the designated list of countries—the so-called white list. Christian human rights organisations are concerned at reports that Pakistan will be on the list—yet there is much evidence that Christians in Pakistan are at risk of persecution by Islamic fundamentalists, the most public example of that being their use of the blasphemy laws. Christians are falsely accused of blasphemy and the resulting trial is used by extremists as a focal point for whipping up religious fervour and hatred.

The recent cases of Gul and Rehmat Masih and Salamat Masih—a 12-year-old boy—all of whom have now found asylum in Germany, and the murders of Naimat Ahmer and Manzoor Masih, all of whom are Christians, testify to that. I met the families of those people last year when I visited Pakistan. Many of them are in hiding in fear for their lives. I hope that my right hon. and learned Friend will agree to meet the representatives of the human rights organisations that I have mentioned before laying his designated list before the House.

I shall confine the rest of my remarks to the concerns of my constituents and those of my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, West (Mr. Butterfill) who attended the public meeting on crime in our borough last Friday. The simple justification for that meeting was that, whereas crime is falling nationally, it continues to rise locally—by 6 per cent. the previous year and by 4 per cent. to June this year. Against this background, there was understandable anger that police manpower in Dorset has been reduced by 34 officers because of this year's settlement, which was £2.8 million less than last year's.

Of course, there was a welcome for the Prime Minister's recent announcement of 5,000 more policemen, 10,000 more closed circuit television cameras over the next three years and the current review of the area cost adjustment. I hope that my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary will ensure that Dorset receives its fair share of the extra police and cameras, and reverse the decline in our funding.

Incidentally, my right hon. and learned Friend will be pleased to know that the CCT cameras that he switched on last month in the Boscombe shopping precinct have already proved a success by leading to six arrests, rendering that precinct safer for shoppers, shop workers and residents alike. We thank him for his personal interest.

Concern was expressed at the meeting about the continuing inability of the courts to pass sentences that match the crime, especially when dealing with persistent 14-year-old offenders, and about the premature release of prisoners long before they have served their sentence. My constituents will thus welcome the Criminal Procedures and Investigations Bill, which will provide for prosecution and defence disclosure and other measures to encourage justice, and the introduction of the secure training order for 12 to 14-year-olds who repeatedly offend. They will also welcome my right hon. and learned Friend's determination to ensure sensible parole for prisoners.

Finally, we in Bournemouth are looking to the Minister of State, Home Office, my right hon. Friend the Member for Penrith and The Border (Mr. Maclean), to respond more positively to our continued appeals for help in funding the cost of conference security, which represents 5 per cent. of our police budget, especially now that the Conservative party comes to Bournemouth every two years rather than every four years for its annual conference.

The cost of protecting our national leaders should be borne nationally by the Exchequer and no longer by council tax payers who also suffer a loss of police protection while the conference is on. My Dorset

colleagues were encouraged by my right hon. Friend the Minister of State's response when they raised the matter with him last week. We look forward to a positive outcome to his present review of conference security.

8.32 pm

Mrs. Maria Fyfe (Glasgow, Maryhill): I am glad that the Home Secretary has returned to the Chamber, because I want to address some comments and questions to him about his statement yesterday. In that statement, he said that the entire Asylum and Immigration Bill should be non-controversial because it was solely about ensuring that genuine asylum seekers were assisted in their aim and helped to reach and stay in this country and that bogus asylum seekers would be deterred.

If that is the case, I wonder how seriously he has considered the proposals recently published by the Law Society. I shall not take up the House's time by examining them in detail, but it seems that there are many in that document, although it runs to only two pages, which would probably win the support of the whole House. They are non-controversial proposals for people who genuinely hope to help real asylum seekers. I wonder whether the Home Secretary has any plans to integrate any of them in the Bill.

A particular proposal that appeals to me is that the Government should consider measures such as the Australian model of licensing immigration advisers, to curb the problem of bogus and unscrupulous advisers who are preying on genuine asylum seekers. They state that that problem is widespread.

I also heard the Secretary of State say that the reason why the Prime Minister had rejected Labour's proposal that a Special Standing Committee be set up was that Special Standing Committees were for non-controversial Bills. That seems to contradict the Secretary of State's claim to the effect that the Immigration and Asylum Bill was a non-controversial Bill. He said specifically that the Special Standing Committee procedure was for Bills that were largely non-controversial. I see him shaking his head, but that appeared in *Hansard* only yesterday.

Mr. Howard: The answer is perfectly simple. The Bill ought to be non-controversial, but the shadow Home Secretary has made it clear that it will be controversial. He has twice gone on record saying that he will oppose the Bill.

Mrs. Fyfe: That is an interesting answer. The most recent occasion on which the House used the Special Standing Committee procedure was for legislation that I do not expect the Home Secretary to have known much about—the Children (Scotland) Act 1995. Many of the proposals in that Bill were accepted by all parties, but there was genuine controversy and divisions on matters of principle in the Chamber and in Committee. The Home Secretary is making a distinction without a difference. Both sides are claiming that they want to deter bogus asylum seekers and help the real ones, but there will be divisions on specific issues. Precisely the same happened with the 1995 Act.

The real reason why the Government do not want a Special Standing Committee is not the bogus reason that they are offering, but that such a Committee is allowed to hear witnesses. If the Committee heard independent, well-informed, knowledgeable witnesses from organisations involved in immigration and asylum affairs, what the Government were doing would be clearly revealed.

The letter sent by the Home Secretary to hon. Members on 20 November begins:

> "We have a proud tradition of giving refuge to those fleeing persecution."

It is true that this country has a long history in that respect, but I draw attention to a recent case in my constituency involving an Iraqi Kurd who had managed to obtain asylum in this country. He came to me about the problem with his mother, who had also fled from Iraq to Iran.

The British embassy there was telling her that it could not supply a visa to the sick woman and her daughter, and that she would have to apply for a visa either to Amman in Jordan, Karachi in Pakistan, Istanbul in Turkey or Nicosia in Cyprus. When I protested that it was unreasonable for a sick woman to have to travel such distances when there was an embassy in Teheran, the embassy would not listen at first. However, I give those people the credit for listening eventually when I, the Red Cross and the United Nations appealed. The embassy eventually acceded to the woman's request, and she is now safely in this country.

Is that the Home Secretary's idea of helping people with a genuine case for seeking asylum? I certainly hope that he will tidy up the current procedures, as it was unacceptable to put that sick woman through such a trauma to get into this country. I must say that other cases have gone more smoothly, but it is cases such as that which I have outlined that give the lie to claims that we are going out of our way to help genuine asylum seekers.

In the few moments that I have left, I shall deal with the nursery voucher scheme. I have recently spoken to people involved in private sector nursery education in and around Glasgow. They tell me that they are unhappy with the voucher scheme because it does nothing to provide them with the capital required to set up a new nursery, especially in the highlands and islands and other rural areas. In other words, parents could have a voucher but have nowhere to spend it.

I also listened carefully to what was said about the cash being provided for the voucher scheme. A few months ago, the Scottish Office said that special needs would be considered because it was more expensive to provide pre-fives education for children with special needs. Yet yesterday and today I have not heard a further commitment to provide the cash for such provision. The money provided will obviously not be enough. Indeed, private sector providers themselves are worried that children with special needs could be pushed out and will not have access to pre-fives education unless the voucher scheme takes account of the extra cash needed to cater for their requirements.

I should also point out that the claim is being made that all the changes are in response to parents' wishes. Again, I cannot expect Conservative Members present to know about the matter. Someone from the Scottish Office should be on the Front Bench when we are discussing those matters.

None the less, there is an important point to be made. The parents of children who attend pre-fives education in all sectors in Scotland were surveyed by the Scottish Parent-Teacher Association, and a large majority of them said that their first preference was for local authority

[Mrs. Fyfe]

nursery education. Instead of wasting money on an unwanted voucher scheme, why is not the Secretary of State for Scotland making that money available in the area where parents want it to be spent and giving it to the local authorities, which parents trust to do an excellent job for children?

8.40 pm

Mr. Michael Fabricant (Mid-Staffordshire): I want to concentrate on education, but seeing my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary in his place, I cannot resist thanking him for his initiative on the provision of closed circuit television in Lichfield. We are to have a £250,000 system thanks to the remarks that he made—and the initiatives that he subsequently took—in the Queen's Speech, albeit last year.

I welcome the education initiatives announced in the Gracious Speech. In particular, I welcome the expansion of nursery education for four-year-olds. As my hon. Friend the Member for Westbury (Mr. Faber) said, it will have tremendous importance in rural areas, not only in his constituency, but also in Staffordshire.

I should have liked to see some reform of university entrance qualifications. In the three and a half years that I have been in the House, I have argued in favour of the Scottish system of highers—like the hon. Member for Glasgow, Maryhill (Mrs. Fyfe), I should have liked to see a Scottish Minister on the Front Bench—or any other broad curriculum that does not require students hoping for an academic career at university to be forced to start specialising in just a few subjects at the age of 15 or 16. That is one of the reasons why we have so many innumerate civil servants and so many inarticulate scientists.

Someone may well ask why I might be interested in education and concentrate on it this evening. Before going up to university, I took a year out and taught physics and chemistry to 11 and 13-year-olds. Having then spent some seven years at university—not constantly retaking the same examination—I later formed a company that employed many arts and science graduates in the United Kingdom and in the United States. So for those reasons, I have a deep interest in education.

I recognise the need for reform, so I welcome the announcement in the Queen's Speech concerning grant-maintained schools. There can be little doubt that the 1,000 or so schools that enjoy grant-maintained status have benefited by the change in their status. Direct and indirect pressure from local education authorities, such as that exercised by the Labour-controlled Staffordshire county council, and a very real fear of the unknown, have deterred many schools from opting to become grant-maintained.

The present system of funding education via local authorities is becoming unsustainable in most parts of the country. In Staffordshire, schools are strapped for cash. That is partly a result of the application of the area cost adjustment, which unfairly favours the south-east, and is also a direct consequence of funding education through county councils.

How can the area cost adjustment be fair when a typical primary school of 300 children in Hertfordshire will receive £61,500 more than a similar Staffordshire school, and while a typical secondary school of 900 students in Staffordshire will receive in excess of £250,000 less than a Surrey school? There are no surcharges for employing teachers in Surrey or Hertfordshire. While Labour-controlled Staffordshire blames the Government for a shortfall in funding, the Government rightly blame Staffordshire for hoarding huge amounts of unused financial reserves—some of the largest of any county in the country.

For the sake of our nation's children and our nation's future, we need to rethink education funding as a matter of priority. We need to introduce greater transparency. The political buck-passing between local and national Government must stop. That can be done only by funding schools centrally and directly from the Department for Education and Employment.

By suggesting the central funding of schools, I am not advocating central control of schools. On the contrary, I want to see far greater local control than at present, by stripping away all the local government powers over education and empowering schools themselves through their head teachers and governors.

Education reforms over the past few years, so bitterly opposed by the Labour party, and now so accepted by teachers and parents alike, such as local management of schools, the introduction of the national curriculum, regular testing by the Office of Standards in Education and the publication of league tables, soon to include value-added data, mean that Britain is ready for central funding.

That does not mean that the grant-maintenance model as it stands at present is suitable were all schools to be funded centrally. Having spoken to many teachers, head teachers and parents, I believe that several questions arise. I should like to suggest a possible solution.

Schools have genuine fears about going it alone and their fears fall under two main headings: operational and financial. Operationally, they ask who will provide advice and support services to schools if local education authorities are abolished. What will happen if a teacher or even a head teacher is taken ill and a supply teacher is needed urgently? Who will act as arbiters when complaints are made against head teachers or school governors? Who will deal with applications for discretionary grants?

Financially, other questions arise. Who will decide how money is disbursed within a county or region? What happens in a financial emergency if the boiler needs replacing or the roof springs a major leak? One answer might be the provision of two parallel tiers assisting at county or regional level. The first tier, whose main concern would be the application of central funds among schools, could be a college of head teachers and chairmen of governors.

That college would not be a regulator, but could have discretion over, say, 5 per cent. of funding, with the remaining 95 per cent. being awarded to schools according to a per capita formula based on a three-year rolling average of student numbers to even out financial peaks and troughs, which are the constant bane on the lives of head teachers and governors.

That college of head teachers and chairmen of governors would be able to make key decisions on the special financial needs of individual schools in their area.

Who better can there be to decide local priorities? Both schools and the college should also have access to capital funding on the financial markets.

But what about the provision of operational services? Many of those can be provided by groups of local professionals—probably many of them now working directly for LEAs—offering their services directly to schools once the LEAs become redundant. The success of Ofsted, despite all the fears expressed at the time, provides a useful model for that.

In outlining one possible solution, I do not prescribe the course of action that the Department should take. I merely call on the Secretary of State to use her not inconsiderable talent in resolving those issues. In the coming months, there needs to be greater debate on the methodology of the funding of schools. If the political hallmark of the 1980s was privatisation and industrial relations reform, the theme for the 1990s must be local empowerment. We have already seen that model operate with the formation of local hospital trusts.

Labour's perennial call—we have heard it this evening—of, "Make no change; everything must be set in concrete; Beveridge was right in 1944, so his credo must remain in place some 50 years later," is no answer. It is Luddite. It is unimaginative. It is Labour.

I call on the Secretary of State to embark on the funding and operational changes that will be necessary over the next few years. We owe it to the professionals who run our schools. We owe it to concerned parents. We owe it to schoolchildren. Perhaps most importantly, as stewards of our nation's future, we owe it to the country.

8.48 pm

Mr. George Stevenson (Stoke-on-Trent, South): I am amazed by the comments of the hon. Member for Mid-Staffordshire (Mr. Fabricant). He seems to argue that there should be more central control, but that there needs to be local control. He must know that one of the reasons why the areas that he represents do not have the same level of nursery provision as the areas I represent is that historically, the areas I represent have had a Labour administration that has provided nursery education. The Conservative administrations in the parts of Staffordshire about which the hon. Gentleman talks have failed to provide that education. It is astonishing that, as a result of Conservative failure, the hon. Gentleman attacks Labour administrations and policies. It is incredible.

Mr. Fabricant: Although the hon. Gentleman was involved in buses before he became a Member of the European Parliament and then a Member of Parliament here, he is surely aware that my area is a rural area; that is why there are no nursery schools in the tiny villages. That is the whole point. The hon. Gentleman's constituency is an urban area.

Mr. Stevenson: That comment seems to be an abject condemnation of the Conservative administrations that have ruled those areas for some time. The point that the hon. Gentleman made the basis of his speech was that the awful Labour administrations in Staffordshire had failed to provide education facilities, whereas the good Conservative administrations would do so. His argument defeats the point that he is trying to make. It is the Conservative administrations in Staffordshire that have not provided nursery education and it is the Labour administrations that have. In my area, 97 per cent. of four-year-olds receive nursery education.

In the Gracious Speech, the Government suggest that we should have a voucher system, yet it will provide no extra places. In an intervention in the speech by the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, I asked how many additional places in Staffordshire and in my constituency would be provided by nursery vouchers. I received no answer, because the Secretary of State does not know. She does not know, because no additional nursery places will result from the voucher system. That is the reality.

The Gracious Speech also contained proposals on grant-maintained schools. There is one grant-maintained school in my constituency. It is amazing that, of the 40-odd schools in my constituency, only one is grant-maintained. Is it because the Government have failed to put their policy across? Is it because parents do not know what they are talking about or because they do not understand the advantages of grant-maintained schools? Is it because the Government do not understand what they are saying? I doubt it. The reality is that parents, governors and teachers know full well that this is not the way in which to proceed.

In the first year, the one grant-maintained school in my constituency had a capital grant to develop a science block. That grant amounted to a significant proportion of the total capital available in Staffordshire. In the second year, the school got nothing, of course, because the second phase of the grant for the science block was refused by the Government. The school was disappointed, so the Government had to do something. They advertised the technology college proposal and, lo and behold, the one school in my constituency that became a technology college was the one grant-maintained school.

According to the Government, this year, the school will receive £60 per pupil because of its new designation. The school will receive £100,000 because it is a technology college. That is all well and good. However, that one school could receive about £250,000 over a period. Why are all the other schools in my constituency suffering cuts? Is not that robbing Peter to pay Paul? Why is the Government's attitude such that one school in my constituency gets many extra resources while the rest of them suffer cuts? That is a fair question, which the Government have signally failed to address.

I am interested in the Asylum and Immigration Bill because, from the reports I read that came out before the Queen's Speech, it seemed that Nigeria, for example, would be on the white list.

The Minister of State, Home Office (Miss Ann Widdecombe): It has never been.

Mr. Stevenson: I am prepared to give way to a Minister.

Mr. Howard: The only suggestion that Nigeria was on the designated list was in a singularly ill-informed article in *The Guardian*. That suggestion has never been countenanced by the Government, and Nigeria has never been considered as a candidate for the designated list.

Mr. Stevenson: The right hon. and learned Gentleman should remember "ill-informed" articles in *The Guardian* which proved to be correct and which meant that he had to suffer humiliation in the High Court. He must be careful.

[Mr. Stevenson]

My point—never mind the white list—is that, out of the tremendous number of applications from Nigeria, only one has been accepted. Will that position change? The political situation has forced the Home Secretary to react, and that is the danger. The Government are desperate and are attempting to play a card from which they will suffer.

Miss Widdecombe: No.

Mr. Stevenson: Yes. I have not yet mentioned the terrible R-word that the Government are worried about. The Government will suffer from the legislation because they will have to define the countries whose asylum seekers they are willing to accept. That will be an extremely difficult and dangerous process. We all know what the Government are about and we all know what the Home Secretary is about. The country at large knows what they are about. The Bill is a dangerous step.

8.57 pm

Sir Michael Shersby (Uxbridge): I wish to declare the fact that I am a parliamentary adviser to the Police Federation of England and Wales, in accordance with the Police Act 1964 as amended by the Police Act 1972. I hope that hon. Members will bear with me as I make my speech, which is one of the first such speeches to be made since the resolution of the House was passed on 6 November. I assure you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and all Members of the House, that I intend to have close regard to the letter from the Leader of the House, addressed to all of us, about our conduct in the Chamber.

I wanted to speak in the debate so that I could welcome the Criminal Procedures and Investigations Bill. For some time, there has been widespread concern about prosecution and defence disclosure in criminal cases, and about the responsibility of the law enforcement authorities concerning material for the purposes of prosecution disclosure and related matters.

There is, I think, a general feeling that the law needs to be reformed, and evidence has been given to a royal commission on the subject. As hon. Members will know, I am a London Member, and I am told that last year in London alone, about 230 cases had to be abandoned by the prosecution on the advice of the law enforcement agencies, because the defence's demand for disclosure was likely to lead to the identification of an informant, usually an officer of the forces of law and order. I believe that in some cases informants' lives would have been put at risk; we must recognise that ruthless criminals think nothing of silencing witnesses, even if that means resorting to murder.

Other cases have been stopped because the blanket demand for disclosure would have required thousands of documents to be made available, to enable the defence to hunt for something—perhaps almost anything at all—that might be contained in them. It seems to me, as to many people who are taking an increasing interest in such matters, that the real objective of such demands, especially in complicated commercial fraud cases, is to persuade the prosecution that the costs involved and the huge time delays are so great as to make its case untenable.

Some hon. Members may say that the procedures outlined in the Bill are complex, but surely the important point for us as Members of Parliament is that the basic principle of disclosure is protected. If something is known that would be of assistance to an accused person, he or she and his or her legal representatives are entitled to be told about it. Surely there can be no argument about that. But there is no reason why the British people should tolerate the right to disclosure being abused so that it becomes a criminals charter.

I believe that the Bill preserves a proper balance between the interests of justice and the rights of the suspect. If the proposals are objected to, one might assume that that is because the Bill is likely to lead to the conviction of the guilty.

I also welcome the reference in the Queen's Speech to the priority attached to the fight against crime, drug misuse, drug trafficking and terrorism. I welcome the proposed legislation to enable the Security Service to assist the law enforcement agencies in their work. I understand that those agencies have had some reservations about the proposals, but it has always been understood that where the security and safety of the state is at stake, the operations of the security services cannot be open to public scrutiny, or as accountable as those of the law enforcement agencies.

However, I feel sure that the law enforcement agencies will welcome the contribution that the Security Service can make, especially through enhanced intelligence. That will work well if the primacy of the forces of law and order, which are responsible for the prevention of crime, is understood and continued. Experience in other countries, including America and France, has shown that inter-service rivalries can hinder the fight against crime. It is therefore important that the arrangements to enable the Security Service to assist the law enforcement agencies are such as to avoid any such rivalry.

I hope that the Security Service will recognise the importance of agreement being reached on the extent of their participation in the work of the established law enforcement agencies. It may be important to have parliamentary supervision of the Security Service, so that all concerned—particularly the British people—can have confidence in and give their full support to the new arrangements.

I wish to refer briefly to the Asylum and Immigration Bill, about which my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary made a statement in the House yesterday. He has given powerful reasons why action needs to be taken, and I should simply like to add a constituency reason for dealing with the matter. My constituency is situated in the London borough of Hillingdon, which is spending about £1.3 million a year on caring for unaccompanied child refugees who come to this country, many of them illegally. It is expected that that figure will increase to nearly £2 million by the end of the year.

Three years ago, I was grateful when my right hon. and learned Friend, in his previous capacity as Secretary of State for the Environment, was instrumental in assisting Hillingdon with a unique problem, as Heathrow airport is situated within its boundaries. I hope very much that my right hon. Friend the present Secretary of State for the Environment will look at that, and assist a local authority that has a unique problem of caring for young people, which it does with considerable distinction. We must consider that aspect of the Bill on Second Reading, and perhaps in Committee.

9.5 pm

Mr. Jack Straw (Blackburn): Like the hon. Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Shersby), I declare an interest as shown in the Register of Members' Interests. I commend what the hon. Gentleman had to say, particularly on disclosure.

The right hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Mr. Patten), in the first speech in the debate today from the Conservative Back Benches, made some thoughtful and provocative remarks on divorce, and then criticised the Government by saying that "friendly fire" from Conservative Members is always to be decried. Well, decried or not, we witnessed friendly fire from at least five Conservative Members who spoke allegedly in support of the Gracious Speech.

There came immediately a double-barrelled attack from the hon. Member for Crosby (Sir M. Thornton), the Chairman of the Select Committee on Education, who blasted into the proposals for grant-maintained schools and the proposals for nursery vouchers. He said that, if new money was to be provided for nursery education, it would be better to widen existing provision than to bring in a new scheme. That was exactly what my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) had said in his speech. The hon. Gentleman went on to say that he saw no enthusiasm for the further extension of grant-maintained schools, and asked whether we were to deprive parents the right too choose by the way in which—as he suggested—the Conservatives were about to fiddle votes for grant-maintained schools.

No sooner had the hon. Gentleman sat down than the hon. Member for Meriden (Mr. Mills) stood up. So opposed is he to the proposals for nursery vouchers and grant-maintained schools that he announced to the House that, unless they were changed, he would not support the education measures in the Gracious Speech. He described the proposals for nursery vouchers as "socialist, centralised and bureaucratic". He is right about two of those—they are indeed centralised and bureaucratic, but those descriptions have now become the hallmark of the Conservative Administration.

The hon. Member for Reading, West (Sir A. Durant) can normally be relied on to be a loyal supporter of the Government in every conceivable circumstance, and he paid a customary tribute to the Gracious Speech. He then launched into a rip-roaring attack on the Government's housing policy, and told the House that unemployment among housing workers has risen by 500,000—we are grateful to him for that fact—and added that the figure was due to rise by another 100,000 if the Government did not do something about the state of the housing industry.

The hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Walden) announced that he did not support the assisted places scheme, while the hon. Member for Bournemouth, East (Mr. Atkinson) criticised the possible inclusion of Pakistan on the white list. The hon. Member for Mid-Staffordshire (Mr. Fabricant) made a kind of supportive speech. His speech was mixed, rather like the advice he gave to the makers of "The Final Cut", with such extraordinary results. Then he said that there were a number of questions about grant-maintained schools that he had to raise. They were only fairly minor. They were operational and financial. He went on to construct—

Mr. Fabricant: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Straw: I will in one moment.

Mr. Fabricant: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The hon. Gentleman is quoting me.

Mr. Straw: That was not in "The Final Cut" either. I will of course give way to the hon. Gentleman in a moment. He went on to describe a policy of abolishing local education authorities and setting up a far more centralised and bureaucratic structure than any of us could imagine.

Mr. Fabricant: If the hon. Gentleman had been here while I was speaking, he would know that I did not say what he has just quoted me as saying. The questions that I posed were those that would arise if all schools were forced to be grant-maintained. That is not the present policy. Grant-maintained status has not been forced on any school. The questions that I raised were about enforced, not voluntary, membership of the grant-maintained system. If the hon. Gentleman had been here, he would not have made the point that he has just made.

Mr. Straw: It is no wonder that the hon. Gentleman is confused about whether he supports the Government's policy. He obviously does not know what it is. It is the Government's policy to try to secure the opt-out of all schools. The hon. Gentleman suggested a way through, with what he described as two tiers for administering education. As my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, North (Mr. Henderson) has said, it sounded like the North Korean solution.

Of the three home affairs measures in the Gracious Speech, the one that is potentially the most divisive is the Asylum and Immigration Bill. In opening his statement on the Bill yesterday, the Secretary of State claimed that his Government had always attached the greatest priority to preserving good race relations in Britain. He did not seem properly to appreciate that the nature of immigration control pursued and the motives perceived to be behind it can have a direct impact on those good race relations.

If the controls operate fairly, if they strengthen families rather than fracture them, if changes are made for sound reasons, racial harmony will be sustained. But if the changes introduced are hasty, ill-considered or disproportionate to the problem or appear to have some extraneous object behind them, their consequence may be to stir up racial prejudice and tension. If, for example, emotive and exaggerated language is used, people may start to believe again the old saw that the immigrant flow is out of control. When such sentiment takes hold, people feel resentful about the presence of those in this country of a different race or colour.

People forget why many of those of a different race or colour came here in the first place. They forget that the original immigrants to my constituency came in answer to advertisements placed in Indian newspapers by British mill owners desperate for textile workers. They forget that the original influx of people from the West Indies came to solve a British labour shortage on the London buses. They even forget that Enoch Powell, when Conservative Minister of Health, advertised for nurses in the West Indies to work in London hospitals.

[Mr. Straw]

If we do not acknowledge the contribution that so many immigrants have made to this country, race relations will be damaged. When the last such Bill was introduced in the House, the Asylum and Immigration Appeals Bill, the then Home Secretary spoke of people who came to this country wanting

"to improve their quality of life."—[*Official Report*, 11 January 1993; Vol. 216, c. 731.]

That is true, as a great many in the House can certify. I can, as a great-grandson of an immigrant. So can the Secretary of State for Defence and the Home Secretary. Those of us who come from immigrant families have a special responsibility in how we act and what we say in respect of those who follow in our parents' footsteps.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: I intervene because I agree with what the hon. Gentleman says. The use of language is very important. Does the hon. Gentleman now regret saying to the Labour party conference that his party would vote against the Asylum and Immigration Bill? Is not the more sensible line that he is now adopting a result of the fact that his leader has insisted on his taking a different view from his original view?

Mr. Straw: Of course I do not regret saying that to the Labour party conference. If the Bill is as anticipated, we shall certainly vote against it. What we want, as I shall describe, is the issue to be taken out of party politics. There is no reason why it should not be. If Conservative Members want it taken out of party politics, they should repudiate, as they have not yet done, what Mr. Andrew Lansley had to say about playing the race card.

Last Wednesday, the right hon. Member for Witney (Mr. Hurd), one of the most distinguished men in the House and himself a former Home Secretary, made a powerful plea about the worries of thoughtful people about what he called the empty noise and phoney warfare of our adversarial politics. In our view, the Special Standing Committee procedure offers a way out of that empty noise and phoney warfare.

The day after my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition made his proposal for a Special Standing Committee, the Prime Minister was plainly warming to it. In an interview in *The Independent*, he said:

"I do not want to deal with the problem in a way . . . which may unsettle people who do not deserve to be unsettled".

The two reporters from *The Independent* who interviewed him on Thursday commented that he was "leaning towards a yes" to that proposal.

That, of course, was before the Home Secretary got back from his trip to America. When he did, he simply overruled this decent but weak Prime Minister. Instead, the Home Secretary sought to assert to an incredulous House yesterday that his proposals can be properly scrutinised in Standing Committee. The truth, which the whole House knows, is that Standing Committee scrutiny does not work. The Government's record of one bad and defective Bill after another shows that to be the case.

When, in February 1986, the House debated the extension of the Special Standing Committee process, the Chairman of the Procedure Committee, the right hon. Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery), launched a compelling attack on the old ways of scrutinising Bills. He said:

"I hope that that procedure will be used much more than it has been."—[*Official Report*, 27 February 1986; Vol. 92, c. 1096.]

Mr. Howard: Is the hon. Gentleman not aware that my right hon. Friend the Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery), the Chairman of the Procedure Committee, has written to the Leader of the Opposition today referring him not to a finding of the Procedure Committee in 1986 but to a finding of the Procedure Committee in the 1989-90 Session, which clearly demonstrates that that procedure would not be appropriate for this Bill?

Mr. Straw: I am afraid that the right hon. Member for Honiton cannot take away the words that he used in the House in February 1986 in plain support of a proposition that the Special Standing Committee procedure should be used more than it has been. The Procedure Committee went on to say, as did the right hon. Member for Honiton, that every Minister who gave evidence to the Procedure Committee suggested that it had greatly helped his or her handling of Bills.

One such Minister was the then Solicitor-General, who is now the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. The Home Secretary should talk more to him about this as about other issues. In his evidence, the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland told how his 1981 Criminal Attempts Bill had been recast as a result of evidence before a Special Standing Committee. He said:

"I had the very salutary experience of cross-examining two of the leading authorities on criminal law . . . as to the likely effect of a Bill about whose provisions I was already experiencing a sinking feeling".

With characteristic honesty, he added:

"At the end of the final sitting of the Special Standing Committee, the draftsman informed me that not only did the Bill not do what it was supposed to do but that it could not be made to do it."

The Special Standing Committee procedure was designed exactly for this sort of Bill, a point reinforced by my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Maryhill (Mrs. Fyfe) in her excellent contribution about the way in which the Children (Scotland) Bill was greatly improved as a result of the use of the procedure.

Mr. Spearing: Did my hon. Friend not hear the Home Secretary say yesterday that the procedure that he is describing is a diversion? Is he aware that 42 per cent. of the Newham population are of overseas background and that, on hearing of the possibility of such a Committee, the police community consultative committee wrote to the Prime Minister saying that it wished to give evidence? Surely a diversion is diverting such committees from the practical contribution that they could make to our proceedings in this place and not the opposite, as the Home Secretary is saying.

Mr. Straw: My hon. Friend emphasises that there is very widespread support outside the House, as inside, for that procedure. Most members of the public and organisations with an interest in the issue simply cannot understand why Ministers have refused to use it.

Yesterday, the Secretary of State told the House that he wanted to take this issue out of party politics, but we then learnt of his approach to consensus. Instead of agreeing to the proper scrutiny of his plans, he effectively told the

House, "These are my proposals—like them or lump them." That is not a recipe for consensus; it is the road to conflict, and he knows it.

This Bill needs far better scrutiny than a Standing Committee can provide precisely because so many in the ethnic communities and beyond are, in the Prime Minister's words, "unsettled by the proposals". Nothing that the Secretary of State has said so far has even attempted to deal with that concern.

The Conservative candidate for Cheltenham, for example, Mr. John Taylor, recently complained of the Tory party:

"They alienate ethnic minorities by pandering to xenophobic voters with promises of crackdowns on immigration".

Mr. Tredinnick: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Straw: If the hon. Gentleman will excuse me, I will not do so, as I gave up part of this speech to allow his hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge to speak.

I shall tell the Secretary of State some of the issues on which that scrutiny should take place. They are: on the reasons for delays when the point of the Asylum and Immigration Appeals Act 1993 was to reduce them; on the need for better regulation of advisers, which was an important point that my hon. Friend the hon. Member for Maryhill also mentioned today; on the failure promptly to remove those who are here illegally; on the failure of the system proposed by which applicants will be forced to conduct appeals from abroad; on how employer checks can work in a non-discriminatory way; and on the whole principle behind the so-called white list. On top of that, there is the greatest anxiety about the fairness with which the present rules operate, even when a country is not and will not be on the white list.

Yesterday, the Secretary of State made light of the fact that, of the 1,495 asylum seekers from the brutal, inhumane regime in Nigeria, just one had been accepted for asylum last year. He said:

"Those decisions are not made by Ministers . . . Every applicant has to establish a well founded fear of persecution."—[*Official Report*, 20 November 1995; Vol. 267, c. 340.]

He must know more than anyone that officials base their judgments partly on so-called Home Office country assessments. I have Nigeria's assessment here. In September this year—three months after the then Foreign Secretary spoke of its "growing cruelty" and "summary justice" and while Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight others were awaiting trial for their lives—the Home Office was advising its staff:

"there is no evidence to suggest that Ogonis . . . face persecution from the Nigerian authorities"

for membership of MOSOP—the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People. Yet that was the very organisation to which Ken Saro-Wiwa belonged before he was brutally and judicially murdered. That country assessment is not a white list; it is a whitewash.

Do not people have a right to feel unsettled when they know of such stunning complacency in the face of the facts? If Britain is to be persuaded that the purpose behind the proposals is not to play the race card, let us have the case for them and let us have that case properly examined.

The Prime Minister told the House last Wednesday that he has always believed strongly in racial tolerance in Britain. No one doubts that, but the problem is that the Conservative party has long been split on the issue of race. We may and do trust the Prime Minister on race, but bitter experience has taught us that we often cannot trust those in control of his party. There was Enoch Powell's "rivers of blood" speech in 1968 and Margaret Thatcher's claim in 1978 that the country would be "swamped" by immigrants. More recently, there were the 1992 and 1994 Euro-elections.

We know that, for many in the Conservative party, the temptation to prey on people's worst prejudices is often too great to resist. What else are we to think of those chilling words from Mr. Andrew Lansley, who said that immigration has more potential to hurt? Is that the language of a party dedicated to good race relations and to the examination of important but sensitive issues? Or is it the language of a party ready to stir up prejudice in a desperate attempt to garner votes? I hope that, when the Secretary of State replies to the debate in a few minutes' time, we will hear from him, at long last, a complete repudiation of Mr. Lansley's views and of his candidacy.

The Gracious Speech contains two other home affairs measures on disclosure and better national co-ordination in respect of the fight against crime. We shall support the principle of both measures, while, of course, examining their detail with care. The rules on the disclosure of prosecution and defence evidence have to be changed. Justice is not served if the innocent are convicted or if the plainly guilty walk free.

We shall support, too, the new proposals on the nobbling of juries and witnesses. None of us wishes to see a national police service, but organised crime is no respecter of boundaries, and national arrangements must reflect that reality. As for the new role for the Security Service, provided that there are proper safeguards for its necessarily secret work, it is plainly sensible, given the reduction in its other tasks, for its skills and resources to be used.

Neither of the two Bills realistically measures up to the scale of the crisis that now engulfs the criminal justice system. What is significant about the Queen's Speech is not what is in it but what is not. There is nothing in the Gracious Speech to tackle crime or the fear of crime, nothing to deal with criminal anti-social neighbours, nothing to cut court delays and nothing to stop our communities being torn apart by disorder and division.

The Secretary of State will no doubt refer to the fall in crime over the past two years, and that is welcome, but he fails to understand that the public judge the Government's record not on two years but on 16, and in 16 years crime has doubled. Violent crime has risen even faster. Yet fewer people are being cautioned or convicted than in 1979. Under the Conservative Government, not only is there more crime but many more people are getting away with it—just one in 50 of the crimes committed result in a conviction.

The consequence is that crime and the fear of crime now dominate people's lives in a way unheard of two decades ago: elderly people are trapped in their homes, women drive in fear and parents believe that their own neighbourhoods are unsafe. In a single decade, the number of children allowed to walk to school unaccompanied has more than halved. The Secretary of State knows that everyone is now affected by crime. When people call for more police on the beat, they do so

[Mr. Straw]

because they want to be safe on the streets, safe from crime, safe from disorder, safe from loutish behaviour and safe from racial harassment.

Nowhere is the failure of the criminal justice system greater than in dealing with the problems of local disorder. We all know about decent law-abiding citizens whose lives have been ruined by criminal, anti-social neighbours who refuse mediation, intimidate witnesses into silence and ignore the law with impunity. We heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Falkirk, East (Mr. Connarty) a harrowing story about how one village in his constituency has been run to ruin as a result of such criminal, anti-social neighbours. But where is there anything on that in the Gracious Speech? Everyone knows that it is a major issue to be tackled—everyone, that is, except the Government.

Mr. Howard: We did indeed hear a powerful speech from the hon. Member for Falkirk, East (Mr. Connarty), in which he said that the cause of the difficulties faced by his constituents was that no one was prepared to come forward to give evidence of those difficulties. How can anything that the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) suggests have any effect in the absence of evidence? What is he suggesting? Is he suggesting some magical new change in the law that will enable people to be convicted without any evidence?

Mr. Straw: I am delighted that I gave way to the Home Secretary, because his question showed complete incomprehension of the scale of the problem.

Mr. Pawsey: Answer.

Mr. Straw: I will answer.

The Home Secretary sought to condemn our proposals for dealing with the problem before reading a single word of those proposals. Of course persuading witnesses to give evidence is a major problem; that is why we have built on the way in which Labour-controlled Coventry city council handled that problem. Rather than relying on individual neighbours who have suffered or been intimidated in silence, we make use of professional witnesses employed by the local authority.[*Interruption.*]

The Home Secretary clearly considers this a laughing matter. The whole country will be delighted to learn that he believes that the problem of criminal, anti-social neighbours is a laughing matter. People do not consider it so in Coventry, Falkirk and Blackburn—and I bet that they do not in Folkestone, either. What they recognise is that the Home Secretary simply does not appreciate the scale of the problem that is affecting the country.

We have proposed a new community safety order with tough penalties for a breach of that order. We have proposed more effective witness protection, and special measures to deal with racial harassment. Labour's plans have been welcomed by local authorities, the Commission for Racial Equality, the Police Superintendents Association and many others, and a consensus could easily be reached on them. However, we have heard not a word of support or even comprehension from the Government; we have heard only complacent claims that existing law is adequate. That merely shows how detached from the reality of daily life the Government are.

Then there is the crisis in the court process. More and more is being spent on achieving less and less. The costs of criminal aid have rocketed; fewer cases are going to court; the proportion of cases that are discontinued by the Crown Prosecution Service has almost doubled; the number of prisoners awaiting trial accounts for a quarter of the prison population—there has been a 22 per cent. increase since 1992. Everyone knows that there is a problem, but the Gracious Speech is deafening in its silence about what is to be done.

The Government's record on crime and disorder is appalling. It is the worst among the 16 western countries on which the Home Office provides comparable crime statistics. The record is there for all to see: a doubling of recorded crime; a greater risk of being a victim of crime; parents frightened to let their children go out to play; old people trapped in their homes. That is the reality of crime in Conservative Britain, and it is the reality that the Government have so comprehensively failed to address in the Queen's Speech.

9.33 pm

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Michael Howard): We have heard yet another preposterous, disgraceful speech from the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw). It was disgraceful because of the racism that it introduced into discussion of the Asylum and Immigration Bill, and because of the way in which it sought to mislead people in regard to the real and certain problem of anti-social conduct, to which the hon. Gentleman and his party have no solution whatever.

The most significant feature of this debate is that it tells the nation loud and clear just how little prominence Labour gives to law and order. Three Home Office Bills are included in the Gracious Speech. They are at the forefront of our programme. We know how important the issues are to the everyday life of our citizens, but the Opposition have tried to hide them and have put them at the end of the debate. They have shown the country what they do not want to talk about. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order. We do not need mirth at this hour.

Mr. Howard: The last thing that the Opposition want to talk about is the success of the police in the fight against crime. We congratulate the police on that success. The past two years have seen the biggest fall in recorded crime since records began in the middle of the last century. There have been 500,000 fewer crimes, fewer victims and less suffering. That is what is happening in the country, and it is the measure of the success of the police. We are determined to help them build on that success.

The measures in the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 are beginning to bite. The new provisions on bail, which the hon. Gentleman impliedly opposed in his speech, are helping to protect the public.

Mr. Straw: Not at all.

Mr. Howard: The hon. Gentleman says, "Not at all." He complained about the number of people awaiting trial, so he cannot be in favour of measures that would tighten bail to ensure that more and more people are not released on bail to reoffend and terrorise the public. If people are refused bail, there will be more people in prison awaiting trial. Perhaps even the hon. Gentleman can grasp that elementary fact.

Mr. Straw: The Secretary of State shows how misinformed he is about the problem in the Prison

Service. Numbers have risen so fast because the statutory time limits that were set by his Government to ensure that there are not too many delays in bringing cases to trial have been broken. The proportion of cases meeting the statutory time limit has gone from 15 to 25 per cent. The truth is that delays are getting longer.

Mr. Howard: The hon. Gentleman knows perfectly well that, if bail is tightened and if it is refused to stop people reoffending, the number of people in prison awaiting trial is bound to increase.

The spread of closed circuit television is preventing crime, as we heard from my hon. Friends the Members for Bournemouth, East (Mr. Atkinson) and for Mid-Staffordshire (Mr. Fabricant). The extension of partnership across the country, which is mentioned in the Opposition amendment but which was not mentioned by the hon. Member for Blackburn, is creating an environment that is increasingly hostile to the criminal. I also pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Exeter (Sir J. Hannam) for piloting through Parliament what is now the Proceeds of Crime Act 1995. It was strongly supported by the Government and it will enable the courts to confiscate the assets of persistent criminals—the professional burglars, the bank robbers and the pornographers.

Last month my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister announced important new backing for the police. We have recruited 16,000 more police officers since 1979—500 more in the current year alone. My right hon. Friend has promised to provide the money for another 5,000 over the next three years. In addition, he promised that resources would be made available to help to pay for 10,000 more closed circuit television cameras to help those police officers to prevent crime and bring more criminals to justice.

Those are the matters that Labour wants to keep hidden and to ignore. Labour Members do not want to talk about them, so they relegate the hon. Member for Blackburn to the tail end of the debate—out of sight, out of mind.

Mr. Ronnie Campbell *rose—*

Mr. Howard: I give way to the hon. Gentleman, who made a notable and compelling speech on the drug problem in his constituency.

Mr. Campbell: It is on that matter that I want to put a question to the Home Secretary. As I said in my speech, the biggest problem in my area is the supply of legal methadone to young children who are reaching the age of the criminal element. What does the right hon. and learned Gentleman intend to do about that?

Mr. Howard: As I have said, the hon. Gentleman made a compelling speech, in which he described in vivid terms the drug problem in his constituency. He will know that, in pursuance of the strategy that we announced in our White Paper earlier this year, we are setting up across the country 100 drug action teams that are designed to ensure that all local agencies work together to deal with the problem. As his speech clearly showed, it cannot be dealt with by any one agency or one measure alone. Everyone must co-operate and work together. That is precisely the purpose of the drug action teams that we are setting up. I hope that they will contribute to the solution in the hon. Gentleman's constituency, but so will the part played by the Security Service in the fight against serious and organised crime.

The three Home Office Bills in the Gracious Speech are of utmost importance. The Criminal Procedure and Investigations Bill was introduced in another place last week. It proposes a statutory scheme for prosecution and defence disclosure in criminal cases. It will help to even up the scales of justice and redress the current imbalance that requires too much of the prosecution and too little of the defence. I have lost count of the times police officers have said to me that the current rules are being exploited by hardened criminals and enable guilty men to walk free from court. I welcomed the informed support that my hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge (Sir M. Shersby), with the wealth of his experience in the police service, gave to that measure.

That Bill will reduce the unnecessary burdens of the present arrangements, without denying defendants access to the material that they need. It will narrow the issues in dispute before the trial and protect sensitive material more effectively. In short, it will help to make trials more a search for the truth and less a game of cat and mouse played out by lawyers.

Mr. Chris Mullin (Sunderland, South): No one wants the guilty to go free, but does the right hon. and learned Gentleman agree that the failure of the police and, sometimes, of the prosecution authorities to produce evidence that is inconvenient to their case has led to some extremely serious miscarriages of justice? Will such miscarriages be avoided under the legislation that he is proposing?

Mr. Howard: The proposals that I make will not, in any way, increase the risk of miscarriages of justice. I was delighted to hear from the hon. Member for Blackburn—although there had been a certain amount of confusion up to his speech this evening—that the Labour party apparently intended to support these proposals. *[Interruption.]* I will explain to him exactly why there was confusion. There was confusion because, in his speech last week, the Leader of the Opposition said that he supported the scheme proposed by the Royal Commission on criminal justice on this matter.

I agreed with the principle behind the royal commission's proposal, but it did not adequately deal with the problem that it identified. The Bill's proposals, therefore—let there be no misunderstanding about this—go substantially further than those made by the royal commission. It was therefore utterly ridiculous—I am glad to see the hon. Member for Blackburn nodding his head—for the Leader of the Opposition to respond to our proposals by saying that he supported the royal commission's recommendations when they were two different things.

Trying to find out where the Opposition stand on such matters is normally a futile affair. The Leader of the Opposition has elevated indecision to the level of a constitutional principle. He will do anything and go anywhere rather make up his mind on any of these matters. His attitude to decision making is to run away from it as fast as he can.

The amendment to the Gracious Speech complains that there is nothing to help victims in our proposals. That is not true. The Criminal Procedure and Investigations Bill will give judges a new power to prevent the reporting of unsubstantiated allegations by the defence, which would blacken the good name of victims, to get lighter sentences for their clients. That should significantly reduce the

[Mr. Howard]

distress experienced by victims, but, as usual, the right hon. Gentleman did not bother to check his facts before drafting his amendment.

The Bill will allow retrials where a jury has been nobbled or a witness intimidated. That measure will do most to deal with the problem that was raised by the hon. Member for Falkirk, East (Mr. Connarty), whose problems were caused by the fact that people were not prepared to come forward to give evidence. One cannot convict people in the absence of evidence. The Bill will encourage people to come forward and to give evidence, and it implements the last of the 27 pledges that I made at the Conservative party conference in 1993. It was one of the many royal commission recommendations that I have been happy to accept.

Mrs. Fyfe: On the subject of indecision, is the Home Secretary prepared to tell us whether he repudiates the words of Andrew Lansley?

Mr. Howard: I made it perfectly clear yesterday that I had never discussed the matter with Mr. Lansley. The Bill that I am proposing is a clear response to an identified problem. We need to hear whether Opposition Members agree that there is a problem and, if not, why not, and what they intend to do about it. Do they agree with our proposals? If they have some other way of dealing with the problem, let us hear from them about it. Let us have no more diversionary tactics. Let us talk about the issues and debate them on their merits.

Mr. Straw: This is the fourth time of asking over two days and the Home Secretary must now answer the question. The entire country wants to know the answer—*[Laughter.]* It is hardly a laughing matter. Mr. Andrew Lansley made it clear that his advice to the Tory party was to play the race card, that immigration was an issue that played particularly well in the tabloids and that it had the potential to hurt. We want to know not whether the Home Secretary has discussed the matter with Mr. Lansley, which is his pat answer, but whether he will now repudiate the views of Mr. Lansley.

Mr. Howard: The hon. Gentleman slightly exaggerates the extent to which he has been able to excite the country about this matter. I have told him clearly that I have made clear proposals to deal with a clear problem and it is about time that we heard from the Labour party about its attitude to the proposals.

Our second Bill will enable the Security Service to help to fight organised crime. Organised crime is big business on an international scale. The people involved are highly calculating, highly ruthless and highly organised. To deal with them we have to be just as calculating, just as ruthless and just as organised.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Mr. Howard: I have already given way about five times as often as the hon. Member for Blackburn. I want to deal with this important measure.

The Security Service has considerable expertise in collecting, collating and analysing intelligence. That expertise should be used to help the police, Customs and Excise and the National Criminal Intelligence Service to fight crime. It is doubtful whether current legislation permits this, so we shall legislate to put beyond doubt its ability to do so.

In addition, we intend to build on the success of the regional crime squads and the National Criminal Intelligence Service so that we can establish a more focused and better co-ordinated policing response, at national level, against organised crime. The police will, of course, continue to lead on this. They fully support the proposals.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed) *rose—*

Mr. Howard: I suggest that the right hon. Gentleman waits until I have completed this passage; then I may give way to him.

The hon. Member for Glasgow, Hillhead (Mr. Galloway) made a speech about that aspect of the matter. It was characteristically mistaken. He was the only Opposition Member to mention it. Perhaps we will hear whether he speaks for his party on this matter. His speech was in direct contrast to that of the hon. Member for Blyth Valley (Mr. Campbell) who made a compelling speech about the drug problem in his constituency. I hope that, in addition to the measures that I identified when I gave way to him, the involvement of the Security Service in helping to intercept the flow of drugs to this country will help to deal with the problem with which his constituents are afflicted.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Howard: I want to finish this section of my speech. If I have not already answered his question, I will then give way to the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith).

Concerns have been expressed about the accountability of the Security Service. Of course, it will not be acting independently; it will be working in conjunction with the police and Customs and Excise. The Director General of the Security Service will be accountable to me in relation to these additional functions just as she is now for the present work of the service. The existing safeguards—the role of the Security Service commissioner and the tribunal in investigating complaints about the service—will apply to its additional functions as they do to its existing ones. This will be a valuable reinforcement of our armoury in the fight against crime, and I hope that the Bill will receive a warm welcome.

Mr. Beith: How will the right hon. and learned Gentleman ensure that the police are in operational charge? If the Act is simply amended to allow the Security Service to operate in the area of organised crime, the service will itself be able to choose which operations to mount.

Mr. Howard: No, because the arrangements that we have made—agreed by the Security Service and the police and Customs and Excise—make it clear that the work done by the Security Service on organised crime will be in support of the law enforcement agencies: the police and Customs and Excise.

Mrs. Bridget Prentice (Lewisham, East) *rose—*

Mr. Howard: My third Bill is the Asylum and Immigration Bill. Yesterday I set out the genuine problems that we face and the actions that we intend to

take to deal with them. Asylum applications are rising sharply. In January last year we received 2,000 claims; last month there were 4,500, so the number has more than doubled.

Mrs. Prentice *rose—*

Mr. Howard: The trend here is in marked contrast to what is happening in Europe, where other countries have taken action, not against genuine refugees but against bogus asylum seekers. Asylum claims fell by more than 40 per cent. last year in the rest of western Europe but rose by 45 per cent. here.

Most of the claims that we receive are bogus; only 4 per cent. are initially granted asylum, and only 4 per cent. of appeals are upheld by independent adjudicators.

Mrs. Prentice *rose—*

Mr. Howard: There are now 700 staff working on asylum claims, compared with fewer than 100 in 1988. In the 12 months to last June, they took 25,000 decisions, 10,000 more than in the preceding 12 months. In February I announced a £37 million increase in spending on more case workers and adjudicators over the next three years. These improvements will enable us to deal with 37,000 claims a year. But this year alone we look set to receive 40,000 asylum applications, and the latest month's figures suggest an annual rate of more than 50,000.

Mrs. Prentice *rose—*

Mr. Howard: Without firm action to deter bogus applicants, we risk getting caught in a vicious circle—ever-increasing delays attracting more abusive applications, making it more difficult to deal quickly with the claims of genuine refugees. The Asylum and Immigration Bill will enable me, with parliamentary approval, to designate certain countries where there is no serious risk of persecution. Claimants from those countries would face a rebuttable presumption against their claim, as they already do in Germany and the Netherlands.

It has been asserted, quite wrongly, that such provisions breach the United Nations convention. They do not. Every application will continue to be decided on its merits, as international law dictates. I repeat what I said yesterday and earlier today: the list of designated countries will be laid before Parliament in due course, but Nigeria has never been considered for it.

Mrs. Prentice *rose—*

Mr. Howard: I am happy to give my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, East the assurance that he sought. I am happy to meet the organisations that he identified before the list is finalised.

Mr. Campbell-Savours *rose—*

Mrs. Prentice *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Member for Lewisham, East (Mrs. Prentice) must have realised by now that she is not likely to be allowed to intervene—

Mrs. Prentice: But Mr. Deputy Speaker—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. If the hon. Lady wants to talk to me afterwards I shall be happy to have a conversation with her, but not across the Floor of the House.

Mr. Bermingham: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Why do you find it necessary to pick on just one hon. Member, when many are rising?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I do not need to hear comments like that. I am merely pointing out that if an hon. Member keeps trying to intervene—on my count, 11 times—but is not allowed to intervene by the Member who has the Floor, it becomes a little tedious.

Mr. Howard: I have already given way half a dozen times more than the Opposition spokesman.

I must deal with the entirely bogus point raised in relation to the Special Standing Committee. The hon. Member for Blackburn referred yesterday and again today to a recommendation by the Procedure Committee going back to 1986. However, the Committee has considered the matter since then. In its second report in the 1989-90 Session, the Committee said clearly that the procedure was appropriate for Bills that were not controversial in party political terms. My right hon. Friend the Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery), the Chairman of the Procedure Committee, has written to the Leader of the Opposition making precisely that point. Anyone who considers the matter objectively will recognise how inappropriate the suggestion of a Special Standing Committee is.

We have debated six Bills relating to immigration since the procedure was introduced. It was not used for any of them. Like its predecessors, this Bill will receive detailed scrutiny in the usual way. If Opposition Members want to take the politics out of the issue, they should support the Bill.

The Opposition's amendment to the motion refers to access to work, but the Labour party has shown yet again that it has no understanding of how jobs are created or how they are destroyed.

Mr. Campbell-Savours *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) should save his energy.

Mr. Howard: Labour's proposals—*[Interruption.]* I can see that Labour Members do not want to hear about the statutory minimum wage. That is the last thing that they want to hear about, but I shall remind them of it. Labour's amendment refers to access to jobs, but there can be no access to jobs if one destroys those jobs with a minimum wage. That is what the Labour party intends to do. The minimum wage and the social chapter—*[Interruption.]* Labour Members do not want to hear about how they will destroy jobs. They would guarantee to give strikers back their jobs. That is how they would destroy utterly the prospect of a pathway to jobs and the access to jobs to which their amendment refers.

I deal now with the position of the hon. Member for Blackburn.

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. David Maclean): Does he have a position?

Mr. Howard: I want to express my sympathy with the hon. Gentleman. During the previous debate on prison policy, the Leader of the Opposition humiliated him. He told him when to make interventions and which to make; he told him when to take interventions and when not to. Finally, when he could constrain himself no longer, he shoved the hon. Gentleman aside and took to the Dispatch Box himself.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Are the Home Secretary's comments in order?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The contributions of all hon. Members should refer to what is in the Queen's Speech. So far, the contributions of all hon. Members have been in order.

Mr. Howard: Unfortunately for the hon. Member for Blackburn, that was not the end of his humiliation. Last month he made what appeared to be a definitive statement about his party's—

Mr. Campbell-Savours: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is the Home Secretary referring to something in the Queen's Speech?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: In so far as I could hear the Home Secretary, he made some reference to a speech by the Leader of the Opposition. I have not yet heard the content of it and I do not know whether the Leader of the Opposition was referring to the Queen's Speech. If he was, the Home Secretary's remarks are in order; if he was not, I doubt that the right hon. and learned Gentleman will be going further down that route.

Mr. Howard: The context is the Asylum and Immigration Bill, which is in the Queen's Speech. The hon. Member for Blackburn said, "We should oppose the Bill." He said it again last month. He has constantly said that he would oppose the Bill. But along came the Leader of the Opposition and said, "No, no. We are going to wait. We are going to consider it on its merits."

The Leader of the Opposition has humiliated the hon. Member for Blackburn again. I think that he should back the hon. Gentleman or sack him. He should make up his mind about the hon. Gentleman. We on the Conservative Benches will continue to propose measures that deal with the problems facing this country—

Mr. Don Dixon (Jarrow) *rose in his place and claimed to move,* That the Question be now put.

Question, That the Question be now put, *put and agreed to.*

Question put accordingly, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 268, Noes 297.

Division No. 1] **[10.00 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blair, Rt Hon Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Cabom, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomery)*
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Cunningham, Roseanna
Dalis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Chris *(L'Boro & S'worth)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge Hl)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
Garrett, John
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harvey, Nick
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley North)*
Howells, Dr Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Ilsley, Eric
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Sheff'ld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Kennedy, Jane *(L'pool Br'dg'n)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
McCartney, Robert
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
Madden, Max
Maddock, Diana
Maginnis, Ken
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Mike *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin

Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Redmond, Martin
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ross, William *(E Londonderry)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Chris *(Is'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smyth, The Reverend Martin
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Trimble, David
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Welsh, Andrew
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Joe Benton and
Mr. Eric Clarke.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Atkins, Rt Hon Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ru'cliff)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Congdon, David
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'shire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Rt Hon Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Rt Hon Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Sir Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lightbown, Sir David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Major, Rt Hon John
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Rt Hon Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Robathan, Andrew

Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Sir Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Timothy Wood and
Mr. Derek Conway.

Question accordingly negatived.

It being after Ten o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.

Debate to be resumed tomorrow.

BROADCASTING

Ordered,

That Mr. Timothy Kirkhope be discharged from the Select Committee on Broadcasting and Mr. Graham Riddick be added to the Committee.—*[Mr. Bates.]*

LIAISON

Ordered,

That Sir Nicholas Bonsor be discharged from the Liaison Committee and Mr. Michael Colvin be added to the Committee.—*[Mr. Bates.]*

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

Ordered,

That Mr. James Couchman be discharged from the Committee of Public Accounts and Mr. Andrew Rowe be added to the Committee.—*[Mr. Bates.]*

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That at the sitting on Wednesday 29th November Standing Order No. 10 (Wednesday sittings) shall have effect with the following variations: in paragraph (1) in place of the words 'two o'clock' shall be inserted 'half-past eleven o'clock'; in place of paragraph (5) shall be inserted 'Not more than one subject shall be raised before eleven o'clock, and not more than one between that hour and half-past eleven o'clock'; and in paragraph (6) in place of the words 'at two o'clock' shall be inserted 'at half-past eleven o'clock'.—*[Mr. Bates.]*

Cervical Cancer (Radiation Injuries)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Bates.]*

10.18 pm

Ms Janet Anderson (Rossendale and Darwen): I am grateful for the opportunity this evening to highlight the plight of a number of women who have suffered the most severe injuries resulting from radiation treatment for cervical cancer. Approximately one year ago, I was invited to meet a group of women in the Manchester area who had, during a period from the late 1970s to the early 1980s, received radiation treatment for cervical cancer at the Christie hospital in Manchester.

In the normal course of events, the women would have been treated with the well-tried and trusted Manchester pack. However, they were told that they were to receive a new and different treatment which would cure their cervical cancer. The treatment was by way of a machine called a selectron. It is important to point out the difference between the two treatments.

The Manchester pack can best be described as a matchbox which surrounded the tumour and emitted radiation concentrated at the tumour. The treatment spanned three days, and had been successfully tried and tested.

For women who were exposed to the selectron method, things were rather different. They were told that they were to be given a treatment which would cure their cervical cancer. This involved them being placed in a darkened room connected to a selectron machine and left there for 24 hours. We now know that, during the course of the treatment, the women received a radiation dose during 24 hours which would have previously been administered over three days with the Manchester pack. The women involved insist that at no time were they informed that they were part of an experimental treatment.

The injuries that the women incurred as a consequence of the intense radiation therapy are simply horrendous. They have suffered bowel and bladder damage and damage to their internal organs, which has made their lives intolerable. Many have had to be subjected to ostomies of almost every kind. Some injuries have been so traumatic that patients have threatened suicide, family relationships have been shattered, and children have had to be fostered while their mothers were in hospital for long periods.

The women I met were no longer able to enjoy sexual relations or to bear children. Their skins had taken on almost a translucent appearance, and they were obviously very ill. Many suffer constant pain from their injuries. I should like to refer to one of the women in particular, whose case will help to illustrate the extent of the injuries that the women suffered.

In 1987, at the age of 26, Mrs. Vicky Parker was diagnosed as having an advanced stage of cervical cancer. The best treatment was radiotherapy. But when Vicky went into Manchester's Christie hospital, she had no idea what was about to happen to her. It was to be years before she learned the truth. Her radiotherapist had informed her that she was to be treated by a selectron. Vicky said:

"I asked him literally hundreds of questions. At the time I had no idea that this was a new experimental treatment and that I was to be used as a guinea pig. I was told that the only side effects would be sickness and diarrhoea.

According to Vicky Parker, the selectron was a complete nightmare. She said:

"In advertisements you see a woman apparently being treated. She is eating and looks completely at ease. The truth was a different picture altogether."

Vicky spent the next 24 hours—the worst of her life—in a sealed room flat on her back with three tubes packed inside her. The selectron machine attached to the tubes fired caesium ball bearings at the tumour. Such was the strength of the radiation that, if a nurse entered the room, the pellets were automatically sucked out and the whole process stopped. For 24 hours, Vicky was unable to eat or sleep. After that, she underwent five weeks of conventional external radiotherapy.

In January 1988, the treatment stopped. Over the next few weeks, Vicky learned that the cancer had gone. She went on a long holiday with her family, and returned to work in a new job. It was a time of real celebration. She had fought cancer and won. But her celebrations were short-lived.

In September, Vicky started having pains in her bowels, and had to go back to hospital. Referred to a bowel specialist, she listened with horror as he explained that her bowel had been damaged by radiotherapy. There was no time to delay, and the endless round of bowel and bladder operations had begun. Vicky Parker never went back to work. She has been in hospital 100 times. She has had 25 operations—a colostomy, operations to repair, operations to deal with complications. She has had a thrombosis and a urostomy. She is constantly on morphine to cope with the pain.

In such circumstances, it is easy to believe that one is alone in one's experience, but in 1989, when Vicky was in and out of hospital, she met another woman on the surgical ward who was in and out of hospital for similar operations. This woman had also been treated on the selectron. It transpired, as revealed by a BBC Radio 4 "File on Four" programme in 1991, that hundreds of patients had been damaged by the experimental selectron treatment. It was shortly after that that Vicky and others founded the action group RAGE—Radiotherapy Action Group Exposure—to which I have the honour to be a parliamentary adviser.

It is hard to believe that in this country, and in this day and age, cancer patients were completely unaware that they were part of a clinical trial in which they had absolutely no say. Vicky, like all the other victims, was merely told that she would suffer some sickness and diarrhoea. Despite her in-depth questioning, she, like all the others, was not told that she was to be subjected to a most horrible experiment. In her own words, she feels that she has been "medically violated".

In October 1991, 20 RAGE victims started individual legal actions against the Christie hospital. The cases are so complicated, dealing not only with legal aspects but medical rules and ethical questions, that they are still going on. However, nothing could ever compensate the victims and their families for what has happened.

One victim, Kath Dillon, tragically died from her injuries in 1992. It was 12 months before an inquest could take place. The coroner said that internal problems that had led to her death had been caused by the treatment.

RAGE now has 3,000 members. Not all its members have had injuries through a pelvic or abdominal cancer: some have been victims of radiotherapy for breast cancer, and they have their own group, RAGE Breast. It is now apparent that it is not only women who have been abused in this way. RAGE now has a small number of men among its members who have radiotherapy injuries from treatment for prostate, bladder, testes and colon cancers.

The women are now seeking an independent investigation into radiotherapy damage and compensation. The Government have decided to audit injuries on two breast cancer cases. Surely the Minister must now agree to a simultaneous audit for all radiotherapy injuries.

Mr. Andrew Miller (Ellesmere Port and Neston): As my hon. Friend knows, I have had a lot to do with the same group. As one of the few people in the House who has worked with radiation, albeit not in a medical sense, I claim some knowledge of the risks faced by the women in question. Does my hon. Friend agree that the issue of consent, a form for which appears to have been introduced by the Christie hospital only in 1991, is critical? Many of the women were clearly experimental guinea pigs prior to that time. It was only after the damage had been identified that people were asked to sign that form.

Ms Anderson: As ever, my hon. Friend has gone right to nub of problem. He is quite right. The whole case turns around whether the women knew they were part of an experiment. As he pointed out, the Christie did not introduce the consent form until 1991. The women that I am talking about received treatment in the late 1970s and early 1980s. I thank my hon. Friend for that well-timed intervention.

Surely the Minister must agree to a simultaneous audit for all radiotherapy injuries, and most particularly those sustained during the period of experimental treatment for cervical cancer on the selectron machine.

Finally, will the Minister tonight give us an assurance that he will agree to that, and that he will now take steps to set up a national register of victims? There are hundreds of women such as Vicky Parker and her colleagues who deserve to have their voices heard and their condition recognised. It is the responsibility of the Government to assess the scale of the problem, to give recognition to those women, and to make sure that nothing like this ever happens again.

10.28 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Tom Sackville): I am grateful to the hon. Member for Rossendale and Darwen (Ms Anderson) for bringing this matter to the attention of the House. I start by expressing my deepest sympathy for the women who have suffered severe adverse effects as a result of radiotherapy treatment for cervical cancer, many of whom were treated using the selectron, as the hon. Lady said, at the Christie hospital in Manchester in the 1980s.

Let me first say something about the selectron treatment. Internal radiotherapy has been available for decades. The difference with the selectron is that, in old-style therapy, the radiation sources were inserted manually. The selectron is a way of inserting the source and removing it automatically by remote control. Such a system has the advantage of reducing staff exposure to radiation, because the radioactive sources could be withdrawn along pipes into a lead-lined safe at the foot of the bed.

[Mr. Tom Sackville]

In 1978, the low dose rate selectron system devised by the Christie hospital was introduced. It is now in use at other United Kingdom centres, including Edinburgh, Glasgow, Leeds, Liverpool and the Marsden.

In its early days, the correct dose on the selectron had to be calculated because stronger sources were used than in the former manual—that is, non-retractable—treatment system. It must be remembered that, although it was a higher dose of radiation than before, it was still a relatively low dose.

The treatment of women using the selectron during the 1980s was part of a randomised, controlled trial, designed to try to establish the optimum dose for patients with an early stage cancer. As I said, the selectron is still used in the treatment of cervical cancer, and the system developed at Manchester is used worldwide.

Mr. Miller: Can the Minister advise the House how the calculations were undertaken in those early clinical trials and what the dose rates were? Furthermore, does he agree that it is unacceptable that the letter from the Christie to my hon. Friend dated 26 July stated that those patients had experienced difficulties and distress? It is far more than that. Those women have had their lives destroyed; the Christie ought to admit it, and so should the Department of Health.

Mr. Sackville: The hon. Gentleman will perhaps not be surprised to learn that I do not have the information on his first, technical question. I will try to supply him with it in writing. On his second question, that was a highly regrettable series of events. As I said, we all have the deepest sympathy. Later, I will explain how I very much hope that ways will be found to avoid that situation recurring.

The selectron is still in use, and we now have the benefit of experience of doses that have been found to have acceptable levels of adverse effect. I am aware that the women who received significant adverse effects, which they believed were caused by their treatment with the selectron, are taking legal action against the Christie hospital, on the grounds that they were given insufficient information as to the nature of the treatment.

It is now clear Government policy that all patients have a right to consent to or reject treatment, and are entitled to a clear explanation of any treatment proposed, including any risks and alternatives. All treatments carry some level of risk, and patients must be allowed to decide whether they wish to continue with the treatment proposed. That is a principle that has been highlighted in the patients charter.

Some of those suing the Christie are part of a support group, RAGE National, which, with its sister group RAGE Breast, is pressing central Government for recognition and compensation for radiotherapy-related injuries. Representatives from RAGE met my noble Friend Lady Cumberlege and the chief medical officer last year to discuss its members' concerns. Following that meeting, and at the Department's behest, the Royal College of Radiologists agreed to undertake a confidential clinical review of 126 RAGE Breast members to discover what—

Ms Janet Anderson: I think that the Minister just said that Baroness Cumberlege had met RAGE National members. With respect, I think that he is confusing two groups. I do not think that it is the case that RAGE National members—the women concerned with cervical cancer—have ever succeeded in obtaining a meeting with a Minister.

Mr. Sackville: That is my information. Clearly, if it proves to be wrong, I will seek to correct it.

At the Department's behest, the Royal College of Radiologists has agreed to undertake a confidential review to discover what common factors in treatment may have led to those women suffering adverse effects. I know that members of RAGE National, which includes about 700 people in the United Kingdom who have suffered such effects, is pressing for a similar clinical review.

The review of breast cancer cases was commissioned because they are a relatively homogeneous group. Common factors are more likely to emerge than from a heterogeneous group, such as RAGE National members, who have had different cancers and undergone dissimilar radiotherapy techniques. The results of the breast review will be available soon. Once we have those results, we can then look to see whether, in the light of what has been learnt, further investigations would be appropriate.

I fully realise, of course, that many of the women who are still suffering side effects following treatment in the 1980s would wish to have their injuries recognised and consideration to be given to their claims for compensation commensurate with the degree of injury, but it is important to be clear about the way in which such claims are pursued.

First and foremost, we maintain the belief that it is right that people harmed in the course of clinical treatment should be able to seek compensation through the legal process, but that requires them to demonstrate not only that they have been harmed, but that there has been negligence and that the negligence caused the harm. Where negligence cannot be shown, however, there is no case in law for them to be compensated. From time to time, it has been suggested that that is not right, and calls have been made for the introduction of a "no fault" compensation scheme.

Hon. Members will recall that this issue has been considered in the House before, most recently in the Second Reading debate on the National Health Service (Compensation) Bill, on 1 February 1991. On that occasion, as on every other when the issue has been raised, the House concurred with the Government's view that no-fault compensation would not be helpful. I shall briefly remind hon. Members of the main reasons.

We are aware of some victims of clinical negligence who oppose no-fault compensation on the grounds that it would make it less likely that plaintiffs' non-financial concerns would be addressed. Many plaintiffs argue that their motivation for pursuing a claim is not to secure money but to obtain an explanation and an apology, and to ensure that what happened to them does not subsequently happen to others. Thus, a system designed to address financial aspects of medical accidents quickly, without regard to fault, could deflect attention from plaintiffs' most important concerns.

Another closely related issue is accountability. Our legal system holds all individuals accountable for their actions and, arguably, has a deterrent effect on

malpractice. No-fault compensation could remove an incentive to good practice, and make some health care professionals less careful.

The Government must be mindful of the potential cost implications of any no-fault compensation scheme. Costs falling on the NHS could increase substantially. For example, a scheme in New Zealand that covers accidents generally is thought to cost about 1.5 per cent. of its entire gross national product.

It has anyway yet to be shown why compensation in health care should be regarded as essentially different from negligence and compensation in other walks of life, where claims are resolved through the legal process.

Finally, there is, I believe, a fundamental misconception in the minds of many that no-fault compensation would obviate the need for legal action. Experience in the current system shows that it can be just as difficult to establish that medical treatment had caused injury as it would be to prove that someone had been negligent. Under any system of no-fault compensation, causation would still have to be shown. The level of quantum would also have to be established. Legal action would not necessarily be avoided. The process could still be very lengthy.

Mr. Miller: It is important that the Minister should cover the issue of no-fault compensation; I raised it with him in a meeting last year. The issue is surely that the hospital trust and the Department have acknowledged that, as a result of these clinical trials, some women suffered damage. The degree to which that happened in each individual case is quite varied. Some of the cases are extremely serious, as I and my hon. Friend the Member for Rossendale and Darwen have described.

If we simply leave it to the legal system to deal with the matter, it will be dealt with on a case-by-case basis—because, as the Minister pointed out, the cancers involved are very varied—and we shall not be able to deal with the overall problem. Would it not be more sensible for the Department to instruct the trusts to release all the information, not just for the legal process but—more important—in the interests of research, to prevent this from happening again?

Mr. Sackville: I shall come to the hon. Gentleman's last point later. As for the release of information, he must bear in mind the fact that legal action is pending, and the trust has a right to coduct the case as it sees fit.

I have spoken at some length about the reasons why we believe that no-fault compensation is inappropriate. The Government have concluded that where—sadly—clinical accidents have occurred, our most appropriate action is to seek to improve claims management practice within the current system, defending claims that should be defended but not causing expensive delays when claims should be settled.

In his response to the National Health Service (Compensation) Bill, the then Secretary of State for Health undertook to consider arbitration as a possible alternative to the courts for the resolution of clinical negligence claims; the Department of Health subsequently consulted widely on a possible arbitration scheme for the NHS, but the outcome was inconclusive.

Rather than dismiss the idea out of hand, however, it was decided to put it to the newly formed clinical negligence working group. That joint departmental and NHS group was set up to consider how best to help NHS trusts to manage their exposure to clinical negligence claims, which are the main cause of litigation. The group considered the proposals put to it very carefully, but its firm advice was that arbitration did not represent a significant improvement on litigation, and should not be pursued.

The group reached that conclusion for a number of reasons. It was convinced that arbitration would not appeal to plaintiffs; in particular, they were thought unlikely to commit themselves in advance to be bound by the outcome, which is a requirement of arbitration. In complex cases—and clinical negligence cases often are complex—arbitration would not necessarily be cheaper than the courts. A paper-based arbitration system, such as that put before the group, would require a better quality of written information than is often available.

The group did feel, however, that mediation offered constructive possibilities for the resolution of clinical-negligence claims, which should be explored further. That advice was put to my ministerial colleagues in the Department, and was accepted. Since then, work has focused on mediation, and I am pleased to say that a good deal of progress has been made. Pilot schemes using mediation for that purpose have been set up in two English regions—Northern and Yorkshire and Anglia and Oxford.

We believe that mediation offers a genuine alternative way of settling claims, in which the parties to the dispute come together to agree a solution. It is non-binding, but in suitable cases it is thought likely to be a humane and cost-effective way of enabling all aspects of a case to be resolved to everyone's satisfaction. Savings may be hoped for in legal costs.

Where agreement is reached, compensation will be arranged in the same way as in any other out-of-court settlement. If, in some cases, full agreement cannot be reached, mediation offers a possibility of narrowing the issues for subsequent consideration. Of course, we do not expect mediation to be a panacea, but we hope that it may prove helpful in suitable cases.

The pilot mediation schemes began operating in April, and the first mediation, which took place in September, was considered very successful by all the parties concerned. However, it will be some time before we are able to draw any firm conclusions from the schemes. When the outcome has been properly evaluated, we will decide whether mediation should be extended to the NHS as a whole.

I make it clear that we see it as a priority to minimise the risk of any adverse effects from radiotherapy, although it is recognised that most treatments have some element of inherent risk. That is why we have issued guidance to health authorities on quality assurance in radiotherapy. We want to ensure that all radiotherapy units have in place the necessary systems to ensure a quality service.

Last year, I launched a new document called "Quality Assurance in Radiotherapy" which has been disseminated throughout the national health service. In offering deepest sympathy to those who have suffered any accident as a result of this or any other cause in the course of medical treatment, it is appropriate to give a firm commitment on behalf of the NHS.

Ms Janet Anderson: I look forward to hearing that commitment. I think the Minister said that mediation is to

[Ms Janet Anderson]

be extended to all NHS patients. Will he confirm that, in the event of that happening, all the women who have been treated on the selectron machine and received radiotherapy injuries as a result, will also be covered?

Mr. Sackville: I said that two trials are in progress, and that we are committed to two schemes in two regions. I also said that not all accidents will be amenable to mediation. It is a question of the parties concerned finding that that is a suitable way forward which may bring a solution. Obviously, good will is needed on both sides. Although it is non-binding, it is a way to find a solution. I have said that we do not intend that trusts or any other part of the NHS should gratuitously resist claims. They should settle those that ought to be settled. All that is imprecise, because cases differ.

Before the hon. Member for Rossendale and Darwen intervened, I said that, in any discussion of a case of this sort, it is right to give a commitment on behalf of the NHS. It is that we shall constantly seek to raise the standards of quality and safety of all treatment on offer. We shall do everything in our power to ensure that events such as the tragic events that have been described never happen again.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at thirteen minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 22 November 1995

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Common Fisheries Policy

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Conway.]*

9.34 am

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): I must confess, Madam Speaker, that I was not keen on our new arrangements until you generously allowed me the opportunity to raise this morning a subject of the utmost importance to our country—the common fisheries policy. At the heart of our national discontent lies a feeling of impotence, in that an elected British Government can no longer decide our country's destiny in a sense that accords fully with our people's desires, or even with their interests.

In few areas of public policy is that frustration more manifest than over fishing. As in much else, it is the apparent supremacy of the cause of the European Union, alias the "process of European construction", over the welfare of the British people that is to blame. It lies at the root of our beleaguered fishing communities' feeling of alienation and of the wider sense of popular disbelief that any Government of the United Kingdom can any longer protect our natural inheritance of rich fishing resources against the depredations of foreign trawlers, officially sanctioned by what many people regard as an alien power beyond their effective control—the European Union.

If the common fisheries policy were working, I should have no reason to complain. Like many hon. Members, I have a personal interest in its doing so. After all, I voted for our accession to the Common Market in 1971, campaigned in favour of our continuing membership of the European Economic Community in the referendum of 1975, and voted for the Single European Act in 1985.

We all like to think that our past parliamentary behaviour and political attitudes can be justified by events, but if that natural human desire does not accord with subsequent realities, pride must give place to honest acceptance of the facts, and intellectual integrity should be our rigorous guide. I do not believe that in the case of fishing we were right to bind successive Parliaments by assigning in perpetuity our unique insular maritime inheritance, our incomparable wealth and diversity of fisheries, as a common resource to what became the European Union.

It is true that in coastal waters for up to six miles British fishermen alone may fish, that between six miles and 12 miles out, only the boats of European nations with historic rights may compete with our vessels, and that even beyond 12 miles a joint EU regime does not prevent United Kingdom fishing boats from fishing their traditional waters.

Nevertheless, the common fisheries policy flies in the face of intrinsic logic and of the pattern of fish stock management in north Atlantic waters adopted by northern maritime nations akin to our own. It was lack of public confidence in the conservation measures and fishing control capability of the European Community that contributed to the Norwegian people's rejection in two referendums of their country's proposed accession.

Likewise, the Icelanders, the Canadians and the Greenlanders have found the imposition of a 200-mile exclusive fishing zone to be fundamental to the husbandry of their precious national fishing resources, and to their Governments' efforts to preserve the livelihoods of isolated coastal communities where little alternative employment to fishing exists. I am not naive, and the Canadian experience shows that Canada's policy is no panacea. Job losses in the Canadian industry have been huge. Fishing bans and even unilateral action beyond the 200-mile limit—as with the arrest of the Spanish trawler Estai—have demonstrated the dire consequences of overfishing.

Nevertheless, when the Estai crisis broke, there was no doubt where the sympathies of the British people lay. Their hearts were not with European Commissioner Bonino's efforts to uphold the letter of the international law of the sea on the EU's behalf, but with the enviously regarded, spirited and decisive action of the Canadians in defence of their interests. British fishermen sailed for weeks with the Canadian maple leaf proudly at their mastheads in salute to a friendly national Government who had the courage to see off what they regarded as a common threat—European Union-supported Spanish fishermen operating far from home in waters where historically they have no place.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Ludlow (Mr. Gill)—quoting Cicero—put it so admirably in a letter to my hon. Friend the Fisheries Minister on 23 October,

"Salus populi suprema est lex",

or, the people's welfare is the supreme law. That is a classic concept to which electorates rightly expect Governments to aspire, and it should be the guiding principle both of our country's attitude to the common fisheries policy and to the evolution of the EU itself.

Let us examine some basic facts about the common fisheries policy. First, the treaty basis for it is fundamentally flawed, and rests on an assertion in article 39 of the treaty of Rome that the Common Market's agriculture measures shall extend to fisheries. There is no rationale for this, except—as we all know—that the application of the common fisheries policy to the United Kingdom was the quid pro quo exacted by the original six members of the Common Market as Britain's entrance fee to the Community. This historical aberration does not justify the UK's continued participation in the common fisheries policy, especially as decision-making under the policy is by qualified majority voting. That allows even landlocked countries such as Austria and Luxembourg a say, and policy can be potentially decided by horse-trading on extraneous matters rather than on specifically fishing issues which are crucial to the prosperity of British coastal communities and to the interests of the UK economy.

[Mr. John Wilkinson]

If further enlargement of the EU occurs—to which the British Government are rightly committed—and unless we have first withdrawn from the common fisheries policy, Polish, Bulgarian and other east European vessels will be allowed access to the so-called common resource of fish stocks. Those stocks have been sorely depleted already within what should be Britain's exclusive maritime economic zone to the detriment of United Kingdom fishermen, who have seen their way of life threatened by Spanish and Portuguese fishing boats, following the accession of those countries to the EU.

Mr. David Harris (St. Ives): Spanish boats, mainly.

Mr. Wilkinson: I take my hon. Friend's point. Lest anyone should still allege that horse-trading is a misnomer for the European decision-making process, I remind the House that when the Spaniards threatened to block the entry of Austria, Finland, Sweden and—at that time—Norway to the EU at the Edinburgh summit in 1992 unless Spain and Portugal's full participation in the common fisheries policy was brought forward from 2002 to 1996, the UK capitulated.

Before I make my final recommendations, I must demonstrate how seriously the common fisheries policy is failing. In so doing, I will refer to the House of Lords European Communities Committee report of 1992-93. On the decline in catches, paragraph 2.5 of page 42 of the report states:

"The substantial decline in catches over the period of operation of the Common Fisheries Policy reflects the deterioration in the stocks of white fish on which the United Kingdom relies, leading to reductions in Total Allowable Catches and Quotas."

In the case of the 11 species listed—made up of various types of cod, haddock, saithe, whiting and plaice—the total allowable catch in 1982 was 868,010 tonnes, which had fallen by 1992 to 495,750 tonnes. The United Kingdom's quota in 1982 was 426,570 tonnes, which had fallen to 207,825 tonnes in 1992. The report commented:

"The volume of these species available to the Community fleet in 1992 is 372,260 tonnes less than in 1982—a drop of 42.9 per cent. The volume available to the United Kingdom fleet has declined by 218,745 tonnes—a drop of 51.3 per cent."

I move on to the question of landings. Page 41 of the report states that the figure for demersal landings in 1982 was 448,000 tonnes, but that the figure had fallen 266,500 by 1990. In the case of pelagic landings, the drop was less marked, but the figure did fall from 301,300 in 1987 to 256,900 in 1990. There is clear evidence of a serious decline of stocks, and the nature conservation committee established by the Environmental Protection Act 1990 made some very interesting comments on this matter to the House of Lords Committee.

The nature conservation committee said that the common fisheries policy

"which is the basis for regulating fisheries in EC waters, appears to have no clearly stated objectives, depending instead on those of the Common Agriculture Policy which since they address cultivation are not particularly relevant to hunting of fish. This lack of specifically directed objectives appears to result in a political rather than a scientific emphasis on the management of fish stocks.

The CFP appears to have failed to maintain many important commercial fish stocks in the EC's waters. The size of the stocks of the primary commercial species, such as those of cod and haddock, are at an historical low . . . 'Total Allowable Catches' as applied in the EC appear to have proved unsatisfactory and relatively ineffective for several reasons."

The nature conservation committee's remarks continue by stating that one of the reasons why the policy is not working is the pernicious practice of discards, whereby species in excess of the quota are thrown back into the sea dead, and the House of Lords Committee had much to say about that practice on page 27 of its report. The conservation regime is being circumvented by the procedure of quota-hopping, whereby the European Court, no less, has—as usual—proved to be the nigger in the woodpile. The Factortame judgment overturned British law and enabled Spanish interests to buy into British operating concerns, as my hon. Friends who represent Cornwall constituencies will no doubt testify.

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): That is an important point. It is a matter of concern. The hon. Gentleman says that Spanish skippers and vessels have been buying into United Kingdom stocks. Does he agree that every buyer must have a willing seller, and that the stocks must come from British fishermen? Does he understand why in France, for instance, the same kind of transactions have not taken place?

Mr. Wilkinson: I agree. British fishermen believe that they had better get out while the going is good. They recognise that the common fisheries policy allows no long-term future for them in the industry and that they had better realise their assets, even if it means selling them to Spanish interests, as soon as possible. As to what happens in France, I have no specific information.

Mr. Keith Mans (Wyre): If that is the case, what is in it for the Spanish? We are all in the common fisheries policy, so why should they be buying up those vessels?

Mr. Wilkinson: I imagine that the Spanish fishermen want to maximise their catch on a short-term basis, which is their traditional manner of operation, before they move on to what they regard as more profitable fishing grounds elsewhere.

Mr. Christopher Gill (Ludlow): Further to the intervention from my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre (Mr. Mans), I wonder whether the hon. Member for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson) would be interested in the contents of a letter from someone in Portugal whom I have consulted about fisheries there. He says:

"As far as the fishing sector is concerned it is one of the worst hit sectors of our economy . . . The situation is becoming explosive. Fishermen are being paid to stop fishing because the Spanish fishing fleet has more competitive production costs."

Is that not the answer to the question asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre and possibly that of the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace)?

Mr. Wilkinson: That is indeed the answer. I am most grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Ludlow, who speaks wisely and with great experience in these matters.

I hope that the House will agree with me that the common fisheries policy is fatally flawed and that it offers no hope of preserving essential fish stocks or of securing sustainable employment for the fishing communities around our coasts. The principal fishing communities are, of course, in the most remote parts of the kingdom, and decommissioning grants from the European Union merely exacerbate an

injury which EU-sponsored policies themselves have already inflicted. The cruel irony is that British taxpayers' money is necessarily involved in the process.

Instead of showing a continued dispiriting acquiesence to the acquis communautaire on the common fisheries policy, Her Majesty's Government should use the forthcoming intergovernmental conference to issue a declaration of intent to our European Union partners that the United Kingdom proposes to withdraw from the common fisheries policy and declare a 200-mile exclusive fishing zone around its coasts. Where propinquity to neighbouring countries precludes that, the median line will constitute our national fishing limit. Naturally the United Kingdom would consider carefully any applications for bilateral fishing agreements on an equitable basis with other countries, be they EU members or otherwise.

Those proposals should be put to the British people for their endorsement in the Conservative party's manifesto for the forthcoming general election as the first stage of a carefully considered Conservative process of recuperation of powers and competences from the institutions of the European Union to the British judiciary, Government and Parliament to help create a European Community of sovereign states in which the national interests of the participating countries are fully safeguarded. I believe that the British people would regard those proposals as courageous and fair, and they would be relieved that at last they had a Government who shared their common aspiration that the United Kingdom should remain proud, independent and free. Our brave fishermen would also have found an effective champion at last.

9.54 am

Mr. Austin Mitchell (Great Grimsby): I congratulate the hon. Member for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson) on securing this debate and on the strength and vigour with which he has put an argument which is extremely strong and very difficult for Ministers to rebut. I have no doubt that they will try to do so, but it is an argument that is impossible to rebut because the common fisheries policy has been a disaster for Britain and it was always intended to be such.

The principle of equal access to a common resource is the basis of the common fisheries policy. The policy was stitched together a matter of months before the British application for membership. It was deliberately designed to obtain access for European fleets which had outfished their waters to the rich fishing waters around the British coast. The principle was misguidedly accepted by the then Prime Minister in his impetuous rush to get into Europe. He was perfectly prepared to sacrifice the interests of a small and, to him, unimportant industry to get at the major point, which was membership of Europe.

Half of the fishing industry protested loudly. The inshore fishing industry saw what was coming and saw that the intense competition would drive it out of business. The big boys—the distant-water fishing fleet—were preoccupied with Iceland. They thought that they would be able to continue catching enormous quantities of fish in Iceland. So they thought that European waters were of no importance to them. Therefore, they made no particular protest.

So the industry was effectively not consulted. The national interest was not consulted. We were pushed into a situation in which we contributed more than 75 per cent.—let us say three quarters for convenience—of the major stocks of the so-called common market pool. That three quarters was in British waters. We were given a small catch, perhaps a quarter of the total catch—less by value—in return for our enormous contribution. That was a massively unfair principle. It produced the consequence that it was impossible to do what was logical in the 1970s when Iceland took its 200-mile limit and started the trend to 200-mile limits. It was impossible to follow suit by taking our territorial limit to 200 miles or the median line and redeveloping and rebuilding our fishing industry in our own waters. That was the logical thing to do. That was what everyone else did.

Although it is true that other countries now suffer problems of overcatching, it is also true that only the nation state has an interest in building up and conserving its stocks because only the nation state has an interest in handing them on to future generations of its fishermen. That is in no one else's interest. Other countries want to fish them out as a disposable resource and keep over-large industries going.

Mr. Mans: Let us get the record straight. Is it not right to say that when the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) was responsible for fishing matters in the 1970s, he was offered 64,000 tonnes of fish by the Icelandic Government, but turned it down because he wanted more? As a result we got nothing. That is one of the main reasons why our deep-water fleet has ceased to exist in international terms.

Mr. Mitchell: It may be convenient for the hon. Member for Wyre (Mr. Mans) to blame the demise of his distant water fleet on my right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook, (Mr. Hattersley), but the facts are different. If the hon. Gentleman wants to read about the matter, he will find in next week's issue of *The House* magazine an article—if I can give it a plug—written by the hon. Member for Great Grimsby which details what happened in those negotiations. The offer of 68,000 tonnes for a limited period was turned down at the insistence of the industry. Not the Government but the industry insisted that it wanted more. It wanted more than it had the capacity to catch. That was a foolish negotiating move by the industry. That was the reality. Therefore, it is unrealistic to blame the Labour Government. I do not want to go into the history.

The abdication of British rights to control British waters by the Government of the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath) was the crucial factor in preventing us from following up our loss by building up our own fishing industry in our own waters, which are the richest in the world. That was the crucial failure. We would do better to do what is obviously in our interests, which is to catch our own fish and land them here, rather than doing what we are doing, which is to allow other people to catch our fish and sell it back to us, getting the jobs and profits.

The argument that is usually put forward, that fish migrate, is fallacious. Most of the stock breed, live and are caught in our waters. Only a minority of species move about. It is stupid to suggest that European countries might catch those while they are young and immature just for the sake of spiting a British Government who take control of their own waters. It might apply to the Spanish, but not to anyone else.

[Mr. Mitchell]

The fact is that we should come out. It is in our interests to do so. It is in the interests of the British fishing industry and it is straightforward. All that we have to do is to provide that the European Communities Act 1972 does not apply to the Fishery Limits Act 1976 and revoke the licences given to vessels from specified European countries to fish in our waters under that legislation. Parliament cannot bind itself and a present Parliament can easily provide that the legislation shall not apply. The mechanics of doing so are very straightforward, even simple.

The question is whether we have the will to do so. Have Ministers got the will and the determination to do it and to face up to the confrontation that will inevitably result? That is the real area of doubt. I do not think that Ministers have that will. Even in the present situation, they are always overruled when it comes to European negotiations. The interests of the fishing industry are always sacrificed to gain some so-called higher good for the Government. That is what happens and it has happened repeatedly. The present Minister is heir to that long legacy of betrayal of the interests of fishing because something else is more important to the Government.

The hon. Member for Ruislip-Northwood gave the classic instance—the desire to get Norway and the other states in, which led the British Government to overrule fisheries Ministers and give the Spanish access to the common fisheries policy six years early. It was a fallacious desire in the case of Norway and we gave the Spanish full status early.

That is a constant pattern. It is only the most flagrant example of what has been going on for years. Frankly, rather than defending and justifying the common fisheries policy and pretending that we derive benefits from something that manifestly does damage, it would be more intellectually honest and convincing to the House if Ministers gave us an honest picture of the position and said that the advantages lie with coming out, but that they have not got the will to do it.

We certainly do not gain anything from this common fisheries policy. Ministers' usual argument is that we have access to markets for our fish, as if it will be turned away from European markets. The world is desperate for fish and it is inconceivable that the Community would block British fish going to Europe if we did the logical thing and caught our fish with our vessels, landed the catch here and sold it on European markets. Access would certainly not be refused; it could not be.

So, that is a stupid argument and it shows a grovelling intellectual attitude towards Europe. We always abdicate our case. We do not recognise the realities and we always start negotiations from a very weak position. We are negotiating on our knees, saying, "Yes, yes. The common fisheries policy is wonderful," and asking what little change or benefit can be given to us by moving the goalposts in a common fisheries policy that, frankly, is disastrous for this country.

We should recognise realities because the crunch is coming. There will have to be a massive reduction in the British fishing effort because we are well over our multi-annual guidance programme targets—further over than anyone else. That will force Ministers to enforce a massive reduction on the British fishing industry. Yet, we are the nation with the stocks and the waters—the nation that contributes everything to that policy, to make room for Spanish vessels.

That reduction will be forced on us by European overfishing and by the principle of equal access to a common resource, which has decimated our stocks. Because of that decimation, Ministers will have to close large sections of the British fishing industry and that is a monstrous thing to do to this country.

The second crunch that is coming is the same one as applied with Spain—the principle of nations coming into the Community with huge fishing fleets, but no waters to contribute to the common fisheries policy, whose demands are satisfied at our expense, in our waters. That has already happened with Spain. Ministers have supinely given way to that monstrous principle.

This country is now anxious to turn the European Union into some sort of continuous rolling row and to weaken and dilute it by bringing in a confused babble of other states. We are now pressing the cases of eastern European states, many of which have huge fleets but no waters in which to catch the fish. On the principle of equal access, they will have a claim to fish in British waters. How are we going to resist them? We could not resist that claim in Spain's case. When Bulgaria, Poland, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania come in with their fishing fleets, what will be our answer? That will break the common fisheries policy.

It would be intellectually honest and much more acceptable to the House if Ministers said this: although a disaster is looming, we have certain strengths in that we contribute waters and that we are prepared to take a tough stand for Britain; we will do that and, if it risks putting us in an exposed position, we will come out. That is the only ultimate safeguard for our fishing industry and that is the intellectual position that I want Ministers to take.

10.6 am

Mr. David Harris (St. Ives): I am sincerely grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson) for initiating this debate. Some hon. Members may think it odd that some of my hon. Friends who represent constituencies many miles from our coastline are here for the debate. I see my hon. Friends the Members for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman), for Ludlow (Mr. Gill) and for Boston—

Sir Richard Body (Holland with Boston): Boston?

Mr. Harris: I am sorry.

Sir Richard Body: May I draw my hon. Friend's attention to the fact that we still have 40 boats left, although we used to have many more. We also used to have a fish processing industry, which has now gone to the Netherlands because the Dutch Government are more vigilant on behalf of the fishing industry than are our Government.

Mr. Harris: I apologise profusely to my hon. Friend, if he will now contain himself. I made the crucial error of lumping him in the same category as other hon. Members who perhaps look at such matters from a different perspective from those of us who represent constituencies along the coast. I recognise their genuine concern about the common fisheries policy and very

much welcome their interest in the subject because it is part of a process that has brought to the fore the crisis in the fishing industry.

I welcome support from all sources in the process of making the House, the Government and the European Union face up to the crisis that our fishermen face. I was absolutely delighted, as were my constituents, when, yesterday, His Royal Highness the Duke of Cornwall visited Newlyn in my constituency and spent the morning considering the problems of the fishing industry and talking at length with the people who really matter—those who work in the industry, such as fishermen, fish merchants and harbour commissioners. That is a part of the one good thing that has come out of this crisis during the past few years, which is heightened interest in it. People are at last paying attention to the problems of the fishing industry, and that is good.

I must say a few words on the speeches of the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) and of my hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip-Northwood, who initiated the debate. We are all a little in danger, if not of rewriting history—although I agree with much that my hon. Friend said—then of forgetting how certain aspects of the problem, such as the common fisheries policy, came about.

The hon. Member for Great Grimsby is right: the fishing industry was a pawn in our negotiations to enter the European Community or, as it was then, the Common Market. I recognise that, and I speak as somebody who would like to regard himself as pragmatic, down-to-earth European.

The hon. Member for Great Grimsby referred to the deep-sea fishing industry. It is nowadays overlooked completely—perhaps it is forgotten—that, when we were going into Europe, the deep-sea fishing industry pressed the principle of open access and, with respect, it was not for the reason that the hon. Member for Great Grimsby gave. It was because, having lost its rich fishing fields around Iceland because of the 200-mile limit, the industry thought that it would be able to gain access to what are now Norwegian waters.

Mr. Austin Mitchell *rose—*

Mr. Harris: I shall not give way because we are all pressed for time. We can discuss it afterwards. I could give the hon. Gentleman chapter and verse from a book on the history of the common fisheries policy.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip-Northwood was right to say that exclusive control over what we like to call our waters would not in itself solve the problem. He mentioned Canada, which has had 200-mile limits. Canada fished out a lot of its shoals although it had exclusive control over those waters.

I had the good fortune, as a member of the Foreign Affairs Committee, to go to New Zealand. I took a little time off from foreign affairs matters to go to the Ministry of Fisheries to see how it managed its 200-mile zone and its system of individual transferable quotas. They have problems and disputes in New Zealand. Indeed, when I was with my colleagues in the Parliament in Wellington, an almighty dispute broke out which involved representatives of fishermen from Chatham island complaining about other boats coming into their waters. They happened to be New Zealand boats. There have always been disputes between fishermen and there always will be.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip-Northwood also mentioned Iceland. I had the pleasure, I think with the hon. Member for Great Grimsby, to give lunch to the deputy director of research for maritime resources in Iceland. He told us that although Iceland started the process of claiming 200 miles, it still had huge problems of overfishing inside its waters and that there is now a considerable movement in Iceland to extend the 200-mile limit. Please, please let no one think that even if we could regain control of our waters, it would solve all our problems. The hard fact is that practically every nation in the world is overfishing because of new technology—new means of locating fish, new sorts of gear and the power of engines.

We can argue about the common fisheries policy, of which I am no friend. As has been said, the way that it was forced upon us was deplorable. I regret bitterly many aspects of the common fisheries policy, but if it was scrapped tomorrow, there would still be problems in the fishing industry and the resolution of those problems would involve huge pain and difficulties for our fishermen.

I shall now deal with the simple case that we can withdraw from the common fisheries policy as easy as anything. The hon. Member for Great Grimsby said that the mechanics are simple and straightforward. I agree with him about that in respect of withdrawal, but the repercussions of unilateral withdrawal would be immense. I wish the hon. Member for Great Grimsby, my hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip-Northwood and others who advocate unilateral withdrawal would be honest and open and say what they really believe: that we should withdraw and that if we do not get our way, we should withdraw from the European Union. [HON. MEMBERS: "That is not what we are saying."] That was not what was said, but it would be the consequence.

Mr. Wilkinson: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Harris: I will not give way because we are pressed for time and other hon. Members want to speak.

I shall tell the House what would happen, as night follows day, if we tried to withdraw unilaterally from the common fisheries policy. Despite what the hon. Member for Great Grimsby said, there would be an immediate backlash and the 90 per cent. or so of the fish that are exported from Newlyn to France and Spain—certainly the element that goes to Spain—would be stopped by blockades overnight.

Sir Richard Body: Rubbish.

Mr. Harris: My hon. Friend can shout, "Rubbish" but that is what the immediate consequence would be. I do not say that a blockade would continue for ever and a day; I doubt that it would. In the long term, the hon. Member for Great Grimsby may be right. I know the Spanish fishermen pretty well.

Mr. Gill: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Harris: No, I shall not. I know Spanish fishermen pretty well and, as the hon. Member for Great Grimsby also knows, there would be immediate retaliation, at least in the short term.

Further, if we stayed in the European Union, we would be taken to the European Court. My hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip-Northwood referred to the perverse

[Mr. Harris]

or diabolical judgment of the European Court in the Factortame case, over which the House was overruled. That was something for which I had been fighting long before many in this House showed any interest in fishing—doing something about the curse of the flag of convenience vessels.

One does not have to be an international lawyer to know what would happen if we withdrew unilaterally from a treaty with which we have at least gone along. It is one thing to negotiate an opt-out from a future European policy, but what is being proposed today is that we should withdraw unilaterally from a policy to which we have been party for many years. We would be challenged in the European Court and there is not the slightest doubt that we would lose. Hon. Members who advocate such a course should argue that we should stand up on the issue and then, if necessary, withdraw from the European Union. That at least is a tenable position. I disagree with it, but it at least has some sense and one could argue it. The suggestion that we can, without consequence, withdraw unilaterally from the common fisheries policy is absolute nonsense and does great damage to the fishing industry because many people buy that line without realising the consequences.

What should we do? There is a problem of great importance to constituencies such as mine. If I may refer again to the visit of His Royal Highness yesterday, the message of the fishermen of Newlyn was that they cannot see a future for the industry given the way things are going and with the pressure for reductions of our quotas. There is the cursed business of the Spanish. Indeed, on 1 January, Spanish boats will come into waters from which they were previously excluded—some of the waters of the so-called Irish box. What should we do about the consequences that will flow from that?

When the decision was taken on 22 or 23 December last year to allow the Spanish into those waters, I learnt a severe lesson. On that day, in the face of every conservation argument, the decision was taken to allow extra boats into those waters—rich fishing grounds for our boats—from January 1 next year. That was done because of the system of qualified majority voting. We were outvoted. Indeed, our Minister made a grievous mistake, in my estimation, when he only abstained. That would not have made any difference in the end, however, because all the other member states voted for the deal that emerged and we were left isolated. That must not happen again when we renegotiate the common fisheries policy in 2002. That is the big danger which has not been mentioned in the debate today.

Mr. Gill: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Harris: No, because I am pressed for time. I am sorry. I hope that my hon. Friend will catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The danger is that, with the renegotiation of the common fisheries policy, which has to be done by 2002, we might have to face true open access and the abolition of all the fishing rights that we now have. That would mean the end of the fishing industry as we know it.

The first thing to do—I have been pleading with Ministers about this behind the scenes for a long time—is, as part of the intergovernmental conference, to make a determined attempt to restore the national veto. I know that the Liberal Democrats want to abolish the national veto. We must make a serious and determined attempt and we must make it a sticking point that we restore the national veto on the final outcome of the renegotiations of the common fisheries policy in 2002. That is the most practical and urgent task we can set ourselves. It is also the most important. There are many other things that we could do, but I do not have time to go into them now.

I plead with my hon. Friend the Minister of State, as I have pleaded, dare I say it, from the top of the Government down, that that task should be our objective. If we do not succeed in that objective and if we end up with a common fisheries policy that allows open access, our fishing industry will never forgive the House.

10.21 am

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): I endorse the congratulations to the hon. Member for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson), who has done the House a great service by introducing this debate. It adds to the number of fisheries debates that we have in the year and it addresses an issue that raises considerable interest. Those of us who, over the years, have regularly attended fisheries debates welcome the interest that is now being taken by hon. Members who represent non-fishing constituencies in the common fisheries policy.

The hon. Member for Ruislip-Northwood conceded that he supported the terms of accession in 1971. I suspect that he did not then speak up for the fishing industry, which was making representations that it did not believe that the arrangements were fair. The renegotiations by Harold Wilson's Government did not take the fishing industry's interest into account either. We have suffered from the fact that, by its nature, the fishing industry is scattered around the coastal areas of the United Kingdom. It has not had the collective clout to put fishing issues to the top of the agenda. That is a historical matter. If we had a Scottish Parliament and regional assemblies in England, fisheries would loom far larger in the economies of those areas and would be an issue that Governments could not ignore as readily as they have.

I cannot accept that the simple solution proposed by the hon. Members for Ruislip-Northwood and for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell)—that with one bound we are free from the common fisheries policy—is tenable, for many of the reasons advanced by the hon. Member for St. Ives (Mr. Harris). We can leave the common fisheries policy either by agreement or by a unilateral measure. I do not see for the life of me how by leaving the CFP we could get a better deal than by staying in it and seeking reform. A unilateral decision would have industrial consequences, which the hon. Member for St. Ives mentioned, legal consequences and political consequences. If nations in the European Union that have entered into treaty agreements start picking and choosing the ones with which they will continue and those which they will abrogate, it will be the start of the collapse of the European Union as we know it. If the Conservative Members who argue for that were open enough to say that that is what they want, the intellectual credibility of their argument would be greatly enhanced.

Some say that we should move towards the abandonment of the common fisheries policy. I do not believe that that is a solution either. It has already been

said the fishing industries of countries with 200-mile limits have not prospered—one needs only to read the large section in this month's *National Geographic* on the perilous state of fish stocks in many parts of the world or *Newsweek* of 25 April 1994 to realise that. The article says that with the increase in territorial seas from 12 miles to 200 miles,

"The hope was that coastal states, angry at overfishing by foreign factory ships, would take a protective interest in the fishing grounds under their vastly expanded domain. Instead, they rushed to plunder the saltwater bounty, offering generous subsidies and tax breaks for new fishing vessels."

The article then points out:

"In Atlantic Canada, the collapse of cod now threatens the survival of hundreds of fishing villages . . . More than 500 small villages on Russia's Pacific coast are similarly threatened by overfishing of pollock."

Earlier, the article states that even where there are 200-mile limits

"every valuable fish that straddles or migrates across this border has been hit hard by foreign fleets".

Mr. Austin Mitchell: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Wallace: No; I shall allow more hon. Members to speak if I restrict my remarks.

Increasing national limits is not a guarantee of success in containing overfishing.

If we abandoned the CFP, fisheries policies would be in the hands of the United Kingdom Government. The hon. Member for Holland with Boston (Sir R. Body) made an interesting intervention in which he pointed out to the hon. Member for St. Ives that the fish processing industry in his area had disappeared and had gone to the Netherlands because the Dutch Government were more vigilant in looking after their interests than were the United Kingdom Government. The Netherlands is, of course, within the common fisheries policy and is subject to the same rules. That suggests to me that we should make a clear distinction between what, at times, are problems of the common fisheries policy and what, at other times, are problems caused by a lack of vigilance and a lack of proper attention to fisheries over many years by our Government.

The fishing industry was not very happy with the days at sea legislation proposed by our Government. Sir George Younger, who was Secretary of State for Scotland when the CFP was being negotiated in 1983, advised fishermen in my constituency that, in addition to the Shetland box, special regard would be given to the representations made by the Shetland Fishermen's Association and the Orkney Fishermen's Association when framing inshore fisheries legislation. The legislation, however, proposed a limit of six miles, to which the inshore fisheries legislation applies and which is purely in the hands of the United Kingdom Government. The recommendations from my local fishermen's associations were ignored. There is no guarantee that repatriation will deliver any better a deal for fishermen than we have seen in recent times.

We must adopt a much more vigorous approach on behalf of the fishing industry. To be fair, the previous Minister, the hon. Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack), took a greater interest in fisheries than any of his predecessors, and the present Minister seems to take such an interest as well. Fisheries are an important issue on the agenda of the House and on the agenda for negotiations in Europe.

I suggest that we look forward to fundamental reform within the European Union. We should appreciate and accept that the negotiated deal on relative stability was, in many respects, good for the United Kingdom. It has been undermined by the flagging out of vessels and we have not fully understood how many other countries have managed to avoid the same loss of fishing vessels. We have fishing vessels that fly the British flag, but which, de facto, belong to other nations. It is always difficult to say that one is right after the event, but if the advice of those of us who advocated a regional system of licensing to try to ensure that licences remained with communities dependent on the fishing industry had been heeded when licensing was introduced in 1984 or 1985, some of the problems might not have arisen.

Some of the present arrangements are almost contrary to the principle of relative stability. In many respects, the hon. Member for St. Ives used the right word. The Factortame judgment was perverse and it does not sit alongside the principle of relative stability.

In any reform, we want to ensure that those principles of relative stability are retained. We also want some clear assurances that the derogation from equal access will be extended. With my hon. Friend the Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood), I visited the Commission in Brussels last week. We had discussions with Mr. Alain Laurec and others. Our impression was that no country has actually pushed for or raised the idea of abandoning that derogation. If Ministers could give an early confirmation of that, the industry would be greatly reassured.

Perhaps we should take a more regional approach to fisheries. The example has been given of the Clyde herring fishery, which is 100 per cent.—or at least 98 per cent.—operated by British vessels. In many respects, there is no reason why decisions affecting that fishery should go to Brussels for approval when they affect only United Kingdom fishermen. We should examine the possibility of decisions on Mediterranean fisheries being made by member states with Mediterranean interests, and the same for the Baltic and the North sea.

A more regional dimension to the common fisheries policy would mean that management decisions affecting an area of 12 to 200 miles would involve the fishermen and member states of those fishing vessels that have historic fishing rights in those areas. Land-locked Austria would not then make decisions on such detailed matters.

We must face the fact that as we move to the next round of multi-annual guidance programmes, Britain will still not have reached the targets set by the present one. In such a short debate we cannot go over the history of why decommissioning was not introduced earlier, and with more money. At this point, we would like to know what the Government's attitude is to the fact that the European Union is providing very little funding to build new vessels. I understand that from the European Union's perspective, as we have not reached our present target, the allocation of more money would be difficult to justify, but the aggregation of licences might allow for new vessels on a scrap-and-build basis so that our fleet does not grow older and less efficient.

[Mr. Wallace]

Technical conservation measures must have a place. Square mesh panels, which have been the subject matter of many debates in the House, seem to have taken a back seat in discussions on conservation.

I welcome the announcement that the Minister made last week on the involvement of fishermen in the discussions that will lead to the setting of TACs for next year. In last year's European elections, I put forward a policy paper that suggested that fishermen, scientists and Government officials should be involved. Any system that involves fishermen in setting TACs is more likely to command consent and respect.

The common fisheries policy should comprise a host of other detailed matters. I welcome the review group and look forward with interest to the outcome. The year 2002 will come upon us sooner than we think, and we must begin to put in place the measures that we want to see by then.

The IGC has been mentioned, and my colleague the Member of the European Parliament for Cornwall and Plymouth West has argued for the common fisheries policy to be on the agenda. He has not had much support from Conservative or Labour Members of the European Parliament. The key issues that are worrying many countries must be tackled in the next seven or eight years and should be highlighted as early as possible.

Those of us who represent fishing communities recognise that, in some parts of the world, fishing is one of the few opportunities for economic activity. The common fisheries policy should be much more oriented towards sustaining fishing communities, which provide important employment; not just offshore in the catching fleet, but onshore in processing and, ultimately, in marketing.

Proposals to abandon the common fisheries policy are politically dangerous and naive, but much more needs to be done to reform it substantially. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Great Grimsby may laugh, but there is a fundamental difference between abandonment and reform. We can go forward with confidence only within the European Union, because fish do not recognise international boundaries.

10.35 am

Mr. David Porter (Waveney): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson) on securing this debate. He and I attended the same fringe meeting at Blackpool last month, which was attended by 400 people. Apart from the meetings addressed by my right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood), that meeting had the biggest attendance of any fringe meeting.

It does not take a genius to realise that the common fisheries policy has failed to conserve fish stocks. If fishermen catch anything outside their quota, they have to discard it and throw it overboard dead. How does that help conservation? A Shetland skipper recently described how a young lad, on his first trip, wept as 10 tonnes of prime fish were dumped dead back into the sea, simply because that vessel had no licence for the particular species.

I have always likened the common fisheries policy to a raft that does not float properly. Each year, a new piece of bureaucratic nonsense is bolted on to try to keep it afloat. Eventually, the raft will sink and take most of British fishing with it. It would be better to get off now.

The official line is often that in a mixed fishery nothing can be done. That is not true. Successful selective gear is being developed in other countries, and their method of management has changed to stop immoral practices. The rape and pillage of the seas takes place even in the third world, where the European Union buys fishing rights at vast expense. In some areas, European Union vessels have been thrown out of fisheries because of the damage that they have caused. Local fisheries have then reverted to local country control and marine resources have recovered significantly.

Brian Tobin, the Canadian Fisheries Minister who visited the United Kingdom this summer, said:

"Conservation is now the watchword of people everywhere."

The recent United Nations conference on fishing highlighted two points: the importance of fishing to coastal communities around the world and the need to work together to maintain the tremendous resources of the oceans. However, the common fisheries policy of the European Union, as implemented in this country, has become so rigid that it is scarcely possible to make a living legally, much less co-operate to conserve fish stocks.

The common fisheries policy encourages law breaking. Our industry has proposed many ideas for sensible management in the past few years. Not all of those ideas have yet been considered by the Government. Fishermen who want to conserve can reap no benefit under the CFP. If they stop killing the small fry and stop dumping mature fish into a stinking, rotten mass on the sea bed, the preserved stocks just go back into the great European pool.

The driving force in the market is the southern states, whose traditional cooking and eating habits require small juvenile fish. Therefore, as those fleets come through our back door with their armadas, they scoop up the juvenile stocks that British fishermen are trying to preserve. The common fisheries policy is therefore a disincentive to conservation. Potentially, if left to run, it will destroy a renewable food supply that is more valuable over the years than even our gas or oil reserves, and will have devastating consequences for the social fabric of our coastal communities. That is criminal.

A Conservative Member of the European Parliament who lost his seat at the last Euro-election told me many years ago that if we did not have the common fisheries policy, we would have to invent it. Surely, if we were starting again, we would not start with the premise that the seas are a common resource open to all, unless we were Euro-fanatics or my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath), or both. We would start from the premise that British fishermen have a historical, economic and cultural right to fish British waters and then do bilateral deals, as appropriate, with our neighbours. We would not, as the Government did in Lowestoft this year, swap North sea plaice with the Dutch in exchange for soles that were then given to the south-west—a quota that those fishermen cannot probably take up in full. That meant that £1 million worth of plaice went out of Lowestoft this year. Following scientific evidence, the likely TACs for next year will mean a 47 per cent. cut in North sea plaice.

As recently as yesterday, I had a very constructive meeting with my hon. Friend the Minister of State and some fishermen from Lowestoft. I understand my hon. Friend's dilemma: does he set the quota high enough to allow fishing to continue and risk there being no fish in two years' time, or does he ignore scientific advice and listen to what fishermen are saying?

The Commission has determined a target size for the European fleet and Britain has accepted the British share of that fleet reduction. Thousands of fishermen have lost their jobs, and more will follow; that is European Union policy.

Quotas, fuel and tax, salaries, bureaucratic procedures and unfair competition from our partners make our fishermen bankrupt, and they are then told that some of them can apply for money to retrain. What do they retrain for in parts of the country where unemployment is already high? They can move away, but where do they move? It is madness.

Fishermen following lines of generations born and bred into the job, simply want to fish. In any local family in Lowestoft, one can find that, dating from one, two or three generations previously, there is fishing in the blood. Those people are not being allowed to fish a manageable and renewable resource because of a wider, sinister European agenda. It is a national disgrace, and the sooner we get out of it, the better.

10.40 am

Mr. Elliot Morley (Glanford and Scunthorpe): I add my congratulations to the hon. Member for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson) on initiating this important debate. Obviously, many issues relating to the common fisheries policy need to be considered and acted on by all parties, especially the Government.

Obviously, people approach that issue from several different directions and there are many different agendas in the debate. Although there is a very significant issue relating to the CFP which must be considered, the CFP should not be used as a vehicle for those people who wish to attack the principle of the European Union without recognising the CFP's role.

I was one of the people who voted against membership of the European Union and campaigned accordingly, but I do not believe that any Member of the House seriously believes that we intend to withdraw from the European Union. It will not be on the agenda.

My opinion, and that of the Labour party, is that we must work in the European Union for the best interests of our country and our communities. That can be done by taking a positive and constructive approach, which means that on occasions there will be disagreements with other member states; it cannot be done by taking a negative and isolationist approach, which I am afraid has been all too common in sections of the Conservative Government.

The demand for a 200-mile exclusive fishing limit is attractive. In an ideal world, if we could achieve that, no one would disagree with the object. However, I do not believe, with the greatest respect to those people who have been leading such a campaign, that it is a credible or achievable object, for reasons that have been outlined in the debate. There would be great problems with that.

Even if we adopted that position, we would be negotiating with other North sea states with traditional historic fishing rights in the North sea, and those negotiations would be extremely difficult. Trade-offs would be inevitable. I do not deny that trade-offs took place in the negotiation for the original CFP, or that some of the principles behind that have been to the advantage of the fishing industry.

Nevertheless, the CFP has certain advantages. I also draw attention to the fact that the 1980s was a time of great prosperity for the United Kingdom fishing fleet and no complaints were made about the CFP at that time, when the fleet was expanding and grants were given to expand the fleet.

The argument has been well made in the debate that, even without a CFP, there would be problems in our fisheries management. The UK fleet has problems now, such as black fish, which has a devastating impact on fish stocks and prices.

It is not fair to consider the role of other member states negatively. In recent discussions about the western controls, the Spanish presidency helped us to reach a workable compromise that was acceptable to the fishing industry.

The principle of relative stability protects the interests of our country, and has protected the interests of our country in such things as preventing access to the North sea by the Spanish. It does not necessarily follow that an extension of the European Union would mean that other member states' fishing vessels would have access to our fishing stocks.

I acknowledge the frustration of many sections of the fishing industry. I have visited many fishing ports and spoken to fishermen. I understand how they feel; I understand the fear for their jobs and their future. I understand their worries, with an aging fishing fleet and little chance of a scrap-and-build policy while we are so far adrift from our multi-annual guidance programme targets. In that respect, it is not fair to blame the current problems of the fishing industry entirely on the CFP. The Conservative Government must take some responsibility.

For years, the Government refused to introduce an effective decommissioning scheme although European Union funds were available. Part of the problem that we have now, with the lack of modernisation, stems from that. I question whether, on occasions, our Government took a tough stand in representing the interests of our fishing industry, because of the number of other conflicting interests that were of concern to the Government.

I return to the involvement and responsibility of the country's fishing industry. The industry has been constructive and helpful in suggesting good ideas for fisheries management and fisheries conservation. Some of those ideas should be taken more seriously—such as a ban on twin prawn trawls and the introduction of square mesh panels. There are ways in which that might be done in the CFP, as I shall explain later.

We cannot ignore the fact that our fleet has undertaken illegal activities. There has been increased pressure as a result of increased catching ability, more powerful vessels and increased use of technology. We cannot ignore those issues. We cannot ignore the fact that gear conflict, which sometimes occurs between our vessels and French and Spanish vessels, goes on regularly along our south coast among our own vessels, between the mobile fleet and the static fleet. Co-operation is therefore needed within the industry, and we need a united fishing industry.

[Mr. Elliot Morley]

The campaign for a 200-mile limit and withdrawal from the CFP has proved extremely divisive in the fishing industry. That is not helpful.

Mr. Gill: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Morley: If the hon. Gentleman will excuse me, I have little time. I do not want to take time from the Minister, who wishes to respond to the debate.

I want to mention a few aspects of the way in which members of the Labour party regard the CFP and ways in which we believe that it can be reformed and made more workable in the present structure.

My hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) recognised and analysed succinctly some of the problems in the CFP and the way in which it has affected the industry. The hon. Members for St. Ives (Mr. Harris) and for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) made some good arguments about the need to take a practical approach to the CFP.

It is important to tackle certain things, such as industrial fishing, which is primarily pursued by the Danes. We cannot tackle the problem of industrial fishing, which I believe should be prevented in the North sea, unless we do so by negotiation through an organisation such as that surrounding the CFP. There is no other way of doing it.

The CFP has certain advantages in ensuring proper management of our fish stocks. We need to protect our six and 12-mile limits and it would be desirable to negotiate, if possible, a small extension to give greater protection to local fleets on a regional basis.

The key to CFP reform is for member states to have greater autonomy in applying their own management. There is no reason why that cannot be done in the CFP. It would be interesting to hear the Minister's opinion on that. As long as it is applied on the basis of non-discrimination, there is no reason why we, as a member state, should not argue for such things as compulsory square mesh panels and certain closed areas at times of spawning in our own waters, which would apply to all vessels fishing in UK waters. We can have that autonomy in the structure of the CFP on a non-discriminatory basis.

We should review the way in which the quota management system works because of the problem of discards, but that problem is not unique to the CFP quota management system. There is a serious problem with discards in, for example, the northern mixed fishery method, which we need to tackle.

We cannot argue that we in this country have an absolutely clean record on fisheries enforcement. There have been problems in the United Kingdom which we need to tackle. With good will and with some commitment from the Government, we can enjoy the advantages of national control within a European and international fisheries management scheme, based on a reformed CFP. The overriding priority for the future of our fishing fleet and the environment of our seas must be a sustainable and properly managed fishing industry. That aim can be achieved within the present structure and we should not argue for an untenable position.

10.50 am

The Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Tony Baldry): It is customary in such Adjournment debates for the Minister to come to the Dispatch Box and congratulate the hon. Member involved on succeeding in obtaining the debate. I do so today and, moreover, I am genuinely grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson) for initiating today's debate as it provides me with a welcome opportunity to place on record my approach to the CFP. It also provides a welcome opportunity to clear up, once and for all, a number of misconceptions about the CFP that appear to have arisen recently. I also welcome the support on the Front Bench of my hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen, South (Mr. Robertson), who is the Scottish Fisheries Minister.

As the United Kingdom's Fisheries Minister, I have only one purpose and aim: to represent and promote the best interests of the UK fishing industry and of UK fishermen. I hold no brief for the European Union and I certainly hold no brief for the European Commission or the European Parliament. My concerns are solely for the well-being of the UK fishing industry.

Since moving to the job in July, I have spent much time visiting fishing ports up and down the country and I have had the opportunity to listen at first hand to the concerns of the industry, both locally and nationally. There is no doubt that the fishing industry feels itself to be vulnerable, threatened and under pressure, and finds it difficult to see where its future lies. But the threat to the UK fishing industry does not come from foreigners; the real threat to it, as to fishing industries throughout the world, comes from dwindling and depleted stocks of fish around our shores, as was made clear in the excellent speech of my hon. Friend the Member for St. Ives (Mr. Harris). The biggest recent blow to the UK's fishing fleet came not when we joined the Common Market but when, in the 1970s, we lost access to the distant waters and fishing off Iceland and elsewhere.

I want the UK fishing industry to be stable and sustainable so that those involved in it have the confidence to make investment decisions for the future. I want an industry that has a clear purpose and direction as we approach and enter the 21st century. I am sure that the industry recognises, as do most sensible commentators, that to have a sustainable fishing industry it is necessary to match fishing effort—the effort taken to catch fish—more closely with the fish available in our seas. That requirement will result in a slimmer fleet, but I hope that it will be a more sustainable fleet that is able to invest for the future.

Some people suggest that any problems caused to the fishing industry occurred as a result of our membership of the European Union—particularly, our participation in the common fisheries policy—and that it would be in the best interests of the UK fishing industry for Britain unilaterally to seek to exit from the CFP. There are undoubtedly concerns about the workings of the existing CFP, which is why Ministers have set up a CFP review group with a view to examining in detail the present workings of the CFP and recommending how it can be improved to benefit our industry. That group has been working hard during the year and has received many submissions. It is drafting a report and I hope that it will be in a position to publish its report and its findings early next year.

The UK has been a member of the European Union for nearly a quarter of a century. It is clear from reading the debates of the time that, when in 1971 the House debated the possibility of Britain's membership, hon. Members were perfectly well aware that if the UK joined the Common Market it would join not only a common agricultural policy but a common fisheries policy. That fact was made perfectly clear in the debates at the time and in article 38 of the treaty. In the event, the House decided, by a majority of 112 votes, that Britain should join the European Community.

In 1974, an incoming Labour Government—for the internal political necessity of the Labour party—promised to renegotiate our terms of entry and to have a subsequent referendum. During those renegotiations, not a word was mentioned about fishing policy. A referendum was held, during which time those concerned about the impact of our membership on UK fisheries undoubtedly put forward their views. But the country decided, by a clear and convincing majority, that it wanted to say yes to Europe.

For Britain to exit from the common fisheries policy would require the unanimous agreement of all our Community colleagues to the necessary treaty changes—and they would have to be complex changes. Simply disapplying the fisheries provisions of the treaty would not be sufficient to exclude the UK fishing industry from the impact of general provisions of the treaty such as the requirements of non-discrimination and free movement—the sort of requirements that caught us in the Factortame judgment. The complex range of changes that would be necessary would all require unanimous agreement.

We obtained a pretty good deal when quota shares and restrictions on access to areas such as the Shetland box and coastal waters were decided. It is politically unrealistic to imagine that a new deal can be done that will result in other countries in the European Union giving away fishing opportunities to the United Kingdom. It is disingenuous for any of us seriously to suggest that this or any other United Kingdom Government would unilaterally seek to exit from a key policy of the European Union.

Even if we sought and secured such agreement, what would have been achieved? I or any future Fisheries Minister would have to spend almost an entire Parliament negotiating new arrangements with the European Union to meet not just our needs but the historic interests of our neighbours such as Ireland, France, Belgium and the Netherlands on subjects such as access and enforcement. We would still have to agree internationally to total allowable catches for fish stocks that straddle the areas within different fishery limits and we would still have to have a system of matching UK effort to available stocks.

In my attempts to be the best advocate for the fishing industry I have a duty to listen carefully to what the industry has to say. Like any good advocate, I also have a duty to tell the industry the facts as I see them. Suggestions that we could unilaterally abandon the CFP are not within the politics of the possible; they are a distraction.

Sir Richard Body: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Baldry: I am sorry, but I do not have time to give way.

Moreover, such suggestions do not tackle the key problems facing the industry—balancing the need to maximise today's catch and the need to ensure sustainable levels of fish stocks to guarantee healthy catches next year and in subsequent years. We have to face up to not fear of foreigners but the straightforward fact that far too many fish stocks around the United Kingdom are seriously depleted or at a critical level. Of the main stocks in the waters that we fish, just over 40 per cent. are considered secure; the remainder are at risk of biological collapse, which means that they could not be fished economically—which is what happened to the cod of Canada. Nearer to home, that is what happened in the 1970s to herring and mackerel in the North sea.

It is important to pause to reflect carefully on why fish stocks are under such pressure. It is always tempting to try to blame someone, but the reality is more complex. If we do not make the effort to understand the reality, we will make an oversimplified diagnosis and seek the wrong solutions.

It is important to understand the role of fisheries science. It is a biological fact that the success rate of each year's spawning can vary massively. A mature female cod may yield 10 million eggs—their survival rate is tiny, as many are preyed on by other or the same species before they mature. Many factors influence the survival rate, including salinity, sea temperature and weather. As a result, in some years the survival rate can be much higher than the average. The peak years, when the so-called recruitment is good, constitute one reason why the scientists may advise that catches can be increased even against a background of poor stocks. That is why, against a general trend, the scientific advice is that we could catch more North sea cod next year. There has been one year of exceptional recruitment in that stock.

A salutary example of fishery science is provided by the Canadian experience. It is now generally accepted that one of the mistakes made in cod fisheries management was in placing too much reliance on the evidence of successful commercial fishermen. The scientific evidence showed that catching rates of research vessels were declining, but at the same time commercial catching rates were sustained at a reasonable level. Fishing was allowed to continue at too high a level and, ultimately, the stocks collapsed and the fishery was closed. With the benefit of hindsight, the commercial fishermen seem to have been successful because they were tracking down the limited numbers of remaining stocks.

The lesson is that fisheries management is difficult and is not an exact science. There is no answer that we can be sure is correct at any one time, but if we want to avoid disasters we must be ready to implement sensible and balanced precautions that may sometimes mean that fishermen are able to say after the event that we were too cautious. It is certainly misleading to pretend that the problems have nothing to do with our fishermen's activities, or that they are the fault of the Spanish when they have no access to fish stocks in the North sea or the Irish sea.

In the short time available to me, I hope that I have explained why I believe that it is disingenuous to suggest that departure from the CFP is the solution to all our problems. In subsequent debates between now and Christmas, I hope to respond to the House on the other points that were raised today—not least on how I believe that we may reform the CFP in the best interests of the United Kingdom fishing industry.

Water Supply (West Yorkshire)

11 am

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): There is a great deal of interest in this subject—as we can see from the number of hon. Members who are present in the Chamber for the debate. I know that my hon. Friends the Members for Normanton (Mr. O'Brien) and for Barnsley, Central (Mr. Illsley) wished to be present for the debate, but they are meeting the Secretary of State for the Environment on another issue.

I requested a debate on the crisis facing the people of West Yorkshire months ago when the privatised Yorkshire Water company first proposed standpipes and later sought Government approval to implement 24-hour rota cuts. I can tell the House about the level of anger in Halifax and in other affected areas about the actions of Yorkshire Water. The public anger is unprecedented: I have not seen the like of it since the introduction of the poll tax.

People detest the way in which Yorkshire Water has conducted its business and the way in which it has blamed its customers for the current crisis. Customers are lectured time and again, as if the present situation has nothing to do with the company. This week the Government have been asked to give Yorkshire Water the authority to impose rota cuts and I ask the Minister not to give that permission. In my speech, I shall outline the implications for both my constituents and the local economy if permission were granted and the cuts went ahead.

My position on the issue of rota cuts is absolutely clear, and I believe that is shared by hon. Members on both sides of the House. I believe that the consequences of the 24-hour rota cuts would be so severe as to make the idea completely unacceptable. Whatever it takes and whatever it costs, the water must continue to come out of customers' taps. I think that the Government have a clear duty to ensure that that occurs.

I shall now turn to the record of Yorkshire Water since privatisation, as its abysmal mismanagement of that vital industry has led to the current crisis. We have lived through an exceptional drought; no one denies that. However, last winter was one of the wettest on record and in early spring our reservoirs were full.

Mr. David Hinchliffe (Wakefield): Does my hon. Friend agree that one of the most obvious causes of concern in Yorkshire is the ludicrous mismanagement of the industry by Yorkshire Water? Throughout the summer, in Calderdale and in nearby Kirklees Yorkshire Water threatened complete cut-offs, while in the immediately adjacent areas of Wakefield and Leeds people were allowed to use hosepipes until a month ago. Does my hon. Friend accept that Yorkshire Water's biggest failure is that it has not yet established the most basic, commonsense elements of the grid system? Will she press the Minister on that issue to ensure that the Government introduce a grid system, as that is surely the answer to Yorkshire's present problems?

Mrs. Mahon: My hon. Friend's comments have exposed the inadequacy of Yorkshire Water's management of the industry. I fully support his comments and I hope that the Minister will take them on board.

Upon privatisation, the water industry benefited from a debt write-off of £5 billion, a green dowry of £1.5 billion and a share underpricing of £873 million—in fact, there was the usual privatisation fix to assist the Government's friends in the City. Since privatisation, the bills to customers have increased by more than twice the rate of inflation. The people having to meet those exorbitant increases have paid for improved standards of quality that were imposed by the European Union and not by the shareholders or by the bosses of Yorkshire Water, who have simply filled their pockets. In June this year Yorkshire Water announced record profits of £161 million. Only £11 million was set aside for the repair of leaks, while the company chairman, Sir Gordon Jones, gave himself a 169 per cent. increase on his salary of £190,000.

Yorkshire Water also borrowed £50 million. However, it spent the money not on its core industry, but on speculative business ventures in China and in Europe. If some of that money had been spent on leaks and on maintenance, we might not be facing the current crisis. Months ago my hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) produced the figures to show that Yorkshire Water is top of the national league for wasting water supplies. Some 103 million gallons—or one third of the total supply—is lost every day through leakage. That is an absolutely disgraceful record.

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield): I agree with everything that my hon. Friend has said—especially as I suffer the double whammy of living in Halifax while representing Huddersfield. Do not the Government also have a responsibility for the current situation? They knew that there had been a hosepipe ban in Yorkshire for five out of seven years and that if there was a drought, there would be trouble. Where was the Government's strategic long-term view? Throughout the summer Ministers simply ran around like headless chickens trying to make it appear as though they were doing something constructive.

Mrs. Mahon: My hon. Friend makes his point very well. Since privatisation in 1992, Yorkshire Water's investment in repair and maintenance has fallen by £44.8 million—26 per cent—while demand has increased. As my hon. Friend said, that information was available to the Government but they failed to act upon it.

I have also discovered that the company does not employ people from the Halifax area to repair bursts or to make new connections: there is no direct labour force. The work is "outsourced"—that is privatisation-speak—or contracted out to small contractors such as O'Donnells of Bradford on a strictly cash-limited budget. Prior to the crisis, all repair work on leaks was stopped unless a major burst occurred. In my village of Northowram, water was allowed to cascade down a steep hill for months and repairs were not made until the conditions became so dangerous that one could almost skate on the resulting ice. I understand that Kirklees and Bradford also operate with no direct work force.

Yorkshire Water has a leakage detection team that marks were leaks occur so that private firms can repair them. But sometimes repair work is not undertaken for weeks or months—if at all. Those private firms are not accountable to anyone, as Yorkshire Water is more interested in making money than in repairing leaks. I have also been informed that it had planned to implement a scheme called Operation 2000 in October, which would

have abolished the leakage detection teams altogether. However, because of the present outcry, its abolition has been put back to January 1996. Will the Minister inform us about that proposed abolition?

Night-time waste detection teams were disbanded two years ago and Yorkshire Water now accepts that 25 per cent. is an acceptable level of leakage. Headwork teams, comprising men who dig conduits to channel water into the reservoirs and keep the silt out, have been steadily disbanded. Water is allowed to form bogs and small lakes around the reservoirs instead of being channelled into them. Silt continues to filter into the reservoirs. I have visited the reservoirs with experts, and in some areas we have seen silt up to 100 ft deep. Had that silt been cleaned out, there would have been greater capacity and, therefore, more water.

Since privatisation, the reservoir keeper has become responsible for more reservoirs, but he does not have the same number of workers as before. Two years ago, Yorkshire Water seriously considered replacing its dwindling band of skilled water workers with Securicor. Can Members imagine anything more ludicrous? That is the level of neglect that privatised industry has imposed on a vital, life-giving resource.

When the current crisis is over, Yorkshire Water's greedy and incompetent managers should be exposed to detailed public scrutiny. Never again should they be allowed to bring the health and well-being of the people and the economy of West Yorkshire to the brink of disaster. We all know that they put profit before service and that will not do. They are not fit to be in charge and those responsible must go.

I turn now to the people who will be affected by 24-hour cuts. Since the beginning of the crisis I have received many representations from the public, industry, local businesses, schools, national health service professionals, nursing homes, council offices, the fire service, charities, local pensioner groups and many others.

Mid Yorkshire chamber of commerce said last week in its objection to the tribunal considering the application for the emergency drought order:

"The major effect that rota cuts will have is the considerable disruption to production flow. All firms have contracts which must be met and loss of production for 24 hour periods will severely hinder a firm's ability to meet deadlines.".

It also wrote to me saying:

"At no time during the development of the drought did Yorkshire Water contact the Chamber. It was the Chamber which contacted Yorkshire Water at the beginning of September to ask for hard information and offered to assist in bringing about awareness through its membership of around 2,500 firms from industry and business."

It had to take the initiative.

The West Yorkshire fire service objected to the drought order through the local evening paper, the Halifax *Evening Courier*, which, along with other media, including the *Yorkshire Post* and Radio Leeds, has sustained an excellent campaign throughout the crisis and kept the public informed. The local authority's chief fire officer said:

"Fire fighting in Calderdale would be seriously compromised if rota cuts go ahead."

Mr. Jim Manuel, West Yorkshire's most senior fire officer, told the drought hearing:

"'A fire in a large multi-storey building, we would be incapable of controlling under those circumstances.' Yorkshire Water had said they could turn the mains back on within one or two hours, said Mr. Manuel. 'I think that would be largely academic'."

That is an example of Yorkshire Water's response. Old mill buildings, which are common in West Yorkshire, could present a serious hazard.

Holdsworth and Company is a local textiles firm that has tried its best to conserve water. I took my hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras to visit that reputable local firm. Holdsworth and Company warned that if it had to close and fell behind with production, vital exports could be lost and once lost could be gone for ever.

The Confederation of British Wool Textiles said that if water cuts became fully operational, there might be lay-offs of up to 3,000 people in Calderdale and Kirklees.

The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds wrote me a very witty letter saying that if the crisis were not so serious, it

"could have been taken from a Gilbert and Sullivan comic opera.

We have the tankers commandeered from chocolate makers and chemical companies to fill up in Northumbrian reservoirs."

More seriously, it said:

"We have the rivers Wharfe and Ouse being drained—placing fish, birds and other wildlife in jeopardy. This is a prime example of the environment paying the price for poor management of water resources."

I could not agree more.

Guy Cocker of the local dental services committee told the inquiry:

"Dentists operate on living tissue and as any surgeon have to scrub wash their hands between each patient. It would be difficult to see how this could be done if water is not of the highest quality and free of bacterial infestation. It may well be that General Dentist Practitioners have to close their surgeries."

Calderdale Nursing Homes Association felt the same as nursing homes were not exempt, as hospitals and police stations were. It said:

"We care for most vulnerable and frail members of society. Many are very ill, doubly incontinent and unable to resist infection. Lives will be at risk without an adequate water supply."

Recognising the severity of the crisis, I wrote to the Prime Minister on 17 August asking Parliament to intervene and for the Government to recall Parliament. I received only a holding letter. I wrote again on 18 September and on 22 September drawing attention to lead articles in the *Evening Courier* and the *Yorkshire Post*. I sent the Prime Minister all the information. I also wrote to the Secretary of State for Health and the Secretary of State for the Environment.

I finally received a reply from the Prime Minister on 26 September. What a disappointment it was after waiting almost six weeks. He said:

"The five months April to August were the driest five months for over 200 years. It is unrealistic for water companies to plan, invest and increase charges to customers to cater for all demands through such a rare event."

I do not agree. Water companies have responsibilities.

Mr. Gerry Sutcliffe (Bradford, South): Was not that disappointing response from the Prime Minister compounded by the response from the Secretary of State for the Environment in the summer, when he told people to stop whingeing and enjoy the weather? He did not care about the people of West Yorkshire.

Mrs. Mahon: That was the usual insult from the Secretary of State for the Environment instead of a helpful suggestion. The Prime Minister's letter continued:

"I understand that although reservoirs which supply Bradford and Halifax areas were at full capacity at the beginning of the summer season, they did not have the usual topping-up from run-off due to the exceptionally dry weather since April.

Overall the privatisation of the water industry has been an outstanding success.".

It did not matter to him what my constituents felt.

Last winter was one of the wettest on record. I would have found the Prime Minister's comments about the exceptionally dry weather farcical were we not facing such a serious crisis. What does he think happens in Australia, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait? People plan ahead.

Last week, the right hon. Gentleman compounded farce with insult when he replied to my intervention during the debate on the Queen's Speech by saying:

"In addition to everything else, the Opposition have a policy to make it rain when it is convenient."—[*Official Report*, 15 November 1995; Vol. 267, c. 27.]

Mr. John Gunnell (Morley and Leeds, South): Does my hon. Friend agree that Yorkshire Water's planning has consisted of closing reservoirs and seeking planning permission to build on those sites?

Mrs. Mahon: That is well documented and well known to people in West Yorkshire.

The Minister for Local Government, Housing and Urban Regeneration insisted that the Government could not intervene, yet they do in other matters. In response to a request from my hon. Friend the Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman) for the Army to be brought in, he said that help in distributing water by the military was impossible because the Army water tankers were busy in Bosnia. He was not concerned about the people of West Yorkshire.

The tankers have come to the rescue, but do Members have any idea of the disruption to the lives of people living round the Albert reservoir in Halifax? I took my hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras to see it. Yorkshire Water is paying compensation to people who live nearby.

Mrs. Helen Jackson (Sheffield, Hillsborough): Is it not the case that the whole tankering operation is moving 13.5 million gallons a day while 100 million gallons a day are leaking away? Could not the whole crisis have been avoided?

Mrs. Mahon: Such a test could have been set in a primary school. There are 250 tankers a day operating in Calderdale, and that figure will increase to 600 as other parts of West Yorkshire are hit by the drought. The constant noise and pollution caused by those lorries as they drive past every day are seriously disrupting people's lives.

I pay tribute to the three local councils involved and particularly to Calderdale's leader, Councillor Pam Warhurst, Councillor Paul Wyatt, who lives in the area where the tankering is in operation, chief executive Michael Ellison and Mr. Paul Steed, principal planning officer, who have all planned for the crisis. While the Prime Minister and Whitehall completely ignored the growing crisis, others were trying to do something. I wonder whether the Prime Minister would have ignored me for six weeks if the affected area had been Huntingdon or the home counties. In no way is the north-south divide better illustrated.

The council has already delivered 1 million litres of bottled water to schools and nursing homes, at the cost of a great deal of time and money. I hope that it will be fully recompensed. When the inquiry opened last week in Dewsbury, Yorkshire Water announced a £2 million compensation package for customers who might be hit by the cut-offs—£2 per week for each property and £15 every fortnight for the inconvenience. There will be nothing for industry, and that is not good enough. One cannot put a price on people's health or jobs.

Why did not Yorkshire Water have a long-term strategy or listen to Diana Scott, who was doing such a superb job of warning of all the folly and neglect? She was doing her job properly, but got sacked for it. Where has Ian Byatt been until recently? Why is that man paid all the money that he is? The Government have washed their hands of 600,000 people in West Yorkshire.

Yorkshire Water's long-term strategy has been to pray for rain. The way that it has insulted customers is diabolical. It makes a mockery of the term privatised business when Yorkshire Water has spent months exhorting customers not to use its product.

The tankering operation is costing £3 million a week. Imagine if that money had been spent earlier on repairs and a decent strategy. Why do the Government think that the crisis is not of their doing, when they are the guilty men and women who handed over a precious asset to a private company? The Minister said that Army tankers are not available, but that is not good enough. Pipelines can be installed in days when there is a war—we saw the most amazing logistics and operations during the Falklands and Gulf wars. Why is it thought that the people of West Yorkshire are less important than the people of Kuwait or of the Falkland Islands? Yorkshire Water did no planning until it looked into the abyss and saw the future—and only then because the company realised that cut-offs could cause it to go bankrupt.

I call on the Government to take over Yorkshire Water and to promise that customers will not have to pay for the company's folly. I ask the Government to put every resource necessary into ensuring that the people of Calderdale and Kirklees will not have their water cut off and to refuse any request to do that. There must be a full and frank public inquiry into why almost 600,000 people have had to experience threats and intimidation from a company in a first-world country, and who may now have to face the kind of hardships that confront people in third-world countries. It is time for Yorkshire Water to go and for the Government to take on the company's responsibilities.

11.23 am

Mr. Graham Riddick (Colne Valley): It is important to debate this subject this morning. I also submitted an application for an Adjournment debate this week, and I congratulate the hon. Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon) on her success in the ballot. In recent months, this issue has not been wholly party political, which is a good thing. All Members of Parliament for Yorkshire have united in urging Yorkshire Water to take whatever steps are necessary, which is a positive aspect of the affair.

I regret that the hon. Lady has made the issue party political with her speech this morning. The crisis would be taking place whether the water industry was in the private or the public sector. I have press cuttings from 1976, when Labour was in government, reporting on standpipes going up in Holmfirth. People in my constituency were being threatened with cut-offs at that time.

It is only fair to acknowledge the significant shortage of rain in recent months. I am not for a moment apologising for Yorkshire Water, and I will say some rough things about it in a moment. I was interested to note that one of the 1976 press cuttings reported that water charges might increase by 25 per cent. the following year to pay for combating the crisis. Now that the industry is in the private sector, I expect to see the company's shareholders—not its customers—pay for the measures that Yorkshire Water has had to take.

If Yorkshire Water had been in the public sector, I have no doubt that Labour would be saying that the crisis was all the Government's fault because they had not invested sufficiently in the water infrastructure. If Labour had been in government, Conservative Members would probably have said exactly the same. As the industry is in the private sector, we can stand back and be rather more objective than might otherwise have been the case.

Mr. Terry Rooney (Bradford, North): It may surprise the hon. Gentleman to learn that, in 1976, I would have been one of his constituents, so I know what he is talking about. Is the hon. Gentleman aware that in 1976, Yorkshire Water—free of any payment or levy—was able to take water from the North West, Northumberland and Severn Trent utilities? Today, the company must buy that water. That is the difference.

Mr. Riddick: Yorkshire Water is taking as much water as it can from Northumberland and the north-east now, so nothing has changed.

We can all agree that Yorkshire Water's customers among our constituents should be asked to save water. Despite the company's statement on Monday that there will be no need to introduce rota cuts before the new year, we are not yet out of the woods. It is important that the public continue to save water wherever they can. I know that my constituents are doing that, and I am sure that people throughout West Yorkshire are doing so. That should continue.

I believe, like the hon. Member for Halifax, that it is wholly intolerable in this day and age that my constituents should be faced with the possibility of having their water supply cut off 24 hours at a time. That is an appalling prospect for domestic householders and it would create extreme difficulties for pensioners, who rely in most cases on central heating to keep warm, and for parents of young families. It would also be disastrous for industry.

The textile industry became established in West Yorkshire mainly because of the ready and plentiful supply of water. The Confederation of British Wool Textiles estimates that 3,000 workers in the industry would have to be laid off if rota cuts became fully operational throughout Kirklees and Calderdale. There are a total of 50,000 jobs in Kirklees in manufacturing, textiles, engineering, chemicals and food production—all of which are major water users. If rota cuts were introduced, thousands of local people would be laid off, which would be wholly unacceptable, and many small companies would go out of business. Water cut-offs would be a real shocker for the local economy, and they must not be allowed to occur. Their effects on the ability of fire fighters to do their job would be disastrous, and hospitals, dentists, old people's homes and schools would also be seriously affected.

The hon. Member for Halifax was not the only person to express her concern early on. In August, before the problem became really serious and only four months into the drought, I said that this year's problem showed a lack of sufficient storage capacity. In his chairman's statement of 1990, the chairman of Yorkshire Water plc said:

"During the year we faced another challenge as Yorkshire experienced one of its worst droughts this century."

In the *Huddersfield Daily Examiner* of September 1994, Yorkshire Water's general manager in charge of water supply was quoted as saying:

"In the exceptional circumstances of a very dry summer and an unprecedented high demand we had no option except to take the steps we did",

which were applying for drought orders.

Clearly there is a continuing problem. The fact that we have had hosepipe bans in five of the past seven years is confirmation of that. West Yorkshire has insufficient storage capacity for water. Yorkshire Water has complained about increasing demand on the part of customers. Most companies welcome increased demand from their customers, and Yorkshire Water should have been prepared for it. As industry emerged from the recession, it was only natural to expect companies to use more water. As householders' living standards rose, so consumption of water was also likely to increase. People buy dishwashers, which use a lot of water; they buy second-hand cars, which they want to wash. People also want to water their gardens, especially in hot, dry summers. Yorkshire Water should be in a position to respond to customers' increased demands.

I have no doubt that the company is fully aware of the seriousness of the situation and recognises that rota cuts would be wholly intolerable. I am also convinced that the Minister is fully aware of how serious matters are. I was delighted that he came up to West Yorkshire last week—I was pleased to see him even if the hon. Lady was not. We had a useful meeting in Brighouse, and he was able to see for himself the tankering operation at Scammonden. Judging by his comments, privately to us and also in public, he is clearly aware of the serious nature of the problems.

I would urge the Minister not to grant the drought order to Yorkshire Water. If he does not, the company will have to take whatever steps are necessary to maintain the water supply. At this point I will read an extract from a letter I have received from one of my constituents, who takes a hard line on this matter with which I fully agree. He is a solicitor working in Huddersfield and he writes as follows:

"If privatisation means anything it means that the supplier of the utility concerned must pay for its acts and defaults. If the order is not made and Yorkshire Water is unable to supply the people of Kirklees and Calderdale, the people of Kirklees and Calderdale will sue Yorkshire Water, which will be liable in damages. If by reason of that Yorkshire Water becomes insolvent, so be it. Yorkshire Water will be placed in liquidation, its assets sold to another undertaking and the proceeds of the sale will be available to satisfy the claims for damages from the citizens of Kirklees and Calderdale."

[Mr. Riddick]

I agree with my constituent, but I do not agree with the hon. Member for Halifax, who wants to allow civil servants to handle the crisis—that is not the answer. It seemed to be her solution, for she called on the Government to take over Yorkshire Water.

Back in August, I raised the issue of bringing in supplies of water from the Kielder reservoir. There is some confusion about this, but I believe there is scope to increase the supply from that source, and Yorkshire Water will need to examine that option both for the immediate future and for the longer term.

Another point about 24-hour rota cuts is that, in practice, many people will fill up their baths and basins with water in advance, and may thereby use more water than they would have without the cuts.

Mrs. Helen Jackson: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that if there had been a connecting grid between the Kielder reservoir and the Yorkshire and Humberside area, this crisis would not have occurred?

Mr. Riddick: Yes. I have talked to Yorkshire Water about that. The fact is that the company can get water from the Kielder reservoir into the Tyne and the Tees; it needs to build a pipe about 10 miles long from the Tees to the Swale, and thence to the Ouse so as to pipe it through to Leeds. Currently 90,000 tonnes of water are being transferred from the Ouse to the Leeds grid. A senior manager of Yorkshire Water told me yesterday that the company is looking for massive pumps to increase the rate of flow from the Ouse.

Once the immediate crisis has been overcome, Yorkshire Water must invest in a grid to ensure that water can be transferred between various parts of the county, and bring in water from outside the county when necessary. Water storage capacity needs to be increased to meet the demands of an increasingly prosperous society. That can probably be done by a combination of increasing yield from ground waters and industrial rivers, and possibly from new reservoirs and outside sources such as Kielder. Leaks should also be reduced in the short term, and Yorkshire Water must do whatever is necessary to maintain supplies.

The Government must not, however, grant the drought order because rota cuts would be wholly unacceptable in this day and age.

11.36 am

Mr. Terry Rooney (Bradford, North): I found some of the comments that we have just heard amazing. I wonder where the hon. Member for Colne Valley (Mr. Riddick) has been throughout this episode.

In the first week of August we in Bradford were told that, unless there was significant rainfall by the end of August, we would have standpipes. That idea fell by the wayside, though not because of rain. At the beginning of September we were told that, instead of standpipes, we were to have alternate 24-hour rota cuts. That resulted in an application for a drought order to the Secretary of State for the Environment, and a public inquiry was set up. For some reason, the application was withdrawn at the last minute and the public inquiry was cancelled. In the meantime, we have not had much rain.

Another difficulty lies with the statistics supplied by Yorkshire Water. If we calculate average daily use, the amount of water brought in by tanker and the amount of rainfall that we have had, the sums do not add up. I suspect that, all along, supplies in West Yorkshire have been between 10 and 15 per cent. higher than Yorkshire Water has admitted; otherwise Calderdale would have run out of water five weeks ago.

It seems that Yorkshire Water has no conception of what rota cuts would do to the economy. Their effects on householders and schools are obvious. Of the top 50 overseas-earnings companies in Yorkshire and Humberside, 13 are in Bradford, representing £1 billion of exports and 20,000 jobs. These companies are being told to shut down every other day. Let us consider companies operating in the food chain. They are being told to boil the water that they use on alternate days. Sunblest bakery is located in my constituency; it uses 500,000 gallons a day, making an awful lot of bread. The director asked me how he was supposed to boil that much water before using it. That bakery will be short until the rota cuts have finished. If they continue, every school kitchen will have to close, and every supermarket and small business will be at risk. Yorkshire Water has no conception of what has been going on.

Mr. Sutcliffe: Yorkshire Water wrote to the affected companies asking why they did not relocate during the crisis.

Mr. Rooney: That would be all very well if they could relocate in the Amazon rain forest.

Yorkshire Water has claimed that the problem lies with consumption and supply, but in fact it is a problem of distribution. Throughout the summer months—even according to Yorkshire Water's polluted figures—supply in the area did not fall below 45 per cent. The whole system is geared to a water supply in the Pennine areas, and pumping stations to pump it into the east; there is no facility for pumping it back. As a result, the east of the county was flooded with water while there was a shortage in the west.

In the first week of September, when Bradford was faced with the prospect of 24-hour cuts, Yorkshire Water was taking tankers to the racehorse trainers' gallops at Middleham and Malton—free of charge—and spraying water all over the place. The racehorses had to be protected, but the people of Bradford could have their water cut off every other day; that was fine. Meanwhile, hundreds of thousands of gallons were being delivered every day, free of charge. That is nonsensical.

Those who know the geography of the area will be aware that Bradford and Leeds are next to each other. In September, when the discussions were in progress, it was suggested that a pipe should be installed connecting the distribution system covering the area between Leeds and Sheffield with that of Bradford. The local authority offered manpower, and even offered to contribute to the cost, but Yorkshire Water would not entertain the idea, which would have obviated any need for rota cuts.

Since July, when Mr. Newton made his infamous claim not to have had a bath for three months—which turned out to be about as truthful as his supply statistics—Yorkshire Water appears to have been run by a public relations gentleman called Steve Painter. At the end of the day, Mr. Painter is a messenger boy, albeit a very good

one. Unfortunately, like most messenger boys, he does not understand the message that he is conveying. The public are fed to the back teeth with being told that it is all their fault; they are fed up with being treated like idiots. It is time that Yorkshire Water put those who are in charge of the system up front, rather than the public relations people. It is time that it gave the public confidence in the water supply.

Towards the end of September, when Bradford was still under the threat of 24-hour rota cuts, an appalling fact came to light. Yorkshire Water had signed up to 61 commercial deals with Bradford companies, involving supplying them with water from Selby: they would have to pay for transport, but not for the water. No nursing home or person with a home dialysis machine could have a water supply, but a commercial concern that was willing to pay could have one. That sums up the difference between 1976 and 1995.

11.43 am

Mrs. Elizabeth Peacock (Batley and Spen): I welcome the opportunity to speak about Yorkshire Water, and congratulate the hon. Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon) on obtaining the debate. I shall express my views on behalf of 77,500 constituents and their families; I also spoke on their behalf on Friday, when I attended a public inquiry.

It is a matter of public record that Yorkshire Water has spent millions of pounds on infrastructure. It has certainly spent a good deal in my constituency. Indeed, it has spent more than has been spent for centuries. Much more needs to be spent, however, particularly on leakage control. It is nonsensical that so much water is being lost every day when it is becoming such a precious commodity. I believe that every consumer in the Yorkshire Water area should benefit from water supplies at home and in hospitals, schools and businesses.

The situation is serious, and it should have been anticipated. We have not had the rain that we should have had. Certainly, neither my hon. Friend the Minister nor Yorkshire Water can make it rain—if they have tried, they have been using the wrong rain dance man—but Yorkshire Water should have started planning for the worst possible scenario early in the summer. If it had taken action at different stages, putting its plan into operation, we should not now be discussing the possibility of rota cuts.

Of course we must all save water: everyone has a responsibility to do that. I wonder, however, whether Yorkshire Water—or, perhaps, my hon. Friend the Minister—can tell me who owns the water that is in the full reservoirs at Whitley and Addingham, which I understand to be fairly full, and why it is not available in my part of Yorkshire.

It was not at all helpful of the managing director of Yorkshire Water to say on television that he had not had a bath for three months. When the media asked me to comment, I said that I would hate to sit next to him on a bus. We have spent years taking people out of houses that had no proper facilities such as running water, but now there is a possibility that we will allow Yorkshire Water to cut off the supply that we spent so much money and time installing. People in Batley and Spen want water—they are not too worried about compensation—and they want it delivered through their pipes rather than in bottles.

There is no shortage of water in the surrounding areas. It is absurd to say that there is a drought. It seems that everywhere in the country except our bit of Yorkshire has water; why cannot some of it be piped to us? What is Yorkshire Water doing about this?

Yorkshire Water has been running more than 200 tankers, and the number is to rise to 600. That is fine, but anyone driving up the M62 at any time of day or night will follow a constant stream of tankers. When they enter urban areas, people's lives become impossible: it is as if a rolling tank regiment were passing their doors continuously, day and night. Many people are being made ill; they and their children cannot sleep. Yorkshire Water must take the problem seriously. The tankers bring their own pollution, along with traffic congestion and noise.

Why can we not have a temporary pipeline? I am sick and tired of everyone telling me over the past few months what cannot be done; I want to hear what can be done. If our Army engineers were here, they might be able to install a temporary pipeline, but they are all in Bosnia. I believe that we in West Yorkshire are just as important as those who are suffering in Bosnia.

I am told that it would take between six and nine months to install a pipeline. Why? We sent our Army into disaster areas to lay pipes in difficult conditions and in a very short time. If all else fails, why do we not get Anneka Rice? She can do almost anything in 48 hours. Perhaps we should talk to her—or perhaps Yorkshire Water should do so.

We are told that we have part of a pipeline that goes from Kielder all the way down to Teesside, and I understand that there is a gap of about six and a half miles. If that gap were filled, the supply could be brought to Swaledale; once it arrived at Swaledale and the Ouse, we could all have water.

Mr. Jack Thompson (Wansbeck): As the hon. Lady knows, my constituency is not in Yorkshire but in Northumberland. I was very much involved in the development of the Kielder reservoir when I was a member of the water authority. Given her political beliefs and her faith in the free market, does the hon. Lady recognise that my constituents who are shareholders in Northumbrian Water will benefit, receiving an increased dividend? Some good is coming from the exercise, in Northumberland if not in Yorkshire.

Mrs. Peacock: The hon. Gentleman is correct; if someone has a commodity and someone else wants it, it has to be bought, and that is what Yorkshire Water will have to do. If that benefits shareholders in the hon. Gentleman's area, good luck to them. Yorkshire Water shareholders might not benefit so much, because I believe that they should foot the bill for whatever it takes to supply water to my constituency.

We have householders, many of whom are elderly, and we have schools, nursing homes, hospitals and local businesses. I am sure that the Minister has heard a lot from local businesses recently. In my constituency, Fox's Biscuits employs 2,200 people, and it could not make biscuits or enforce hygiene in the factory without water.

Earlier this week Nigel Worne, Fox's Biscuits managing director, said:

"We are the biggest private employer in Kirklees and Calderdale with 2,200 staff and the implications of having no water are enormous. Cutting it off for 24 hours at a time would be even worse because Yorkshire Water couldn't guarantee constant purity. We use 44,000 gallons of water a day."

[Mrs. Peacock]

Of course Fox's Biscuits uses that much water; its biscuits are sold internationally—indeed, all over the world—as well as in all the best stores in the United Kingdom. Furthermore, the company employs many people in my constituency, and I want that to continue.

I have had a great deal of contact with our textile companies, through the Confederation of British Wool Textiles. John Whitfield, of Thomas Carr Ltd., another large employer in my constituency, described the application for rota cuts as "a short-term, ill-considered decision" that would have "a long-term devastating effect" on local industry. Talking about three or four firms that provide another 1,000 jobs, he said:

"Closure of our firms will have an immediate knock-on effect on employment on both our raw material suppliers and carpet-producing customers."

Thomas Carr Ltd. is another firm that sends 50 per cent. of its goods for export, and this is its busiest time of the year. If it does not complete its orders, it will lose not only those but future orders, because its customers will go elsewhere to buy.

As we have already heard, earlier in the summer Yorkshire Water suggested that some of the affected companies should relocate. What arrogant nonsense. What right has Yorkshire Water to tell companies in my constituency, or anywhere else in Yorkshire, to relocate? In my constituency alone there has been millions of pounds worth of investment over the past 10 years. It is downright arrogance to say, "Sorry, we can't let you have water. Would you mind gathering up your factory and taking it 10 miles up the road?" In fact, it is disgraceful.

I urge the Minister to ensure that, if necessary, the Government will lift planning restrictions so that a temporary pipeline can be laid. I have discussed the matter several times with my hon. Friend, and I know that he is sympathetic to what we are saying. If that is the way to get water into the area, so be it—and I understand that it is now being discussed.

May I also have the Minister's assurance that the recent public inquiry will not necessarily lead to rota cuts? Last week, the general view of the media in Yorkshire was that the inquiry was merely an exercise, that rota cuts were already on the cards and that the public inquiry was little more than a waste of time. Will my hon. Friend assure my constituents and me that that is not so, and that he will ensure that every possible source of water, however expensive it may be, is explored by Yorkshire Water, so that our householders, consumers and businesses can continue their activities over the next few weeks, when clearly things will be difficult?

I repeat that there is plenty of water around. Yorkshire Water must go out and buy it and get it into our areas, perhaps by using a pipeline.

11.53 am

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): Earlier this month, a constituent of mine wrote to my hon. Friend the Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon) saying:

"I write, as a disillusioned Tory, to thank you most sincerely for forcing Parliament to debate the serious mismanagement of collection and distribution of water in the Yorkshire area . . . The blame should be laid fairly and squarely on the present government. There never has been a better case for having a National Water Grid serving a Nationalised Water Board".

I ask the Minister for three undertakings. First, I would like a clear assurance that the Government will require Yorkshire Water to take every possible action to avoid the interruption of water supplies in any part of Yorkshire in the foreseeable future.

Secondly, will the hon. Gentleman assure me that the Government will not agree to any further drought order? I also ask for clarification as to whether the granting of a drought order automatically exempts Yorkshire Water from paying reasonable compensation. That is a grey area, and the Minister should clarify it this morning.

Finally, I ask for a clear undertaking that the Government will authorise a wholly independent inquiry soon, to examine several matters, especially Yorkshire Water's investment programme for repairing leaks.

Mrs. Helen Jackson: Does my hon. Friend agree that the present proposal that such an inquiry be sponsored by Yorkshire Water is totally unsatisfactory? Is it not true that any inquiry must be completely and utterly independent of that company if it is to have any credibility for the people of Yorkshire?

Mr. Madden: I thoroughly agree. That is an absolute requirement. Moreover, there would be no confidence in any inquiry initiated by the water regulator, who is widely regarded as someone who would find it difficult to regulate his way out of a wet paper bag.

Such an inquiry should be able to investigate the ability to move water around within the region and between regions. It should also examine the closure of reservoirs that has taken place in Bradford and other parts of West Yorkshire—primarily, it would appear, to raise even more money for the shareholders of Yorkshire Water.

The inquiry should also examine the handling of the summer crisis, which, as the Minister has heard from both sides of the House, left much to be desired. Finally, it should inquire into Yorkshire Water's diversification into all sorts of business activities other than supplying water, not only in this country but around the world.

The most recent edition of *Private Eye* reports:

"Drought-stricken Yorkshire Water is using its newly-found customer relations skills to top up its profits. The company is holding a seminar for the PR industry on how to improve communication skills and handle the media. Appropriately the £35-a-head session ends with a lecture on 'crisis management'."

I cannot conceive of any organisation less fit to advise others on crisis management than Yorkshire Water.

I hope that in replying to this important debate, the prospect of which I suspect persuaded Yorkshire Water not to embark on rota cuts anywhere, the Minister will make it clear that he will not tolerate that company's interrupting water supplies anywhere else in Yorkshire. I also hope that he will respond to my request for undertakings.

11.57 am

Mr. Spencer Batiste (Elmet): From what we heard earlier this week, it appears that because of recent rainfall, the immediate crisis has been postponed into the new year. However, no one knows what rain will come later this year, in the winter or even next summer, and the

debate gives us an important opportunity to establish clearly what our priorities should be for the water industry in the future.

First and foremost, it must be clearly stated that water supply must be guaranteed, at whatever cost to the shareholders of any water company. Water must come to homes, schools, hospitals and businesses. Proposals to restrict the supply are unacceptable.

This is not a national crisis, because there is no national shortage of water. It is a local issue; water does not happen to have fallen in the places where the water companies traditionally predict that it will. The problem is therefore one involving the supply system rather than general drought conditions. It has been caused by the lack of a national grid and the lack of action to deal with leakage. These are the consequences of a century of under-investment in the water industry, and privatisation has for the first time brought large-scale investment into that industry. The problem we face is that, until now, investment has been focused on other important priorities such as improving water quality, dealing with sewage and improving the quality of rivers. Money has not been invested in the basic issue of guaranteeing the supply of water to consumers.

Weather patterns are very variable, and they are becoming increasingly unpredictable. We cannot rely on rain falling in the Pennines over the summer in a way that will guarantee water supplies to the homes that depend upon it, and Leeds is every bit as much at risk as Bradford, Halifax or any other area. We must ensure that a system is in place that will ensure water supplies to all, whatever the local conditions may be. Tankers are not the solution, as they cause havoc on the roads. Increased extraction from rivers has an enormous knock-on effect on wildlife, and we should be carefully monitoring that effect already.

Frankly, the priorities which have been established for the water industry need to be reassessed. Obviously, we want to improve the quality of our drinking water and the purity of water in our rivers, but first and foremost we must be able to deliver water to homes, schools, businesses and hospitals.

Mrs. Helen Jackson: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Batiste: I have only a short time, and I am sure that other hon. Members would like to speak. The hon. Lady has already intervened on two or three occasions.

Clearly, we need a grid system which will shift water from areas which have it to others which do not. Kielder in Northumberland may have water this year, but it may not next year, and Northumberland may be asking Yorkshire for water next year. A system must be in place that is able to provide that water.

Leakages must be addressed, and the neglect of the infrastructure in this century must be addressed quickly. Above all, it seems to me that Yorkshire Water is responding to the crisis in a way that is still reflective of a nationalised industry. The company is looking at the crisis on the basis of trying to control demand when it should be managing supply a great deal better. I hope the message that comes from this debate today is that, for hon. Members on both sides of the House, the people must come first and the supply of water must be guaranteed.

12.2 pm

Mr. Frank Dobson (Holborn and St. Pancras): I must start by congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon) on initiating this debate. More to the point, I should congratulate her on the campaign that she has waged against the shortcomings of Yorkshire Water and the way in which its incompetence continues to threaten the health and prosperity of people in Halifax, Calderdale, Bradford, Dewsbury, Huddersfield, Colne valley, Leeds and surrounding areas. Together with other Labour Members from Yorkshire, my hon. Friend has been relentless in speaking up for local people against the incompetence and profiteering of their privatised water company.

I should add my congratulations to those involved in newspapers, radio and television in Yorkshire, who have been stalwart campaigners on the matter. Despite the fact that they are run by a company that does not hide its light under a bushel—a company that is rightly described as Yorkshire Conservative newspapers—I should include in that my congratulations to the *Yorkshire Post* and the *Yorkshire Evening Post* on their campaigns.

No one who has followed this debate—or, more to the point, what has been happening this summer and autumn—could possibly doubt that Yorkshire Water is failing the people of Yorkshire. Equally, no one can doubt that Yorkshire Water is profiteering at the expense of its customers and the taxpayer. One needs only to look at the figures. Since Yorkshire Water was privatised in 1989-90, household bills have gone up by more than two thirds, or 68 per cent. Profits have more than doubled, and are up by 144 per cent. The pay and perks of company bosses have nearly quadrupled, and are up by 288 per cent. The market value of the company has more than doubled—it is up by 165 per cent. Nice work if you can get it.

The company and the Government claim that investment has increased. It did at the beginning, but it has tailed off. In any case, most of that investment was financed directly by the taxpayer. When the water industry was privatised, the Government handed over to the new private owners £6.5 billion of the taxpayer's money. Out of that bonanza at the taxpayer's expense, Yorkshire Water got £648 million. In the first five years of privatisation, Yorkshire Water invested £700 million in water supply. As I have explained, £648 million of that came from the taxpayer, leaving only £52 million—or 7 per cent.—to be met by the company from its £721 million profit.

Since privatisation, Yorkshire Water has paid no mainstream corporation tax at all. It has paid just £50 million in tax in total, and that is mainly in the form of advanced corporation tax, which the company can write off against its future tax liabilities. In short, Yorkshire Water—like the rest of the privatised water companies—is coining it at the expense of its customers and the taxpayer. But this summer's performance shows that Yorkshire Water is not just coining it; it is incompetent into the bargain.

The company's attitude to the drought has lurched from abject complacency to total panic. To be fair to Yorkshire Water, the Government's response has been the same. The Government—in the face of all of the evidence—have gone on proclaiming that water privatisation is a "brilliant success". They have blamed any problems that the industry has faced on the awful water company customers

[Mr. Frank Dobson]

who insist on having water. They have taken every opportunity to promote their hidden agenda of forcing everyone in the country to install water meters, despite the £4 billion to £5 billion that it would cost the country.

In pursuit of that unholy grail of water metering, Ministers—either deliberately or in total ignorance—have misled the House, and claimed in plain words that the customers have wasted more water than the water companies. They have patronised and insulted Labour Members who have challenged those misleading statements. That was why I published the full figures on leakages on 3 August, and published them for the first time in a form that people could understand. Would you believe, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that the form in which the figures were published previously was in litres per household per day on the basis of a 20-hour day? That appears to be a covert effort to decimalise time.

The figures showed that the companies lost 826 million gallons of water a day, or 500,000 gallons a minute. Of the total water lost through leaks, 78 per cent. was leaked from company water pipes, leaving customers responsible for just 22 per cent.—precisely the reverse of what Ministers told the House. Yorkshire Water's record on leaks is the worst in the country. It wasted 103 million gallons a day from its own pipes. That accounts for 87 per cent. of the total leaked, while the careful customers of Yorkshire, as one would expect—I am a Yorkshireman myself—were responsible for leaking only 13 per cent. of the total.

The water that the company will lose from leaks today would meet all the water needs of Halifax and Calderdale for a fortnight. The water industry's response to the publication of the figures was to claim that we were exaggerating and that the companies were spending £4 billion on dealing with leaks. That simply was not true. I published the real figures, which showed that, far from investing £4 billion in dealing with leaks, the companies were investing about £66 million in identifying and dealing with leaks. Of that total, Yorkshire Water was investing £11 million.

The first response from the Government was a statement from the Secretary of State for the Environment, in which he said that he was very impressed with what the water companies had done. So were the people who were not getting any water. The right hon. Gentleman went on to say that we should all stop moaning, and that Labour's condemnation of the leaks was "hot air".

Ten days later, the Secretary of State published a document which, in line with the Government's hidden agenda, promoted the idea of domestic water metering, and refused to set targets for cutting leaks by water companies. He also claimed—extraordinarily—that he had taken new powers in the Environment Act 1995 to promote the conservation of water. He conveniently omitted to explain that the Act placed that requirement not on the companies—as Labour proposed—but only on the customers.

The Secretary of State told people in Yorkshire that Yorkshire Water was a world-class company, and boasted that it was deploying its expertise in China and north America. Most people in Yorkshire did not share the right hon. Gentleman's thrill at that news. They took the view that the first duty of Yorkshire Water was to deploy its expertise—such as it is—in making sure that Yorkshire people get the water that they need and have paid for. Most people in Yorkshire do not like seeing their money going instead into speculative projects in China and north America, or, for that matter, into speculative shopping malls in Leeds. But that is what Yorkshire Water has been doing with its customers' money.

A week later, the Secretary of State changed his tune again and said that he might take action to require the water companies to cut their leaks, but he added that that would have to await the National Rivers Authority report on water conservation. Six weeks later, the NRA published its report, which vindicated everything that we had been saying. It said that reducing leaks was the most effective way of conserving water and that cutting leaks was twice as effective as installing water meters.

It is not just the experts who support what Labour has been saying. Throughout the country, people know that leaks are the main cause of the water shortage. They know that water companies are not doing enough to reduce the leaks. They know that compulsory water metering, which the Government support, would be an expensive racket at the expense of the customers. They also know and feel strongly that the water companies should never have been privatised in the first place.

Nowhere do people feel that more strongly than in Yorkshire. People have experienced hosepipe bans and drought orders. They have seen Yorkshire Water harming the environment by draining too much water out of precious lakes and rivers. They have seen Yorkshire Water forced to interrupt people's peaceful occupation of their homes and damage the environment by dispatching huge fleets of tankers all over the county. This is the county where one third of all water distributed leaks out of the company's pipes. This is the county where the water company continues to blame its customers for the shortages. This is the county where the water company officials have the cheek to suggest that local firms should shut down or relocate because they have the audacity to use too much water. This is the county where the company first promised to guarantee water supplies to residential homes for the elderly and then went back on its promise. This is the county where the company said that it needed drought orders, then that it did not—in the middle of the Tory party conference—and then that it did. Now it is not quite sure.

The company ignores its customers. As we have heard, it ignores the needs of local business. It ignores the views of the fire brigade. It ignores the views of the local authorities. All in all, the record of Yorkshire Water is a shambles and a disgrace. That shambles was created by the original privatisation of the water industry and the stupid and expensive way in which it was gone about at the expense of the taxpayers. It has been augmented since by Government complacency and the incompetence of the overpaid bosses of the company.

Dr. Keith Hampson (Leeds, North-West): If the hon. Gentleman checked the figures, I think he would find that in the period around 1976, when the industry was nationalised and accountable to the then Labour Government, investment levels were halved by the Labour Government. That must have had a major effect on the problem of bad pipes, rotting sewers and the leakage factor. If the investment had gone in under the Labour Government, we would not be in the mess that we are in now.

Mr. Dobson: Thank you, Mr. Rip Van Winkle. The Tory party nationalised the water industry, taking it out of the hands of the local authorities that had run it so well. No doubt the hon. Gentleman voted for that. Certainly, the Secretary of State voted to nationalise the water industry. They should know that when the water industry was nationalised, average investment per year under the Labour Government was a third higher than the average under the Tory Government. As the hon. Gentleman would have known if he had come into the debate, virtually all the investment since has been entirely at the expense of the taxpayers and drawn from the massive subsidy that the companies were given at the time of privatisation.

Yorkshire Water's insulting answer to the catalogue of lunacy that we have heard about today is to apply, God help us, for a charter mark and appoint a new public relations official on £80,000 a year. No wonder the people of Yorkshire are sick to death of what has been happening. No wonder they are turning in greater and greater numbers to the Labour party, the party of the Members of Parliament and councillors who have spoken up for local people and local businesses and have not proved to be apologists for Yorkshire Water.

Labour's representatives have told the truth. They have exposed the facts and suggested sensible answers to the problems. Conservatives have always defended the pay and perks of the water company bosses. Now they are even reduced to defending their leaks. I remind the House that leaks are running at half a million gallons a minute. That means that during this debate, 45 million gallons of water will have leaked out of the water pipes of the companies and 6.5 million gallons will have leaked out in Yorkshire alone.

The Secretary of State has sent the Minister along to defend the position. He is going to have a job because it is what the Tory party believes in—subsidised private monopolies ripping off the public.

12.14 pm

The Minister for Local Government, Housing and Urban Regeneration (Mr. David Curry): The purpose of this debate should be to try to give some reassurance to the people of Yorkshire and to show them that we understand their deep concerns. I should be very happy to engage in party political warfare at any time at the hon. Gentleman's invitation, but the purpose now must be to get some facts before the people of Yorkshire.

I should like first to deal with what has already been done and then look a little towards the future. At the moment, some 35,000 tonnes of water is being tankered daily into Leeds, which is about 17.5 per cent. of demand; 20,000 tonnes of water is being tankered into Kirklees, which is about 18 per cent. of the demand; and 12,000 tonnes of water is going into Calderdale, which is 24 per cent. of the demand. Up to now, we have granted 20 drought orders, the most important of which have dealt with four categories of activity: first, reducing the flow of water from the reservoirs in the Pennines back into streams that were originally designed to boost the supply of water for the wool textile industry in Yorkshire in the 19th century; secondly, giving Yorkshire Water the authority to take water from the Ouse and the Wharfe; thirdly, enabling Yorkshire Water to tap special sources of water, such as ornamental reservoirs and water-skiing surfaces; and, fourthly, prohibiting non-essential uses.

Yesterday my Department approved an order to allow the use of borehole water and for the owners of the boreholes to sell or to give that water to other people. We have received—or, I imagine, will receive within the day—applications for two new drought orders. We have also received a demand to cut further the compensation flows from reservoirs. Some 28,000 tonnes flows from the reservoirs into the streams daily, which represents about 20 per cent. of the supplies to Kirklees and Calderdale, and the application is to reduce that flow.

We expect to receive an order—I believe that the advertisement has already been published in Yorkshire—for further extractions from the Wharfe to be made at Arthington to supply Leeds and at Lobwood in the Hollins for Bradford. We shall consider those orders as rapidly as we are permitted to do under the statute. We shall also, however, fully take into account our wide responsibilities when we consider those orders, including environmental considerations.

A number of hon. Members mentioned the question of the pipeline. I think that it would be helpful if I were to make a few remarks about that. Three questions have to be settled. First, the National Rivers Authority has some concern about the environmental effect of water from the Tees being added to the Swale and the Yorkshire water system. That is a legitimate concern and it clearly has to be decided. Secondly, in regard to the level of extraction at Moor Monkton, there is a problem of pumping capacity and the pipelines. One could argue that the most urgent need is for pipeline work on the link between Moor Monkton and Eccup and for the pumping facilities to be put in place. Thirdly, there is some concern about the level of pesticides in the water from the Ouse and the ability to treat it before it enters the drinking water system. That is again a legitimate environmental concern. If one were to act, with due risk, immediately, people would later ask, "But were the serious issues that were raised borne in mind?"

Mrs. Mahon: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Curry: No. I have not intervened on other people and I have very little time.

I must make it clear that I believe that Yorkshire Water must as a priority deal with the bottleneck at Moor Monkton. I believe that it has to continue work on the pipeline option, and I wish to make it absolutely clear that no planning problems will be allowed to stand in the way of the construction of that pipeline. We can authorise the construction through the use of drought orders, and we will not hesitate to do so.

On the purchase of water, I shall make one thing clear. When one water undertaker has to take water from resources controlled by another, it has always had to meet the reasonable costs. Under the privatisation arrangements, that system continues. If there is no agreement on the reasonableness of the cost, the Office of Water Services has to arbitrate.

I must inform the hon. Member for Wansbeck (Mr. Thompson), therefore, that I am moved by his concern for the shareholders of Northumbrian Water, but there might not be quite the bonanza that he anticipates on their behalf because of the requirement that the water should be sold at a reasonable cost. I certainly welcome the embracing of the capitalist ethic by at least that member of the Labour party, however.

[Mr. Curry]

The postponement of the earlier public hearing was due to a Government decision in the light of advice from the National Rivers Authority to allow those major abstractions from the Wharfe.

The public inquiry has just concluded and we have not yet received the inspector's report, but my advice is that we are likely to do so today. I wish to make it absolutely clear, as I have made it clear in Yorkshire and at a series of meetings with Yorkshire Water, that there is no question of the Government simply receiving the report, allowing a decent interval to pass and signing it through. Before he even contemplated the emergency drought orders, the Secretary of State would want to be convinced that they were the last of all possible last resorts and that the only alternative was to run out of water. I must emphasise that point because any impression that the inquiry was a mere formality to provide cover for a Government decision is not true. I have spelt that out categorically in those terms to Yorkshire Water as clearly as I am spelling it out in the House.

Let me spell this out clearly, too—in the present circumstances, that order will not be made. The measures already taken, particularly the reduction in compensation flows from reservoirs, even given below-average rainfall, will permit the reservoirs to fill. Until now, the problem has been the constant decline in reservoir levels and concern about the quality of the water that was left at the very bottom once they got to between 11, 12, 13 and 14 per cent. of capacity. The measures that have been taken should permit the reservoirs to fill. If we were to accede—I emphasise the conditional because we have to take the decision in the light of all our responsibilities, including environmental ones—to the two most recent requests and had the option to change the terms of those requests in giving the consent—it is not merely a question of saying yes or no, because we can vary them—the reservoirs would be able to fill more rapidly.

The hon. Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden) asked about the compensation arrangements. The statute lays down the position. If an emergency drought order interrupts supply, compensation is ruled out under long-standing statute law, which has stood under both Labour and Conservative Governments. It is for the Director General of Water Services to decide to hold an inquiry. As the House will know, he has been following the matter very closely indeed.

Mrs. Helen Jackson: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Curry: No.

What Yorkshire Water does in terms of its own inquiries is entirely for it to decide, but it is important for us to draw conclusions from what has happened this year, to ensure that it does not happen again. I have made it clear once again to Yorkshire Water that, irrespective of the weather conditions and the rainfall, we must not find ourselves in a similar position next year. That means a sustained programme of refilling reserves in the reservoirs in the coming months and of putting right some of the faults in the system.

As I have said in public and to the company's face repeatedly, a justifiable criticism can be made of the company. At the turn of June or in July last year, it should have realised that demand was going through the roof. It was rising rapidly and the company did not respond quickly enough and placed too great a hope in the weather eventually changing. If it had acted more rapidly, particularly to reduce compensation flows out of reservoirs into streams, we would have been in a much better position now. At their height, the flows were about 80,000 tonnes a day, which is half the entire consumption of Calderdale and Kirklees. Frankly, the water was running to waste.

Action has to be taken on four fronts. The first is for Yorkshire Water. It is urgent that the company addresses itself to the problems of the distribution grid within Yorkshire. It inherited an extremely old, unmodernised and out-of-date grid and serious problems are caused by, for example, subsidence from mining, which makes it difficult to improve and replace the system—*[Interruption.]* I hope that hon. Members will recognise that fact when Yorkshire Water has to replace the grid and improve the mains in places such as Halifax. It will mean considerable disruption because of the road and engineering works that it entails. I hope that they will not complain about the disruption when that work takes place.

Secondly, Yorkshire Water has to ensure that it is able to secure the necessary long-term water supplies. It must study rising demand and the possible trends and realise that, in five out of the past seven years, there have been hosepipe bans, which should have been a litmus test for the problems to come and led it to take action earlier this year. Now the company has to set out clearly the actions that it will take in the medium and long term. That means dealing with the leaks and reviewing the compensation water regimes, which the Secretary of State has already undertaken to review.

It is a matter of renewing the grid network within Yorkshire so that capacity is improved, particularly to enable the company to move water east-west. As the hon. Member for Bradford, North (Mr. Rooney) said, one of the problems has been that rainfall has tended to be in the east, whereas the historical pattern was for rain to fall over the Pennines. The company has to consider improvements in pumping capacity and the overall supply position. That may include looking for new, long-term supplies, including Kielder Water—no doubt to the eventual long-term benefit of shareholders in that company.

The Government have made it clear that, if the companies do not do well enough, we shall consider statutory leakage reduction targets.

Mrs. Ann Taylor (Dewsbury): Consider!

Mr. Curry: That is a responsibility that should fall on the companies. That is why there is a statutory undertaking. Although the Labour party is deeply in love with the Armageddon strategy, and would love Yorkshire to run out of water, which would give it political satisfaction, I do not intend to give it that satisfaction—*[Interruption.]*

Mrs. Mahon: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Curry: No.

Mrs. Mahon: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. That is the most outrageous and insulting remark and the Minister should withdraw it immediately.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. That is not a point of order for the Chair. In the few minutes available, I should have thought that the House would want to hear what the Minister has to say.

Mr. Curry: I realise that there is colossal concern in orkshire about the situation. I have tried to outline the osition and what can be done about it. The Labour party as engaged in a constant programme of political arracking, which I do not think will be appreciated by e people who are concerned in Yorkshire. It is a tone ifferent from that of the constructive conversations that have had with Labour Members from Yorkshire. I wish at that had been carried through into this debate and not hat we have heard this morning.

I can well appreciate that, for Yorkshire Water, the atisfaction of shareholders matters. I can equally nderstand the importance of the views of its City analysts nd financiers. However, the people who matter most of ll are the customers and consumers of Yorkshire Water, ecause they have nowhere else to go. They must be given riority in the future investment programmes of orkshire Water.

Education Funding (Northumberland)

12.30 pm

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): We have plenty of water in Northumberland. It is funds for schools that we are short of. I am tempted to offer to trade one for the other because we are in such a desperate state and the Minister has so far not been able to offer us much. We intend to seek more from him today.

In September, a leaked memo from the Secretary of State for Education and Employment acknowledged that there is a perception that schools are underfunded and that peace in the classroom threatened. If that is true at national level—and it is a remarkable admission—it is even more true in Northumberland because of specific difficulties about the funding of education in our county.

In the already underfunded education system, there are authorities which have been placed in an especially difficult position by the failure of the standard spending assessment mechanism, which does not take adequate account of regional differences and the additional pressures that face some areas. That problem is made worse by the capping system. Some authorities threatened to set deficit budgets because they felt unable to make yet more cuts.

Perhaps one of the greatest sets of difficulties is that faced by Northumberland, which lost about £7 million when the SSA replaced the former system of education funding. The authority was particularly disadvantaged by two factors. The first was the additional educational needs factor. Northumberland lost about £5 million because of the large increase in the percentage of the SSA formula that was devoted to additional educational needs, which are needs different from those prevalent in Northumberland. The other factor was area cost adjustment, which was also increased substantially when SSAs were introduced, and affected Northumberland especially badly.

Northumberland is geographically the largest of the shire counties; its population is the smallest except for that of the Isle of Wight. That means that it has lowest population density and all the problems that that brings. Sixty out of the county's 146 first schools have fewer than 100 pupils. A number are very small, with fewer than 25 pupils, but are in remote places where it is necessary to retain a school. Small schools are expensive to maintain.

Distance is another problem. Pupils in some parts of the county have to travel 15 or even 25 miles each way to school, which is a major cost to the budget. The extra cost arising from small rural schools is about £1.3 million; rural school transport costs £3.7 million. Of course, if more schools are cut, the transport bill will go up. The sparsity factor in the SSA does not adequately compensate the county council for the extra costs.

As well as the initial losses, Northumberland county council has experienced four years of budget reductions which, according to its calculations, have wiped another £13.4 million from the education budget in real terms, based on a standstill budget. Considered year by year, in 1992-93 there was a £3.8 million cut against a standstill budget; a £4 million cut in 1993-94; a £4.6 million cut in 1994-95; and a £1.235 million cut in 1995-96. That last figure would have been higher if the county had not cut its reserves to £4 million. An auditor's report the year

[Mr. A. J. Beith]

before said that letting the reserves fall below £6 million would be imprudent, but the county felt obliged to take that action.

In money terms between 1992-93 and 1995-96, the total education budget for the county rose by 5.7 per cent., taking account of the changes in further education, when the retail prices index grew by 11.8 per cent. and the number of pupils in Northumberland schools increased from 45,960 to 48,454. At the same time, teachers' salaries, which make up four fifths of the budget, have increased by 28.5 per cent.

School budgets have been hit badly. Although in cash terms some schools have had their budgets increased since 1992, that increase has been undermined by inflation, teachers' salary increases and the additional costs of local management. The Office of Standards in Education warned that further cuts at one school would seriously affect its ability to meet the statutory requirements of the national curriculum. Pupil-teacher ratios in Northumberland have been deteriorating at an alarming rate compared with the average in the rest of England; compared with Scotland, the situation is worse still. We make the comparison with Scotland because it adjoins us.

Mr. Jack Thompson (Wansbeck): I congratulate the right hon. Member on obtaining this Adjournment debate. There is another element that needs to be recognised in respect of Northumberland. I am told that, in a rural area in the right hon. Gentleman's constituency, there is a class of seven. That is fine, because it is a small rural school and it is the only service available.

In my part of Northumberland, we now have classes of more than 30 to 35 on some occasions. The big problem in Northumberland is that four fifths of the population lives in the south-east corner and the rural areas are sparsely populated. They still require education services, but they have to be provided on a two-level basis. We have a shortage of spaces in the south-east and a surplus of spaces in the rural parts.

Mr. Beith: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for underlining the point that I made earlier about the cost of maintaining schools in scattered rural areas. It is an essential cost because it would not be reasonable to remove schools altogether from areas as remote as some of the places concerned.

The average pupil-teacher ratio in England was 17.4 per cent. in 1993. It was 15.4 per cent. in Scotland; in Northumberland, it was 19.4 per cent. Since then, it has worsened. The Fairshares campaign, which is an independent group of parents in Northumberland who have united to campaign for adequate funding, produced a detailed report on the issue. It carried out a survey of Northumberland schools and found that among respondents, 85 per cent. of schools had experienced an increase in the pupil-teacher ratio between 1991 and 1995.

Class sizes are similarly bad when compared with other areas. The average for England and Wales is that around one quarter of primary pupils are in classes of 30 or more; in Northumberland, approximately half are. That figure relates primarily to the towns and the urban, south-eastern part of Northumberland; classes have to be smaller in rural areas where pupil numbers are low. On top of that, schools have to rely on parents to raise money for essential equipment and to continue the employment of existing staff. The vast majority of schools surveyed made use of money raised by parents for such purposes—almost a quarter of it for essential items.

The leadership of the county council responded to the crisis in which it was placed by proposing earlier this year to close 10 first schools, six of them—Hipsburn, Acklington, Linton, Milfield, Horncliffe and Thropton—in my constituency. A number of those 10 are popular schools whose pupils cannot satisfactorily be accommodated elsewhere. Others are village schools in places distinct or remote from the nearest community that would still have a school. It was an unwise response to an admittedly difficult situation. Indeed, the county council has now dropped the proposals and is concentrating on trying to get better funding.

The funding changes have placed Northumberland towards the bottom of the spending tables for education. The Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy statistics show that Northumberland is ranked towards the bottom of the table of potential schools budgets per pupil in English counties. Oxfordshire has more than £200 more potential schools budget per pupil than Northumberland.

This week, I received a letter from the head teacher of King Edward VI school in Morpeth, in the constituency of the hon. Member for Wansbeck (Mr. Thompson), which takes many pupils from my constituency and has an outstanding record. She used to be the head of a school in Cleveland. She calculated the different funding that would have been available to her school in Cleveland. The difference amounted to more than £450,000. She asked:

"Would you please explain to me why I need so much less money to run my school in Northumberland?"

I was recently told about a school which was forced to ask parents to raise £25,000 to bring its facilities up to the standard expected under the national curriculum. The school failed in three areas when it was inspected by Ofsted and all of them were due to lack of funding.

Mr. Ronnie Campbell (Blyth Valley): I congratulate the right hon. Gentleman on getting this debate because it is a matter that needed to be debated. Can he develop the argument about nursery vouchers? The Government are going to give £1,000 per child throughout the land. If that goes for nursery school pupils, should not the figure apply to all pupils throughout the land? Would not that be a better system of financing local schools?

Mr. Beith: I am not sure that I would want to construct the funding system on that basis. The fact remains that the amount available per pupil, which is what the hon. Gentleman was getting at, in Northumberland is very much less than in comparable areas and much, much less than in places such as inner London. Northumberland is being asked not just to make efficiency gains, but to make cuts, time and time again. Schools are struggling desperately in the face of that. The chairman of governors of one high school wrote to tell me that his school has been forced to make several part-time and full-time teachers redundant to balance the budget. He pointed out that that would have been avoided if Northumberland had only half as much extra per pupil as some authorities receive.

Another constituent has written to tell me that in her first school, caretakers and meal supervisors are doing extra duties for no remuneration and giving up their

complimentary lunch to save the school £5 per head per week. The school is dependent on the charity and good will of its staff. Another high school lost three teachers, a caretaker, out-of-school activities and staff preparation time. There was an increase in class sizes and the school could not repair its heating system, all as a result of recent cuts.

There is enormous strength of feeling. More than 3,500 people in Northumberland have written to the Secretary of State for the Environment about the standard spending assessment as it affects education funding. I could find many more examples of the way in which schools have had to cut staff, deliberately taking on far less experienced staff in an attempt to reduce costs. Perhaps the final word should go to the constituent who wrote to the Secretary of State for the Environment:

"I challenge you Mr. Gummer to go into a class of 42 reception children and get them changed and organised for a physical education lesson."

I am waiting for the Secretary of State to avail himself of the opportunity and to see just how difficult the task is. Large class sizes do not mean only the problems mentioned by my constituent, but half as many books again to mark and half as many parents again to see. All those problems make it impossible to give the level of attention teachers see as required.

When pressed, the Government say that it is not their fault; they claim that the fault lies with the local authority and its decisions on funding priorities. They say that the county council could solve the problem by managing its school budget more efficiently and they say that the schools could solve the problem by spending their contingency funds. None of those arguments holds water in Northumberland's case.

Northumberland spent more than the SSA levels on education, yet its education spending is one of the lowest in the country. It is prevented by capping from raising any more money. Between 1993-94 and 1994-95, Northumberland's SSA increased by 4.4 per cent. The Government were saying, "Yes, you do need to spend more money," yet Northumberland was allowed to spend only 1.75 per cent. more, so the Government were saying at the same time, "No, you cannot spend it." It is like saying to someone, "You can have £5 a week more pocket money, but I am inventing a rule that says that you cannot spend it." In this case, we are talking not about pocket money, but about essentials.

I am hardly a fan of the Labour administration in the county hall—indeed, I am often a critic of some of its decisions and spending priorities. However, it is accepted on all sides, including the Conservatives on the county council, that the problem cannot be resolved just by changing the county's spending priorities. Indeed, in 1990-91, the Audit Commission's view was that Northumberland was not mismanaged. The commission said:

"Our overall impression is that the Authority is well managed at both member and officer level."

Since then, the costs of education other than in schools have been reduced by almost a quarter. Comparisons with other areas on this point are favourable. In a sample of comparable counties, including Buckinghamshire, Lincolnshire, North Yorkshire, Norfolk and Cumbria, Northumberland's costs were the lowest. Administrative costs as a percentage of the potential schools budget were, at 1.93 per cent., only slightly higher than those of Cumbria and Lincolnshire, and lower than those of the other authorities mentioned. Given the lower pupil numbers, that suggests that education administration in Northumberland is efficient.

The contingency funds are largely mythical. Schools have no more than two weeks' operating costs, if one averages it across the board, kept as contingency funds. Any small business would regard that as a small margin, especially when some of the funds are earmarked for essential projects. In a very small school, one family leaving the area can slice more than that two weeks' contingency fund from the school's budget for a year. Schools have to keep something in reserve.

The Government and the Prime Minister claim that education has become a priority. This is the opportunity for them to match words with action. The Government should bear in mind the £7 million that was lost through changing the funding arrangements and consider restoring that funding. I urge them to review the standard spending assessment formula to give a fair allocation to Northumberland. The Department of the Environment is reviewing the area cost adjustment, but the review needs to consider the particular problems highlighted by underfunding in Northumberland. We need action sooner than the time scale of the review will permit.

I fear that if we find in the Budget in a week's time that there is some more money for education, it will all be eaten up to match the existing amount that local authorities spend over their standard spending assessments and to deal with new responsibilities, such as the extra costs for special needs which are now required—that is estimated nationally to be more than £400 million—new rules on seat belts in school transport, EC legislation on part-time staff, new school transport entitlements and local government pension scheme costs. In those areas, any new money over and above inflation that the Government promise will be eaten up, not just in Northumberland, but in other places.

In Northumberland, we have a large need over and above those other needs. I plead with the Minister to recognise that need and to realise that it is accepted across the board, by people in all political parties on the county council and here in the House. There are Northumberland Members from all three political parties present in this debate. I urge the Minister to respond to the plea.

12.44 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment (Mr. Robin Squire): I am grateful to the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) for initiating this debate, thus giving the House an opportunity to consider how education is funded in Northumberland. I also welcome hon. Members on both sides of the House to the debate. I make one introductory comment in response to an introductory comment by the right hon. Gentleman concerning a certain memorandum. I reiterate what my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment has said more than once. She did not devise, write, sign or use that memorandum. Although we never comment on leaked alleged memoranda, it is only fair to put that point on record in light of the right hon. Gentleman's opening comment.

[Mr. Robin Squire]

Inevitably, what I say today can, in part, be only a curtain raiser for the announcements that will be made next week by my right hon. Friends. Tempting though it is to say much more, I must decline invitations, however kindly given by the right hon. Gentleman, to say more about funding for education in Northumberland for 1996-97.

The first education expenditure matter on which we all need to be clear is that Northumberland county council, like every other local authority, is responsible for setting its education budget and deciding the priorities between and within services. The council has the final say on how much is spent on education and how much is spent on other services.

We heard—I expected it—a lot from the right hon. Gentleman about reductions, past, present and future, in Northumberland's education budget. I have already made it clear that I can say nothing about next year's financial settlement except this. Neither hon. Members nor Northumberland county council can yet have a clue about the level of that settlement. Any talk, therefore, of budget cuts must be purely speculative. Frankly, it is irresponsible for local authorities to ring alarm bells at this time of the year when they cannot know how much money they will have in 1996-97. I make it clear, for the avoidance of doubt, that a number of local education authorities, including Northumberland, Lancashire and East Sussex, have indulged in that practice. At the very least, it does not assist in rational discussion of these matters.

Mr. Jack Thompson: Is the Minister aware that I am chairman of governors of one of the schools in my constituency, Newbiggin middle school? Last Friday, the board of governors had a meeting. In our budget preparations, we had to take into account the possibility of having a reduction of between 1 per cent. and 3 per cent. That is the simple logic that one must use in planning and preparing for an academic year for a school. We also have to consider the next year, the year after and the year after that. We have to take into account the welfare of the pupils, the staffing levels, the provision of resources and the building itself—the whole gamut of running a school. One has to prepare and consider those factors and take them into account, otherwise one is caught with one's pants down.

Mr. Squire: I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's work in his capacity as chairman of governors. Of course I endorse the point that all governors and all local authorities must plan ahead. My point was specific. I speak as the recipient of many letters, from across the country, which have been caused by local education authorities describing now, in advance of next week's settlement, exactly the cuts or whatever they will face. I repeat for the hon. Gentleman and the House that those figures cannot yet be known and that such talk is, at this stage, alarmist.

The right hon. Gentleman said that Northumberland has been forced to cut millions of pounds from its education budget this year. That is not true. Northumberland has been able to increase its education budget by some 2 per cent. this year and is able to spend over £200 million on all services. That, I submit, is not bad in a year in which local authorities face a tough, but fair, settlement.

Mr. Beith: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Squire: I wish to make progress. The right hon. Gentleman made a number of points and in fairness to him I would like to reach them. If I have time, I will willingly give way. As he knows, I do not refuse to give way.

So from where does the talk about cuts come? The county council is not cutting what it is actually spending; it is drawing up a shopping list of additional spending, fully uprating for all price and income movements, and then cutting back on what it would ideally like to spend if it could buy all the items on that list.

We have to recognise the wider background to the financial settlement for Northumberland. The Government have made it clear all along that this year's settlement has been tough. That is necessary to constrain increases in public expenditure, since local authority expenditure accounts for roughly a quarter of all public expenditure. The whole of the public sector should be looking to meet pay and price pressures, and to make efficiency savings. The long-term future of funding for education in Northumberland depends on ensuring that the economy is placed on a firm footing and that Government keep a firm grip on inflation.

We should give more attention to what Northumberland county council is doing with the funds it receives from central Government. There are important questions which schools and parents will want to ask the county council. Is it achieving value for money? How many surplus places are there in Northumberland schools and what does the county council intend to do about them? I shall not exchange comparative figures because that would be tantamount to telling Northumberland exactly what it should do, but I shall say that the county council has some way to go to catch up with what a number of LEAs are already doing.

The right hon. Gentleman mentioned class sizes in Northumberland schools. Despite the horror stories that appear about class sizes of 30, 35 and more, the facts are that the latest available data show that the average class size in Northumberland schools is 27 in the case of primary schools and 23 in the case of secondary schools. If there are individual class sizes of over 30, it is up to the county council in the first place, and those managing school budgets in the second, to explain to parents why those particular class sizes are so far above the Northumberland average. There could be any number of reasons: the level of teaching done by the head teacher and deputy—

Mr. Beith: The rural factor.

Mr. Squire: I fully concede that and I will say more on the rural factor if time permits.

Other reasons include the degree of non-contact time, a bulge in the pupil population, the physical size of classrooms and the general organisation of teaching and learning at the school.

I remind the House of the main finding in the recent Ofsted report based on inspectors' independent observations. There is no simple link between the size of class and the quality of teaching and learning within it. The selection of teaching methods and forms of class organisation have a greater impact on learning than the

size of the class. For example, how well classroom assistants are used alongside teachers is an important factor influencing the quality of teaching and learning.

It is interesting to compare the quality of education in Northumberland with schools elsewhere with smaller class sizes. Look, sadly, for instance at Hackney Downs school, where spending is two and a half times the national average per pupil, and the pupil-teacher ratio is 8:1. That illustrates my point, particularly as the coincidence of small class size and failing schools is by no means limited to Hackney Downs.

Mr. Peter Atkinson (Hexham): Pupils in Newcastle get far more funding per pupil than those in schools in Northumberland. Newcastle gets £651 per head of population in grant while Northumberland gets £482. Northumberland is in the top half of local authority schools in the league table, but Newcastle is second from the bottom and is clearly failing its children.

Mr. Squire: My hon. Friend makes a very important point. I will deal with the SSA system on differential funding, but he must be right to say that, at any given level of funding, there is a considerable difference in the outturn as a result of that funding, as we have seen most recently in the tables published this week. In particular, schools in disadvantaged circumstances can perform tremendously while others in similar circumstances cannot currently do so. I know that heads and governors in those circumstances will revisit their own schools' experience.

I thought optimistically that I might get away without discussion of the standard spending assessment, but I understand why the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed raised it. Next week, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment will announce his proposals just after the Budget, but I can make two points about the SSA methodology. Both will be familiar to hon. Members but they none the less concern two essential elements of a methodology which would purport to be fair.

The first is that the education SSA system does not set out to allow the same level of spending for each pupil, nor should it. That is the point raised by the hon. Member for Blyth Valley (Mr. Campbell). The system aims to provide funding for a common standard of service across the country, taking account of the fact that the costs of providing education vary from one LEA to next. As need varies from one council to another, so logically does poundage per pupil.

Each authority's education SSA reflects the relative costs of educating children in very different circumstances: in sparsely populated areas; in London and the south-east where labour costs are higher; and in areas of socio-economic disadvantage or with a high proportion of non-English-speaking children.

I know that the sparsity allowance is a particular concern to Northumberland, and the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed mentioned the problem of running an education service in a scattered rural area. The fact is that, alone of all the factors in the education SSA formula, including the much-loved area cost adjustment with which I shall deal shortly, the weight given to the sparsity allowance is 50 per cent. higher than the raw statistical evidence would suggest.

Alongside all the representations I receive about a bigger slice of the SSA cake for rural authorities, I have to consider the position of those authorities that object to that 50 per cent. judgmental uplift. They might ask: why should the Government not reduce it, or increase the weight on additional educational needs, or even uplift the area cost adjustment by 50 per cent. as well? All those arguments have to be balanced against each other. Our aim is always to arrive at the fairest formula possible for distributing grant between authorities. In consultation with the local authority associations, we will continue to consider carefully the arguments for and against making changes.

I want to say a brief word about the area cost adjustment, since I know that it is a particularly controversial aspect of the formula that hon. Members on both sides of the House have raised with the Government. The right hon. Member referred to the level of support going to local authorities in the south. Everybody agrees that there has to be an area cost adjustment. Not even Northumberland county council would abolish it altogether. It is the unanimous view of the various local authority associations that some recognition of the factors that lie behind it must be made. Those LEAs that get it say that they need to spend even more, and those that do not say that the money needs to be redistributed to them. That is perhaps unsurprising.

The Government, however, want to make progress on this issue. As the right hon. Gentleman mentioned, my hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government, Housing and Urban Regeneration met leaders of the local authority associations on 16 October to discuss the area cost adjustment. My hon. Friend proposed that we should set up an independent review of the area cost adjustment to try to ensure that it receives uniform support among LEAs. I know that that review will be welcomed by many hon. Members even if, inevitably, the consequence of that review cannot reasonably feed into the announcement that the Secretary of State for the Environment will make immediately after the Budget.

The right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed briefly mentioned capping. I know that there is a wide range of opinions on that subject, but capping is important as part of the Government's wider economic objectives.

We should be clear in our minds about the way in which capping works. It does not force local education authorities to cut their budgets; rather it limits the rate at which they can increase them. As I mentioned at the start of my speech, there is little that I can say today about the role of capping in 1996-97. The right hon. Gentleman will have to wait—but only a short while—for the relevant announcement to be made.

This has been a short but wide-ranging debate and I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for allowing me the chance to put the record straight on several issues. I am sorry none the less, especially as a result of the coincidence of timing, that I cannot say more about the settlement for 1996-97 now.

Portsmouth (Fleet Maintenance)

1 pm

Mr. David Martin (Portsmouth, South): I am most grateful to Madam Speaker for granting me a timely opportunity to mention the fleet maintenance and repair organisation, the future of which vitally affects, not only my constituents, but those of my hon. Friends and neighbours, whose strong and assured support I thoroughly welcome.

The latest review into the planned market test of the FMRO plainly threatens its continued existence in carrying out docking and essential defects requirements, as well as being responsible for organising a great deal of unscheduled work on ships.

Mr. Peter Griffiths (Portsmouth, North): I realise that my hon. Friend has only a short time. I interrupt him only to pick up the argument that he made to start with, which was that we are debating not a narrow issue, but one that widely affects the whole Portsmouth travel-to-work area and the economy of southern Hampshire. Only a firm assurance that the FMRO will continue as a single unit with a solid work load will remove the threat to the necessary morale of the economy in that part of the country, extending much wider than the constituencies in Portsmouth.

Mr. Martin: I am most grateful to my hon. Friend for making those valuable points, which I am sure will be considered by my hon. Friend the Minister.

I concede at once that it is necessary always to consider whether public money is being spent properly or should be spent at all. That is the case with every Government Department, and the current public expenditure round is no exception.

In defence, the priority is, rightly, to spend for the maximum benefit of the front line, but it is my main purpose in this debate to show that the front line—in this case front-line surface ships of the Royal Navy and the people who serve in them—is indeed best served if the finest Royal Navy ship repair facility, the FMRO, is allowed to continue its work, made even better by the market-testing operation to which Ministers and Royal Navy personnel are already signed up, and which, unlike the position at Devonport, is attracting very healthy commercial interest from some very hard-headed business men.

In making such claims, I do not rely on the proud traditions and sentiments stirred by 500 years of Portsmouth dockyard's unparalleled contribution to shipbuilding, refitting and repair, although, as a Conservative, such considerations weigh with me, as I am sure that they do with my hon. Friend the Minister.

Today, I rely wholly and only on the present-day facts. The more that those facts are considered dispassionately on public expenditure grounds as well as grounds of front-line operational efficiency and effectiveness, including the well-being of sailors and their families, the more rational minds are driven to the conclusion that it would be madness to interfere with the present planned arrangements for the FMRO, and plain common sense to give it the opportunity that it deserves to serve the fleet on the new basis envisaged.

What are the powerful arguments for keeping a facility for maintenance and repair work at Portsmouth? First, plainly the review of the market-testing operation is being offered up as a cost-saving measure, probably also in an attempt to help the faltering privatisation plans and the position at Devonport. However, far from public money being saved, I have heard a reliable prediction that, if all the effects of messing about with the successes of Portsmouth to transplant elsewhere are taken into account, the cost would be at least £200 million.

Secondly, 58 per cent. of the surface fleet—42 ships, including the three carriers—is based in Portsmouth. The cycle of ships at sea these days places greater pressure on their operational capacity, requiring speedy access to an efficient and flexibly run repair and maintenance facility between refits.

A good example is the carriers, one of which, Invincible, soon to be replaced by Illustrious, is required to be on station in the Adriatic because of the continuing unstable position in Bosnia and the former Yugoslavia. That requirement shows no sign of ending while front-line British troops are involved in that theatre, whether helping to keep the peace or implementing any peace settlement.

Although programmed ship projects comprise only 4.25 per cent. of the total naval ship repair programme, they are essential to operational effectiveness and availability of Portsmouth ships. Overhead costs are shared with maintenance of the operational base. It would, for instance, be potty to separate the utilities from the market-testing process. Any transfer of work elsewhere is therefore highly questionable in savings terms. Transferring DEDs work to Devonport would not make a significant impact on the position in Devonport, but it would mean everything to Portsmouth.

Thirdly, if more than half the surface ships are based in Portsmouth, it would be nonsense not to have facilities for their repair and maintenance on hand. If the facilities were to be removed elsewhere, base porting would probably follow, and the finest docking provision in Europe would be run down. As my hon. Friend the Minister is aware, base porting is a vital part of the harmony rules for sailors serving on board, who are entitled to a certain number of weeks each year in their base port.

Many years have been spent and consistent policy decisions made, concentrating not only on ships but on administrative headquarters and training establishments for the Royal Navy in and around Portsmouth, not for the fun of it but because greater consideration for home and family life, for summer leave, school holidays, Christmas and so on is very much part of recruiting for, retaining in and running a modern Royal Navy. That should also be an important consideration for a modern Conservative Government. Any proposal that claims to make questionable financial savings while running counter to harmony rules should be rejected.

Fourthly, I shall discuss the likely commercial outcome of continuing with present plans for market testing, assuming that it is followed by a desperately needed long period of stability, at least seeing through the first few contracts under the new arrangements before any further review is even considered, let alone announced. In that context, the prime consideration is repair facilities for the Royal Navy.

Even granting that at present there is a national overcapacity of ship repair facilities—which I believe these days is debatable—instead of taking the negative "let's shut something down" line, let us admit that nowhere in Europe has greater potential to develop a

ship docking and repair business on a sound international commercial basis, harnessing private sector companies and resulting in the cheapest possible service for repairing and maintaining ships of the Royal Navy, than Portsmouth dockyard. We can find evidence for that, not only in the private sector companies so keen to join the tendering process at Portsmouth, but in the lack of commercial investment in new ships in recent years, making more repairs needed, or likely to be needed, for those that are in use. In addition, all ferries are likely to need docking and repair facilities as new safety standards require reconstruction work. Is that to be done at Cherbourg rather than Portsmouth because we have not the nous or the nerve to compete in the market—under a Conservative Government, no less? With such opportunities, we would be mad to break up such a successful going concern as the FMRO, and for what?—to leave the docks to silent decay.

Speaking about a going concern, it is wholly relevant to the commercial potential of the FMRO to continue service to the Royal Navy, and wholly relevant to that consideration are the present Portsmouth work force, now numbering 1,450 people. I cannot speak highly enough of the massive co-operation of the trade unions and the whole work force in recent times in adjusting to new, flexible working and training arrangements, improvements in productivity and efficiency, co-operation with contractors, and mixed skills working, which has shown a dedication to meet the challenge of the market-test operation every bit as impressive as the examples that used to come out of Japan alone. Management and those on the shop floor have united in their determination in a way that even a casual visitor to the FMRO can feel in the air. That feeling is even more pronounced when one has the privilege of being shown round the facilities by a human dynamo such as Mr. Keith Crockford. One of the greatest disadvantages of the review of the market test process is that, as well as the risk of commercial bidders cooling off, the enthusiasm, energy and high morale of the FMRO staff may be undermined.

I am not exaggerating when I say that the staff believe, however wrongly, that the review will result in the closure of the FMRO. In that case, all the enthusiasm, energy, co-operation and the current reorganisation of buildings and workshops will have been for nothing. That must not be allowed to happen—it would be madness to allow it. Before any more harm is done, the decision must be taken—the sooner, the better. The damaging limbo must not last a day longer than necessary.

When I visited the FMRO last Friday, Captain John Crump, its chief executive, gave me an FMRO shield. Much as I treasure it, I am sure that he will give me another one if I pass mine to my hon. Friend the Minister on condition that he keeps it on his desk until a decision is quickly reached. As an additional reminder, I can tell my hon. Friend that the Greek historian Herodotus, with whom I am sure my hon. Friend is familiar, tells us that after the Athenians had embarrassed the Persian emperor Darius at Sardis, he commanded a slave to repeat to him three times at dinner each day, "Remember the Athenians." Over the coming days, until a decision is reached, I ask my hon. Friend to ask a civil servant to repeat to him three times each day while he tackles his health food snack, "Remember the FMRO."

1.11 pm

The Minister of State for the Armed Forces (Mr. Nicholas Soames): I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Martin) and start by congratulating him on his success in securing today's debate on a subject in which he has taken a close personal interest over many years. I am delighted to see that my hon. Friend the Member for Portsmouth, North (Mr. Griffiths) is also in the Chamber.

My hon. Friend the Member for Portsmouth, South has been an assiduous champion of the interests of Portsmouth naval base. I wish to commend him for the way in which he so vigorously fights for his constituents' interests. I also join him in expressing my admiration for the FMRO, whose reputation is excellent. I was talking this morning to a captain who had commanded a ship that had been looked after by the FMRO. He spoke warmly and highly of the quality, speed and commitment of its work. I join my hon. Friend in paying tribute to the work force, to the way in which they throw themselves into their tasks so vigorously and to the excellence of the product.

I also pay tribute to the excellent service provided to the fleet by the FMRO, and shall respond as fully as I can to the understandable concerns over the organisation's future. Those concerns have arisen following my recent announcement that we are considering whether the current market-test route remains the most appropriate course of action in the current financial and operational circumstances. As my hon. Friend rightly said, the amount that we spend on defence and the way in which we spend it is a matter of continuing review. We have to undertake a broad range of tasks and we must get everything we can out of our limited and limiting funds. I hope that I shall be able to allay some of my hon. Friend's anxieties, although I cannot promise to do so.

The FMRO is a comparatively new institution, which was opened in 1984. It has a long and proud list of antecedents stretching back to the dawn of time. In 1495, King Henry VII ordered the construction of the world's first dry dock at Portsmouth. From that auspicious beginning, there developed over the centuries the infrastructural inheritance and the skills that characterise the naval base today.

In its heyday in the late 19th century, Portsmouth dockyard, as it was then known, more than doubled its capacity through a major expansion programme. It combined ship building and ship repair with a large range of ancillary activities. As my hon. Friend knows, the dockyard, and the city, saw the most distinguished service through both world wars, but the changing nature of the Royal Navy required progressive changes in its engineering support and maintenance facilities. In response to those changing imperatives, Portsmouth dockyard ceased to build warships in the late 1960s—HMS Andromeda was the last ship built there. In October 1984, following decisions taken in the 1981 defence review, and after a period in which it gave fantastic support to the Falklands task force, the dockyard was closed.

The fleet maintenance and repair organisation was conceived as a conscious attempt to redirect naval support resources to best effect in an era of considerable financial stringency. If there were a climate of financial stringency then, the pressures today are, proportionally, even greater.

[Mr. Nicholas Soames]

Our priorities have not changed much since then. The FMRO was not supposed to be a scaled-down version of what had gone before. As the FMRO evolved, it enabled a major shift in emphasis that saw it taking a far greater role in supporting the active, operational fleet rather than devoting resources to ship repair work on non-operational ships.

As a consequence of the change in emphasis, ship refit work by the FMRO ceased in 1992. Since then, the organisation has specialised in providing a flexible and responsive service to operational ships through maintenance work on vessels base-ported at Portsmouth and to visiting ships. The work undertaken ranges from programmed dockings and essential defect work, which involves ships spending several weeks in dry dock, to minor engineering support. The FMRO plays an important role in allowing the crews of vessels based at Portsmouth to spend time with their families during those maintenance periods—something that would not be so easy to arrange were the work carried out elsewhere.

Mr. Peter Griffiths: I apologise to my hon. Friend for intervening. Can he assure me that the decision on the FMRO will be taken on its merits, not in the shadow of the problems at Devonport, which may be pushing the Ministry of Defence and the Minister towards a decision that they may not wish to take?

Mr. Soames: I am delighted that my hon. Friend made that intervention and I can assure him that what he suggests is not the case. The case for the operation is based solely on trying to obtain the best result. I endorse what my hon. Friend the Member for Portsmouth, South said about the importance of the harmony rules and how well they work for the 58 per cent. of the surface fleet based at Portsmouth. The rules are extremely important to the crews and those involved with them—they are allowed a degree of flexibility that other, less fortunate, people are unable to enjoy. The FMRO also provides a centre for supplying base services and utilities to the rest of the naval base, and I again join my hon. Friend in paying tribute to its admirable work.

The decision to market-test the FMRO was confirmed during the "Front Line First" study last year, and in July 1994 the formal preparations commenced. "Front Line First" confirmed that market testing was the best way of seeking efficiencies within the organisation, focusing resources on its key tasks and identifying alternative uses for any surplus infrastructure—for example, my hon. Friend mentioned more commercial utilisation of the docks. Nothing has occurred since that time to alter that judgment, and the current review will not go back to examine alternative management options, such as in-house operation or agency status. There is no basis to suggest that that would be worth while.

In the 18 months since the decision to market-test the FMRO was taken, we have seen the implementation of the "Front Line First" measures, several of which related specifically to naval infrastructure. There have also been developments in our drive to privatise the royal dockyards and in the associated programme of surface ship and submarine refits. All of those factors have implications for the future operation of the FMRO.

There has also been continuing pressure on the support area to generate the efficiencies that are needed to maintain front-line capability and to enable the MOD to live within its means—which is not as easy as my hon. Friend might think. Therefore, it is only proper to review programmes such as the FMRO market test to confirm that, despite the changes that have taken place since they commenced, they remain the most appropriate and cost-effective solution. I make no apology for that, although I understand the concern that has arisen out of the uncertainty.

It is also correct for such a review to be conducted before third parties have committed significant resources to responding to the market test. That is why I have announced the review before issuing the invitation to tender: a stage which companies could reasonably assume marks the start of the formal market-test process.

It would certainly be wrong to encourage companies to invest resources at this stage while there remains a possibility of not proceeding with the market test. We would be rightly criticised if we were to do that. Therefore, we are now seeking to take a view on the Navy's future support requirements at Portsmouth and examine, against the background of our existing repair and maintenance facilities, whether we are better served by proceeding with the market test of the FMRO as it currently stands or whether alternative options would offer a more cost-effective, but still operationally acceptable, solution. Those alternatives would need to take account of the whole range of existing ship repair facilities, including the royal dockyards and the wider functions of Portsmouth naval base.

As to my hon. Friend's point about the dockyards' sale, the Government remain committed to privatisation at the right price. Considerable benefits and efficiencies have emerged in the years since the dockyards' management was contracted out to the private sector, and I fully expect that to continue under privatisation. We require both dockyards to provide longer-term competition and value for money within the refit programme. The FMRO does not carry out refit work. That may change if a private sector operator wished to bid for such work, but it would not alter our policy in respect of the two dockyards.

Efficiencies within the dockyards are not an alternative to efficiencies within the FMRO: both are needed. Dockyard efficiencies are already being addressed within the sale process. It is hoped that the review of the FMRO will generate its own savings. As I have said, any alternatives would need to take account of the whole range of existing ship repair facilities and existing capacity—including the royal dockyards and the wider functions of the Portsmouth naval base.

I assure my hon. Friend—who is entitled to such an assurance—that the FMRO will be examined not in isolation, but within a coherent context which embraces the naval base as a whole entity. Work is at an early stage and I can give no indication of how it might develop, but I am of course extremely conscious of the real anxiety caused to the work force and to the wider community and, as I told my hon. Friend, I do not wish to extend it one moment longer than absolutely necessary. I certainly hope to reach a decision early next year.

My hon. Friend wants to know what options we are examining. It will be clear from my general description of the factors involved in the review that one of the routes we are exploring is whether we can reduce the current overcapacity in our ship repair facilities. "Front Line First" made some inroads into the surplus capacity that exists within naval bases, but there is still some way to go to complete that process of rationalisation.

Ship repair facilities remain an area where some surplus capacity exists. That is being tackled within the Government's programme of dockyard privatisation and clearly must similarly inform the review of the FMRO market test. Therefore, I cannot rule out future reductions in the tasks carried out at the FMRO should their absorption elsewhere represent a more economical use of resources.

Equally however, it is pure speculation to claim that the FMRO will close as a result of the review. I can say categorically that we will not seek to introduce measures affecting the FMRO that would impact adversely on the operations of the front-line ships. My hon. Friend is fully aware—as am I—of the great benefits that the FMRO brings to that operation and that stands it in very good stead.

The whole point of the exercise is to avoid that outcome at all costs. I reassure my hon. Friend that the review will take account of the fleet's needs and those of the ships' crews as well as the demands of the Department as a whole. That is why I give an undertaking today that it will be examined in a coherent and sensible manner in the round rather than in isolation.

I should also stress that one wholly possible outcome is to continue with the market test. For that very reason, we have taken pains to maintain the process of preparing the invitation to tender in order to minimise any delay to the overall market-test timetable should the review confirm the validity of proceeding with it. I am satisfied that our dialogue with interested private sector companies will not suffer unduly during that period of uncertainty. They fully understand the pressures that have led to the situation.

I have heard claims that the review of the FMRO is designed to displace ship repair work from Portsmouth so that it can be given to the royal dockyards to bolster the Government's privatisation programme, as my hon. Friend suggests. I have also seen media speculation that the review now under way is part of a concerted effort to undermine the naval presence at Portsmouth. I would like to take this opportunity to dispel those rumours as totally unfounded.

Taking the claims in turn, the sale of the royal dockyards is proceeding as an entirely separate matter. Negotiations with the companies currently managing both yards are not assuming that any work whatsoever will transfer from the FMRO to either Rosyth or Devonport. It is equally absurd to conclude that the review of the FMRO heralds the beginning of the end for the naval base. I recognise local concern about the recent decision which I announced during the defence debate last month to base HMS Ocean and the future amphibious ships at Devonport rather than at Portsmouth. However, I assure my hon. Friend that there is no connection between that decision and the review of the FMRO market test. The review has no remit to address current base-porting arrangements.

The fact is that Portsmouth is currently home to some 58 per cent. of the surface fleet of the Royal Navy—we need no further evidence of the Royal Navy's complete commitment to, and dependence on, Portsmouth as a key operational and support centre. I have also heard suggestions that, rather than review the FMRO, the Government should look again at the royal dockyards to seek efficiencies there. That task is already in hand within the context of the dockyard privatisation programme.

The Government's policy on ship refits is quite clear and requires both dockyards to provide effective competition and value for money into the future. The process of dockyard sale will prove to be the mechanism for delivering efficiencies within the dockyards and reducing costs to the MOD.

In summary, I make it clear that, in deciding whether to market-test the FMRO, we will take full account of the factors raised by both of my hon. Friends today. We will not adopt solutions which, while pleasing on cost grounds, fail to meet the operational needs of the Royal Navy. The FMRO currently delivers a first-class service in a thoroughly effective manner.

I cannot, however, dispel fears that the facilities and functions currently carried out by the FMRO might be affected by the review. I hope that, by setting them in the context of the financial and operational imperatives that obtain, I have at least allayed the worst suspicions and made it clear that our minds are truly and genuinely open.

There is certainly no hidden agenda or preconceived view that the market test should not proceed. As my hon. Friend rightly said, it behoves us to be prudent in committing the Department to courses of action which may not represent best value for money. That is the sole rationale behind the review.

I have listened carefully to my hon. Friend and undertake to keep him closely in touch with developments. Once again, I warmly congratulate him on securing a debate on an important asset not only to the Royal Navy, but clearly to Portsmouth and the wider community. I congratulate those who work in the FMRO. I am extremely grateful to them and I congratulate my hon. Friend on raising the matter.

Breast Cancer

1.30 pm

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): I am pleased to raise a subject that many Members are keen to debate—I took part in a similar debate earlier this year. An early-day motion tabled by a Liberal Democrat Member, which has all-party support, seeks compensation for women who suffer the terrible effects of radiotherapy damage and the permanent pain and injury that accompanies it.

On 15 February this year, a debate on breast cancer services was initiated by my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, Leith (Mr. Chisholm). He informed the House about a petition of more than 200,000 signatures from Scotland alone about the need for better treatment. That debate referred to the work of the all-party group on breast cancer, which demonstrates that, unfortunately, one in 12 women in Britain are likely to suffer breast cancer and only 40 per cent. will be able to see a specialist oncologist.

Although today's debate deals with compensation, the wider issue of accessibility to quality diagnosis and treatment of breast cancer is particularly important. I quote from the reply to the debate on 15 February by the Under-Secretary of State for Health, the hon. Member for Bolton, West (Mr. Sackville), who, in reply to the hon. Member for Colchester, North (Mr. Jenkin), mentioned the

"damage unwittingly done through the use of excessive radiation on treatment. I assure him that there are initiatives to minimise the risk of any further slip in quality assurance and plans are in hand to ensure that all radiation units are subject to the strictest guidelines so that the unnecessary and disastrous damage to which he referred cannot occur in future."

Later in his speech, he said:

"It is well known that too many cancer sufferers, especially women with breast cancer, are not diagnosed swiftly enough. They are not seen sufficiently quickly by people with the appropriate level of expertise, which means that treatment can be delayed. Whatever the clinical effect of waiting for diagnosis and then waiting for treatment may be—it can be serious—the emotional effect is clearly considerable and we need to take action."—[*Official Report*, 15 February 1995; Vol. 254, c. 953-54.]

I assure the House that we shall return to that issue in future.

The figures relating to people suffering from breast cancer are truly horrendous: 25,000 cases per year are diagnosed and 15,000 die—or 300 deaths a week. Britain has one of the highest death rates in the world from breast cancer and one of the highest occurrences of that disease. The incidence rate is much lower in other countries. There many reasons for that and there is not sufficient time to discuss them today, but they need to be studied.

The treatment has been described as a lottery. I have been trying to raise this subject because of the serious problems faced by hundreds of women in Britain who suffer from permanent, progressive and disabling injuries after radiotherapy treatment for breast cancer.

The issue is not new. The Select Committee on Health examined it in detail in its report on breast cancer. I recommend that the Minister rereads the evidence taken on 30 March from Radiotherapy Action Group Exposure and the very thorough memo that RAGE drafted for the Select Committee on 15 January, setting out its aims and objectives and what it saw as the way forward.

Since its invention, the dangers of radiotherapy have been fully recorded and recognised, yet hundreds of women have been treated without informed consent or warning of its dangers. It is routinely prescribed, often without consultation and purely as a precautionary treatment. There is very little recognition in the medical profession of the true extent of the injuries caused by radiotherapy.

RAGE helped me a great deal in preparing the debate, and I pay the strongest possible tribute to that organisation for its work and for the hope that it has given many of its members and supporters round the country. It was formed in July 1991 and aims

"To identify sufferers, collectively record their particular circumstances and draw attention widely to their injuries."

It lists as its objectives:

"To seek independent inquiry. To seek remedial action, including compensation. To urge the upgrading of radiotherapy practice and seek national quality standards. To provide support."

It is doing that extremely well.

The work of RAGE took off as a result of the withdrawal at trial of Lady Ironside's High Court action for medical negligence. A handful of the victims met to discuss the situation and it immediately became apparent that there was a common pattern of injury among them. While RAGE cannot pretend to represent every woman who has ever had radiotherapy treatment or every sufferer from breast cancer, it certainly has a large membership and wide support, so it represents an authentic voice of people who are suffering because of such treatment.

There is something seriously and unaccountably wrong with the radiotherapy treatment techniques and procedures being applied in the United Kingdom. All the work of RAGE has been done by women in constant and dreadful nerve pain, whose personal and professional lives have been shattered. Some members of RAGE have had their limbs amputated and almost all have been left with only one usable arm. For the rest of their lives, in addition to being under the cloud of the possible recurrence of cancer, they will become progressively disabled.

I find it a humbling experience to talk to victims of breast cancer for whom, although their cancer has been treated, the permanent damage and injury and the constant pain means that they may never get a night's sleep or a day free from pain for the rest of their lives. As a man, I find their plight hard to contemplate. I am sure that many women will understand what I am saying and the requests that I am making today.

The Government should give urgent consideration to what is happening to those women and to giving them the compensation that they so desperately need and deserve. It is not just my view, but one shared by Professor Karol Sikora, professor of clinical oncology at Hammersmith hospital and a leading pioneer in the fight against breast cancer.

The members of RAGE have all contracted breast cancer and have experience of the treatment protocol and of receiving radiotherapy treatment of the brachialplexus at one of the 53 treatment centres in the United Kingdom, as it is invariably prescribed as a precautionary measure following surgery. While the women, as patients, were generally made aware of the temporary nature of the side effects such as sickness and nausea, they were not made aware of the risk of serious and permanent injury involving arm paralysis and other disabling consequential effects that have been identified.

The Department of Health should look seriously at the facilities that are made available to support people going through the treatment process. While consultants and doctors give medical advice and try to explain the possible effects, there is a need for women who are feeling desperately anxious and often isolated to receive that advice in a supportive environment. Unfortunately, that does not often happen. The debate earlier this year drew attention to the lack of specialist centres and the fact that many women are misdiagnosed because there is not sufficient expertise in all areas of the medical profession. The Minister conceded that point.

Some of the consequential effects are lymphoedema, lung burn leading to severe breathing difficulties, deadened bones—often leading to spontaneous fracture—heart damage, jaw bone pain, amputation of an arm as a last resort, skin burn and psoriasis. The onset of injury has occurred as long as 20 years after the treatment.

I hope that the Minister will listen to this carefully. It is important that the information collected by RAGE shows that there are clusters of cases at certain hospitals in certain years. In some hospitals, they coincided with a cost-cutting exercise to treat more women in the same time scale. Women were treated in 15 fractions instead of 25 to 30 fractions, thus enabling doctors to treat twice as many patients. Many RAGE members sustained injuries while being treated in 30 fractions. British hospitals use higher doses per fraction compared with other European countries and the USA. The records show a higher recovery rate, and that would be justified.

Britain's record of deaths from breast cancer is among the most horrifying in the world. In the United States, the issue has been taken seriously. A committee was already established, and President Clinton convened a special conference to examine the issue and the problems faced by women throughout the United States. We also must acknowledge the need for serious examination.

The marked clustering of injured women in certain hospitals in certain years—while other centres have experienced no cases—seems to suggest faulty protocols, inevitably at the cluster hospitals. Injury does not have to be inevitable. It is also worrying that the number of radiotherapy injuries after breast cancer reported to RAGE have increased, not declined, in recent years. The lack of a national reporting system makes it difficult to see the total picture. The Government have sought to dismiss the increase in notifications, claiming that it can be attributed to more women learning of the existence of RAGE. That may be so, but if there were national analysis and reporting, that argument would disappear. I ask the Minister to consider establishing such a system as a matter of urgency.

It is often said that it is difficult to identify causation, but that is not necessarily so. RAGE's work in increasing awareness of radiotherapy injuries has led to causation being unequivocally identified and admitted in the majority of cases. The Government's present position is that victims must seek compensation through the courts. Replying to Lorna Patch of RAGE on 7 August, the Minister stated, on compensation:

> "I can only repeat that the Government's position remains that the basis for seeking compensation is by proof of negligence through the courts."

That is unacceptable, because one must be very rich to pursue compensation that way. It costs around £200,000 to mount an effective case to prove medical negligence in the High Court, which is totally beyond the means of almost everyone in this country. It would certainly be beyond the means of an individual who has suffered as a result of breast cancer, lost her income and, more importantly, forgone any prospect of future income. The individual might try to obtain legal aid, but there is a legal threshold of the probability of success and one must also pass a poverty threshold. The Government must instead produce a compensation package.

The injurious effects of altering the time dose fractionation plan were known to practitioners as early as 1966—29 years ago. The alteration continued at the Royal Marsden hospital until as late as 1982, 16 years after its injurious effects were first known, as a measure to increase productivity. RAGE members to whom I have spoken—and this comes through in all their documentation—had no prior warning before radiotherapy of the risk of permanent injury. As a result of such injury, entitlement to statutory benefits and state pensions has often been eroded, exacerbated by lack of Department of Social Security recognition of the type of injuries.

The compensation package suggested by RAGE—which I and a large number of hon. Members in all parts of the House endorse—is an annual figure for extra expenses, such as splints, slings, medication and hospital transportation; a sum to cover the net cost to date, net of any disability benefit or attendance allowance; and a payment to cover loss of earnings to date and to retirement. Victims can be women of all ages and classes. Many of them may have been in high-paid jobs, while others might have looked for career development and additional qualifications that would have improved their life style—and that potential has been cut by the inability to pursue their career.

Those calculations, however, take no account of the constant, nagging pain that victims suffer and their inability to lead a normal life and to pursue ordinary leisure pursuits. Where the loss of an arm is involved, the victim is unable even to pick up her child or grandchild—something that the rest of the population takes for granted as normal behaviour. Loss of mobility is an important factor.

The Department of Health is about to publish an audit conducted by the Royal College of Radiologists on the practices of its own members, to establish how such injuries occurred. RAGE was denied an independent, multidisciplinary inquiry. I hope that the audit will go some way to supporting the arguments constantly made on causation and for proper compensation. There is strong support for an independent inquiry that is not dominated by the medical profession, but takes evidence from its members—in the way that a Select Committee does.

We should be concerned to study the causes of breast cancer in Britain and why the incidence is so high, examine facilities for diagnoses and treatment, and look at increasing and making more readily available specialist treatment centres so that breast cancer can be detected earlier and be properly treated. We should ensure also that women who receive radiotherapy are made fully aware of what it involves, the dangers and possible side effects, which may not appear for many years.

We should also acknowledge the dreadful damage done to many women by mistakes, misdosage and a failure to explain possible after effects. The least we can do is to

[Mr. Jeremy Corbyn]

ensure that women who have suffered so grievously in the past receive proper compensation, ensure that such suffering does not recur and try to conquer that awful illness.

1.46 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Tom Sackville): I am grateful to the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) for bringing the issue to the attention of the House. I want to express my deepest sympathy to the women who have suffered side effects as a result of radiotherapy for breast cancer. I know that they can endure severe, debilitating pain and even bone fractures, as the hon. Gentleman said. In some cases, the injury to the arm is such that the women cannot continue their careers or undertake ordinary daily tasks without help. We must aim at discovering the reason for those strong reactions to treatment that, for most women, is effective and has few long-term side effects.

Radiotherapy dose and treatment techniques are determined by the clinician in charge. However, all patients have a right to consent to or reject treatment, and all are entitled to a clear explanation of any treatment proposed—including of any risks and alternatives. All treatments carry some risk, and patients must be allowed to decide whether they wish to continue with the treatment proposed. That important principle has been highlighted in the patients charter and it is departmental policy.

Any health professional will take any steps possible to avoid adverse effects, and significant cases are published so that all doctors may learn lessons from them. It is important to define factors that cause adverse effects in particular patients so that they may be avoided. It is possible that, in future, research will allow a patient's sensitivity to radiation to be assessed before treatment, to allow the treatment to be individually tailored. Unfortunately, adverse effects from radiotherapy are frequently incurable because the effect on the tissue cannot be reversed by surgery. The effects of radiotherapy are drastic because that is the nature of the treatment: it is designed to kill tumour cells and in doing so will kill a proportion of normal cells as well.

As the hon. Gentleman knows, representatives from RAGE Breast, the organisation representing many of the women suffering severe side effects, met Lady Cumberlege and the Department's chief medical officer last year to discuss the concerns of their members. Following the meeting, discussions took place between the Department of Health, the Royal College of Radiologists and RAGE at which it was agreed that the royal college would undertake a confidential clinical review of consenting RAGE members, funded by the Department of Health.

The aim of the review was to discover what common factors in treatment may have lead to these women suffering such effects. It is a relatively homogenous group and we hope that the audit will yield useful information about common factors in treatment that might have led to the adverse effects. Armed with this information, we can then assess the need for further studies.

Two hundred and forty-nine patients—all of whom are now members of RAGE—treated at 15 centres in the 14 years between 1980 and 1993 were invited to participate; 126 consented to do so. A conservative estimate of the total number of patients receiving radiotherapy for breast cancer at these centres over the same period is 65,000. The clinical review has now been completed and the report will be published on 6 December. Following that, each participating RAGE member will receive a personalised assessment of his or her case.

At the behest of the Department of Health, the Royal College of Radiologists has developed guidelines for the care of women who have suffered tissue damage following radiotherapy for breast cancer. They were sent to the NHS in October this year. Additionally, the Department has funded the production of factsheets—prepared by the cancer charity BACUP and other charities—for women about to undergo radiotherapy, and for women experiencing short and long-term effects following it.

As for quality assurance systems, the ionising radiation regulations are intended to prevent unnecessary or excessive exposures to medical radiation. The Secretary of State's inspectorate investigates cases of suspected breach. There are four inspectors who are Department of Health officials. The introduction of dose-reducing strategies continues and is part of a thrust to reduce radiation doses to as low as reasonably practicable in order to achieve the required diagnostic or therapeutic purpose.

Guidance notes for the protection of persons against ionising radiations arising from medical or dental use were issued in 1988. In July 1991, guidance was issued to health authorities on quality assurance in radiotherapy. It sets out 18 requirements to be satisfied to ensure that quality is maintained. The guidance has been considered in two sites—the Bristol oncology centre and the Christie hospital in Manchester. Both centres completed their assessments, and their findings were disseminated by way of a document called "Quality Assurance in Radiotherapy", which I launched at a conference in May last year. The document will act as a quality assurance model for the wider NHS; it will be for each radiotherapy department to produce a quality manual showing how the requirements of the guidance are to be met and detailing procedures in the department.

I fully realise that many of the women suffering side effects would wish to have their injuries recognised and consideration given to their claims for compensation, commensurate with their injuries. It is important to be clear about how such claims are pursued. First, we believe it right that people harmed in the course of clinical treatment should be able to seek compensation through the usual legal process. But that does require them to demonstrate not only that they have been harmed but that there has been negligence, and that the negligence caused the harm. When negligence cannot be shown, there is no case in law for compensation.

From time to time it has been suggested that this is not right, and there have often been calls for the introduction of a system of no-fault compensation. Hon. Members will recall that this issue has been considered in the House before, most recently on Second Reading of the National Health Service (Compensation) Bill on 1 February 1991. On that occasion, as on every other when the issue has been raised, the House concurred with the view that a no-fault compensation scheme would not be helpful.

Perhaps I should remind the House of the reasons for that conclusion. We are sensitive to the fact that some of the victims of medical accidents oppose no-fault

compensation on the ground that it would make it less likely that plaintiffs' non-financial concerns would be addressed. Many plaintiffs argue that their motivation for pursuing a claim is not to secure money but to obtain an explanation and an apology and to ensure that what happened to them does not subsequently happen to others. Thus a system designed mainly to deal quickly with the financial aspects of medical accidents, without regard to fault, would deflect attention from plaintiffs' most important concerns.

Another issue is accountability. Our legal system holds all individuals accountable for their actions, which arguably has a deterrent effect on malpractice. No-fault compensation could remove or weaken it.

We must also be mindful of the possible cost implications of a no-fault compensation scheme. Costs falling on the NHS could increase greatly. For instance, a scheme in New Zealand which covers accidents generally is thought to cost at least 1.5 per cent. of its gross national product. Given that we spend about 6 per cent. of our GDP on health, hon. Members can imagine the possible impact on our health budget.

Proponents of no-fault compensation have yet to show why compensation in health care should be regarded as essentially different from negligence and compensation in other walks of life, where claims are resolved through the usual legal process.

Finally—

Mrs. Maria Fyfe (Glasgow, Maryhill): I am sorry that the Minister seems to be approaching the end of his speech because I had hoped to hear a quick word about the sums devoted to research into breast cancer, and the efforts to detect it in women under the age of 50. He probably knows that current mammography methods are not suitable for women under 50, who are clearly an important group.

The Minister has expressed his worries about NHS budgets. Clearly, if enough money were spent on research in the first place, fewer women would suffer from breast cancer.

Finally, it would seem from the Minister's argument that only women with money in the bank will be able to claim compensation at all.

Mr. Sackville: Although I have outlined some of the reasons why no-fault compensation has been thought inappropriate, we have recently accepted that a system should be tried for mediation in such cases. The Minister of State recently agreed to set up pilot mediation schemes that may make it easier to reach agreement. We have no wish gratuitously to defend certain cases or to cause any unnecessary delays.

The Calman review was set up precisely to ensure that best examples of cancer treatment in this country should be disseminated throughout the system. In particular, we should ensure that more patients see specialists and that those with rare or difficult-to-treat cancers do not always end up in local cancer departments. They should be referred to tertiary specialist cancer centres, possibly on a regional basis, so that people with the qualifications to treat cancer can diagnose and treat the more difficult cases referred to them.

Following the general agreement that we need to take such steps to improve cancer care, I hope to see more widespread best practice. I offer the House a commitment today on behalf of the NHS: we will do everything possible to ensure that accidents of this sort are avoided in the future.

It being Two o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

Sitting suspended, pursuant to Standing Order No. 10 (Wednesday sittings), till half-past Two o'clock.

Oral Answers to Questions

SCOTLAND

European Community Directives

1. **Mr. Steen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many statutory instruments have been passed through Parliament as a result of European Community directives in the past year. [771]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. George Kynoch): There are 181, of which seven extend to Scotland only.

Mr. Steen: Is my hon. Friend aware of what is going on in his Department? Although I know that whatever he does, he does very well, the problem is that his civil servants have a penchant for gold-plating: whenever they see a directive, they have to add something to it. Directives arrive from Europe couched in very general terms, but then civil servants add to them. Will my hon. Friend tell us today that he will outlaw gold-plating, that any adding to European directives by his Department will be banned and that he will examine all the old directives that have been gold-plated and get rid of all the stuff that should not have been there in the first place?

Mr. Kynoch: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Scottish Office officials are instructed to check that no double-banking or gold-plating takes place.

Mr. Canavan: Is the Minister aware of the concern about the implications of certain European Union decisions, including those contained in directives and certain decisions made by the European Court of Justice? What action do the Government intend to take in regard to the implications of the Bosman case, bearing in mind the fact that the abolition of transfer fees would threaten the financial viability of many Scottish football clubs?

Mr. Kynoch: I am informed by my hon. Friend the Minister with responsibility for sport that the Scottish Football Association is scheduled to hold a meeting with him on that very issue.

Mr. Gallie: My hon. Friend will be aware of the bathing water standards that operate as a consequence of a European directive, but is he aware of the time that it has taken Strathclyde region to bring bathing water standards in my constituency up to scratch? The authority has procrastinated rather than providing. There is, however, a glimmer of hope: the new West of Scotland water and sewerage authority looks set to find a solution. Does my hon. Friend welcome that?

Mr. Kynoch: Of course I do. My hon. Friend is right to draw attention to the deficiencies of Strathclyde regional council—not just in connection with bathing water. This year it has already been very slow to react to floods with prevention measures. I am afraid that the council has let down its electors, and I look forward to seeing the new water authority doing just what my hon. Friend describes.

Scottish Council (Development and Industry)

2. **Mr. Salmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he last met representatives of the Scottish Council (Development and Industry) to discuss economic matters; and if he will make a statement. [772]

The Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Michael Forsyth): I met them on 6 September. Scotland's economy is buzzing with success.

Mr. Salmond: When the Secretary of State next buzzes along to the Scottish Council—many of whose members seem to be deserting the Unionist cause, perhaps agreeing with the Prime Minister that independence is perfectly feasible—will he discuss with its members the results of a survey that appeared in *The Times* last Monday? It revealed that, apart from punishing low earners, 21 Tory tax rises since the last election had cost average earners £1,000 each.

To avoid any suggestion of who is responsible for that, and before disparaging the policies of Opposition parties, will the Secretary of State tell us how many of those 21 Tory tax rises he has personally voted for over the past three years?

Mr. Forsyth: On the subject of surveys, the hon. Gentleman will have seen the survey by Scottish chambers of commerce showing that 0 per cent. of businesses connected with the oil industry, which he is so keen to talk about, support his party's policy on independence. As for tax rises, the hon. Gentleman supports a tartan tax for Scotland—a tax on people working in Scotland—so he has a brass neck to talk to us about tax cuts. The only party in the House that is in favour of lower taxation, and delivers it, is the Conservative party.

Sir Hector Monro: Does my right hon. Friend remember the warm welcome and endorsement by all the Opposition parties of the Fraser of Allander report? Yet now that we have seen the report we know that only 14 per cent. of industry in Scotland would put up with the tartan tax. Are not all the Opposition's policies therefore in disarray?

Mr. Forsyth: I entirely agree with my right hon. Friend. Indeed, I was much struck by the fact that before they had seen the survey, the leaders of the Opposition parties commended it and said how splendid it was, but that when they saw that only 14 per cent. of respondents would support a tax-raising Scottish Assembly, they started saying that they were rather concerned about the low response rate. The fact is that the businesses that responded spoke for Scotland, and it is high time that Opposition Members listened to the voices of those on whom Scotland's jobs depend.

Mr. Wallace: I am sure that the Secretary of State and others will wish to express their congratulations on the successful creation of 3,500 jobs at Moss End through inward investment from Taiwan. Although it is estimated that those jobs will each produce 1.5 more jobs in the Scottish economy, does the right hon. Gentleman accept the figures given to several hon. Members at the Highland Park Parliamentarian of the Year lunch, which showed that for every job lost in the whisky industry in Scotland—sadly, many jobs have been lost in recent times—3.5 more jobs are lost as a result? Bearing that

fact in mind, what representations has the right hon. Gentleman made to the Chancellor of the Exchequer to reverse the real tartan tax of last year—the additional 26p on a bottle of whisky?

Mr. Forsyth: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for drawing attention to the splendid success by Locate in Scotland in attracting new inward investment to Lanarkshire, and a stake in the new industrial revolution. It is a pity that he did not go one stage further and abandon the tartan tax, which would send elsewhere the inward investment on which we depend. As for whisky taxation, the hon. Gentleman should not tempt me to say things that I should not say, but I have made my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer well aware of the concerns of the whisky industry. If the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues would stop calling for extra expenditure, they might have a little more credibility when they call for less taxation.

Mr. Bill Walker: When my right hon. Friend meets the august body mentioned in the question to discuss the economy, will he remind its representatives that the estimates clearly demonstrate that Scotland, excluding the oil industry, would have an £8.1 billion deficit? Will he also tell them how Scotland benefits enormously from being part of the United Kingdom, because this Parliament has always taken that fact on board? That is why the Scots are so prosperous today.

Mr. Forsyth: I agree that Scotland benefits from the Union. England, too, benefits from the fact that Scotland is part of the Union. My hon. Friend is right to draw attention to the fact that if the nationalists had their way we should have to fund a structural deficit of about 15 per cent., or £8.1 billion—that is an independent figure. The deficit could be funded only by higher taxation—including taxation on whisky—by higher borrowing or by higher inflation, and I suspect that all three would be used. Most people want nothing whatever to do with such an assault on our standards of living, or with the destruction of our vital public services, which would be the consequence of going down the independence road.

Mr. George Robertson: Will the Secretary of State accept from me the fact that when he meets the Scottish Council (Development and Industry) it will certainly not accept his propagandist interpretation of the survey by Scottish chambers of commerce? Despite a sustained campaign of smears, distortions, accusations and downright lies about devolution, there has been a decisive swing in the Scottish business community towards the idea of a devolved Scottish Parliament. Will the right hon. Gentleman not accept that fact now? Whereas 67 per cent. of the business community supported the status quo in 1991—the Secretary of State still does—88 per cent. of those who responded to the poll were against the status quo, with only 9 per cent. on the right hon. Gentleman's side. When will he recognise that he is wrong and that business opinion now realises that devolution will be good for Scotland, for Britain and for Scottish business? Will he change his mind before it is too late?

Mr. Forsyth: The hon. Gentleman is beginning to sound rattled. He claims that his position has been distorted, but when he was invited to speak for himself on "On the Record", he spent 20 minutes failing to answer the West Lothian question, which his hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) asked all those years ago.

Public Expenditure

3. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much public money per capita is spent on grants and all other public expenditures in Scotland; what is the percentage difference between these figures and those for Northern Ireland, Wales and England; and if he will make a statement. [773]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The answer is £4,185, 12 per cent. less, 7 per cent. more and 21 per cent. more respectively. Scotland gets a good deal from the Union.

Mr. Greenway: Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is remarkable that Scotland does so much better on public funding than England and Wales? Is it not naive of the Labour and Liberal parties to expect that high funding to continue, to expect to be allowed tax-lowering and tax-raising powers and to expect Englishmen and Welshmen to pay for that?

Mr. Forsyth: I agree with my hon. Friend—as the public expenditure round has been completed, it is safe for me to do so. I am not sure whether many people down here realise that Opposition Members are going around Scotland arguing that Members of a Westminster Parliament would vote for more money for a Scottish Parliament than they would vote for their own constituencies, and that a Scottish Parliament could use its powers under a tartan tax to lower taxation to less than in England. It is simply not credible, and it provides no basis on which to have a stable relationship within the Union. It is laughable in terms of its prospects, and it would be deeply damaging to Scotland's economic interests and public services.

Dr. Godman: What about the illegal acquisition of grants? Will the Secretary of State confirm that the £600,000 paid to Tate and Lyle in regional selective assistance grants was obtained illegally under European Union law? Was it a case of collusion by Scottish Office officials in these transactions, or—more probably—were they acting in a state of what might be called justifiable ignorance? What is the right hon. Gentleman doing to ensure that the money is repaid to the Treasury or, better still, given to Inverclyde district council, which will have to pick up the pieces?

Mr. Forsyth: If the hon. Gentleman has a complaint to make about regional selective assistance and how it is paid, there is a proper way to make it: he should write to me, and I shall certainly look into any complaint. He will know that we have been able to provide substantial regional selective assistance, which is one of the reasons why 3,300 new jobs are being created in Lanarkshire and why two major job-creation prospects have emerged in Scotland in recent days. He will know that we can try to replace the jobs that, sadly, were lost at Tate and Lyle in Greenock by attracting more inward investment. I hope that he will distance himself from his party's adherence to a tartan tax, which would destroy jobs and scare away inward investment.

Mr. Jenkin: Does my right hon. Friend recall Bob Boothby's maxim:

"Without Scotland, England is sunk"?

Will he take it from me that the extra money that English Members of Parliament commit to the Scottish economy is money extremely well spent and is a price well worth paying to maintain Scotland's prosperity within a single United Kingdom currency?

Mr. Forsyth: I agree. We are one United Kingdom, but Opposition Members wish to disturb that relationship—and in a way that would be to Scotland's disadvantage.

Forth Bridge

4. **Mr. Darling:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he expects to announce the date and terms of reference of the inquiry into the second Forth road bridge crossing at Queensferry. [774]

The Minister of State, Scottish Office (Lord James Douglas-Hamilton): My right hon. Friend and I recently met Councillors Eric Milligan and Robert Gough and other representatives from Fife and Lothian regional councils. We agreed to examine together proposals for traffic management on and around the Forth road bridge. Once these discussions have concluded, we shall be in a position to announce our proposals.

Mr. Darling: Do the Government still want to proceed with the building of a second Forth road bridge, which would devastate the constituency that the Minister seeks to represent at the next election? Have the Government changed their tack? Do they now accept that there needs to be a co-ordinated public transport strategy to deal with the transport needs of Edinburgh and south-east Scotland? Will the Minister make the Government's position clear so that we know whether they want to build this ridiculous bridge?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I can say quite clearly that we are in favour of a medium-term strategy. We have discussed that very fully with Councillor Eric Milligan. I strongly recommend that the hon. Gentleman has discussions with him, because we have reached an agreement on the subjects on which we can go forward with consensus. The subjects cover many issues, such as the new Halbeath bridge junctions in Fife and improvements to the railways. Various electronic tolling measures have also been considered. I am pleased to see that Fife and Lothian share our view and that they will work together on this. We cannot rule out the important role that a new bridge might play in the longer term, but it is premature to proceed further at this stage.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: If there is a public inquiry into a second Forth road bridge, will the inquiry's reporter be entitled to look at Government policy and, in particular, to consider the comparative advantages of road transport or a much better system of public transport?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I have already said that we are going ahead with a medium-term strategy, which includes very substantial improvements to public transport strategy, such as park-and-ride schemes and bus lanes. It would be premature to hold a public local inquiry; many measures must be put in place by agreement. We are not going to forget the interests of those who live in Fife and in the north of Scotland.

Munitions Dumping (South-west Scotland)

5. **Ms Roseanna Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the Scottish Office response to environmental concerns arising from munitions dumping in the south-west of Scotland; and if he will make a statement. [775]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Raymond S. Robertson): The Scottish Office contributed fully to the emergency services' excellent response in dealing with the phosphorous devices. It has provided data on materials deposited under licence in the Irish sea and recently brought forward its planned marine survey of the Beaufort's dyke area.

Ms Cunningham: As the Ministry of Defence has admitted that many of the relevant munitions dumping records have been destroyed, does the Minister agree that it is enormously important to know that there is at least one individual—former Army Captain Buchan of Peterhead—who was directly involved in the dumping in the 1940s? Will he outline what arrangements the Scottish Office is making to interview Mr. Buchan to establish the extent of his direct information and to establish whether there are others in his position? If such arrangements are not being made, will he explain why not?

Mr. Robertson: It is unfortunate for the hon. Lady's understanding of the issue that neither she nor any of her hon. Friends were present in the Chamber when we last debated this issue last Wednesday. The Ministry of Defence's advice is that any munitions on the sea bed are potentially dangerous and should be left undisturbed. It will be for the relevant Government Departments to consider the appropriate action if the survey detects significant quantities of munitions outwith the designated dump site. I am sure that the hon. Lady will be the first to agree that we should wait until we have the results of the survey that is being undertaken before we reach any conclusions and before any Department decides what it should do.

Mr. Donohoe: The Minister may be aware that a public inquiry has been held on the overland route of the electrical interconnector in Scotland and Northern Ireland. What has not been covered by any public inquiry is its route under the sea. Given the latest concerns in relation to the laying of British Gas's pipeline, does the Minister think that it is now time for a public inquiry about its route under the sea?

Mr. Robertson: There is no hard evidence to substantiate any of the claims that the laying of the gas pipeline was responsible for the devices arriving on the beach: there is circumstantial evidence, but no hard evidence. We must wait until we have the results of the survey that is being undertaken. We have said—and I repeat to the House—that the results of the survey will be published in full when we have them.

Mrs. Ray Michie: In that connection, which Department will be responsible if compensation has to be paid to somebody who was injured by one of the phosphorous devices that washed up on the beaches around the west coast of Scotland? Would it be the Scottish Office, the Department of Trade and Industry, the Ministry of Defence or, indeed, British Gas?

Mr. Robertson: I know that the hon. Lady has pursued the issue with great vigilance because one of her

constituents has been injured—the only person to be injured. I understand from the Department and others that he is making good progress and we wish him well. Compensation is still being discussed and once it has been finalised I shall write to her.

Mr. Beggs: The Minister will be aware that phosphorous incendiary devices have also been washed up on the east and north Antrim coast. May I have an assurance that the survey will be thorough and that it will examine the sea bed between the south-west Scottish coast and the east coast of Northern Ireland to protect the workers to whom the hon. Member for Cunninghame, South (Mr. Donohoe) referred, who are involved in laying the gas pipeline and who, I hope, will be involved with the interconnector when a favourable decision is made?

Mr. Robertson: I assure the hon. Gentleman that site scar sonar and other underwater television studies are being undertaken. Sea bed sediment samples will be taken by grab-sampling equipment. The Department will be fully involved with the other relevant Departments once the results of the survey are known.

Mrs. Liddell: As the Prime Minister has now acknowledged that the Government have got it wrong about the government of Scotland and are out of touch with Scottish public opinion, will Ministers recant the bluff and evasion that we have had on munitions dumping, and which we just heard from the Dispatch Box, and extend the technical capability of the survey and the areas to be covered by it to include all those where such dumping has taken place? May we also have an exact answer as to what the Government intend to do to protect public safety?

Mr. Robertson: I welcome the hon. Lady to the Dispatch Box: like me, she is a new kid on the block. I will write to her and answer her questions, if she can satisfy me about what she means by bluff and evasion. There has been no bluff, and no evasion.

Wealth Creation

7. **Lady Olga Maitland:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on wealth creation in Scotland. [777]

Mr. Kynoch: The process of wealth creation in Scotland would be severely damaged by the constitutional changes advocated by Opposition Members.

Lady Olga Maitland: I thank my hon. Friend for his reply. Is he aware that the Scottish chamber of commerce has found that 70 per cent. of Scottish businesses are bitterly hostile to the idea of a Parliament with tax-raising powers? They know very well that that would be the death knell for Scottish investment from outside. Indeed, it would kill all the work of the past five years, when £3 billion has been invested in Scotland, creating 47,000 jobs. Is he aware that those jobs would simply head down south, which would put thousands on the dole?

Mr. Kynoch: My hon. Friend is absolutely right and I wish that the hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson), instead of talking to one of his colleagues on the Opposition Front Bench, would listen and realise that 70 per cent. of Scottish businesses have said that his tartan tax-raising Scottish Parliament is bad for them, the people of Scotland and the economy of Scotland.

Sir Russell Johnston: Is the Minister aware that both he and his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State going on and on in a mindless way about a tartan tax, which is no more than a superficial, meaningless soundbite, should consider federal systems throughout the world, such as those in Germany, the United States and Canada, where it is possible for federal units to raise taxation and thereby stimulate wealth creation?

Mr. Kynoch: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman should talk to his Liberal Democrat colleagues because that is not what his party advocates. It is advocating a tax-raising Parliament for Scotland. It is clear to everyone who looks at the figures on funding in Scotland that that will be bad for Scotland. Seventy per cent. of businesses in the Fraser of Allander report confirmed that it would be bad for business in Scotland.

Mr. Stephen: Does my hon. Friend accept that people who have a job in Scotland and elsewhere in the kingdom are working harder and for longer hours than ever before and that their employers would like to take on more staff but are afraid to do so because, if they prove unsatisfactory, they might not be able to get rid of them? They are afraid that they might be taken to the cleaners under so-called employment protection legislation.

Mr. Kynoch: My hon. Friend refers to employment practices. What is clear to the people of Scotland, and to employers in Scotland, is that the policies advocated by the Labour party—the social chapter and a national minimum wage—are, along with the tartan tax-raising Parliament, very bad news for the Scottish economy and bad news for business.

Mr. Maxton: Instead of continuing to mouth his closed-mind attitude to devolution, why does not the Minister—and the Secretary of State—take a little time to study what has happened in the autonomous regions of Spain, in particular, which is much more like what is being proposed in Scotland? Catalonia, the Basque country and Galicia have all shown an improvement in their economic structures as a result of devolution and have not been damaged.

Mr. Kynoch: I wish that the hon. Member would look at all the positive things that are happening in Scotland: the fact that unemployment is falling steadily—whereas in Spain I understand that it is at record levels—and that business is performing better than ever before, with record output and exports. None of this would be possible if businesses were not competitive. The hon. Gentleman should look at the success stories in Scotland and question why he wants to make it very difficult for business to continue succeeding in Scotland.

Mr. Gallie: Has not the principle of level taxation across the United Kingdom given Scotland the opportunity to create the levels of wealth of recent times? Will that not be put in jeopardy—and the Union too—if we impose a tax on Scottish people which is not imposed across the Union as a whole?

Mr. Kynoch: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I am sure that nobody in Scotland wants to pay more tax than the rest of the United Kingdom. We have been discussing

record inward investment and the successes of last week. I question whether we would have been able to convince those companies that they should locate in Scotland if it was taxed higher than elsewhere in the United Kingdom. Quite blatantly, the Opposition parties cannot see how their tax-raising Parliament will square the books unless they either reduce services or increase taxes, and that would be bad for the people of Scotland.

Mr. McFall: The Minister knows that the 21 Tory taxes since 1992 are the equivalent of one every seven weeks in Scotland. Can he look in the eye the 200,000 unemployed and 50,000 young people who do not have a future and tell them that they are participating in wealth creation? Like the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Scotland, is he not wrong on devolution, culpable on the poll tax, which wasted £2 billion, and part of a Government who have deeply scarred the Scottish economy and Scottish society? Does he not accept that the majority of Scots believe that the Government's lies on taxation render them unfit for office?

Mr. Kynoch: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will look the people of Scotland straight in the eye and explain to them how, if he were ever to get in a position of having his tax-raising Parliament, he would justify the loss of jobs, not just from the tax-raising Parliament but from signing up to the social chapter and the national minimum wage, even though he and his party are scared to tell the people what national minimum wage he proposes. I suggest that he is scared because he knows that it will cost jobs—and dearly.

Inward Investment

8. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on inward investment in Scotland. [779]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Scotland is enjoying record levels of inward investment.

Mr. Marshall: I congratulate my right hon. Friend on the announcement of an additional 3,300 jobs in Lanarkshire and on the fact that Scotland has more success in attracting inward investment than any other country in western Europe. Does he believe that that success would continue if Scotland adopted a tartan tax, a national minimum wage and the social chapter and were as well run as the district of Monklands?

Mr. Forsyth: No, I do not.

Dr. Reid: Since everyone else has raised it, may I also say to the Secretary of State and Ministers that I am very pleased about the inward investment from Chunghwa Picture Tubes. The Minister will know that it has been a team effort running from the local development agency in Lanarkshire and local councils up to the Scottish Office. It would be churlish of me, having criticised Ministers in the past, not to give them full credit for the efforts that they have made—particularly the Minister of State—to keep me informed, and I therefore congratulate them.

Will the Secretary of State accept that, although I say that without qualification, he must realise that a hard-headed, realistic and progressive company such as Chunghwa came here in full knowledge of all the circumstances? It cannot but have contemplated the onset of a Labour Government. If anything, its coming here proves that the scare stories about Labour Governments and tartan taxes hold no water.

Mr. Forsyth: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his generous remarks and for promoting my hon. Friend the Member for Kincardine and Deeside (Mr. Kynoch) from Under-Secretary of State to Minister of State. I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister will take account of that recommendation, given the splendid job that my hon. Friend did in attracting Chunghwa to Scotland.

The hon. Gentleman is a fair-minded man. I should like him to use his imagination—to imagine, for a moment, a Labour Government and to imagine, for a moment, that the negotiations were going on under such a Government. Exactly what argument would he use to attract Chunghwa to Lanarkshire when the Secretary of State for Wales pointed out that if the company were to go to Wales, it would not have to pay a tartan tax? It would be a knock-out blow. In this case, it was pretty tight between us and Wales, and we won because of the conditions that we had created in Scotland. If the hon. Gentleman's party had its way, Scotland would be disadvantaged.

Mr. Kirkwood: Will the Secretary of State accept that there are real difficulties for companies that are expanding in areas of Scotland that do not have any development assistance, and that they can be enticed outward, for disinvestment purposes, to other parts of the United Kingdom? Will he make it his business to ensure that local enterprise companies and local authorities have the wherewithal to try to get sensible arrangements in place to prevent that disinvestment?

Mr. Forsyth: I agree with the hon. Gentleman. Indeed, I have spoken to Scottish Enterprise about the matter in the context of the borders where there is a need for us to see what we can do to generate more investment opportunities and to create more employment, especially in respect of the difficult position of textiles. I took the opportunity of a meeting, last week I think, with the Commissioner to discuss some of those points. I can assure the hon. Gentleman that I am very aware of the concern in the borders. I have asked Scottish Enterprise to discuss with the local enterprise company what more can be done to take advantage of the tremendous opportunities in the borders, of the wonderful quality of the labour force and of the environment on offer there for those who wish to invest in Scotland.

Sir Hector Monro: Does my right hon. Friend agree that, with two notable exceptions, it seems impossible to get Opposition Members to understand the successes of Locate in Scotland during the past five years? Can my right hon. Friend spell out a little more detail about the 47,000 jobs and the 379 projects that have been created? Can he show that the trend of unemployment in Scotland has been markedly downward and is likely to continue in that direction?

Mr. Forsyth: I would be happy to arrange for all the successes to be printed in the *Official Report* if my right hon. Friend would provide a question that would give me such an opportunity. I will not list the successes this afternoon in view of your strictures, Madam Speaker, to keep answers as short as possible.

Suffice it to say that none of the successes has happened by magic. They have happened because we have created flexible labour markets and low taxation and

improved standards of education. All those policy achievements are important in creating jobs. If Opposition Members examine their consciences, they will find that they were on the wrong side of the argument when we made changes in our economy and in our policy.

Housing

9. **Mr. Chisholm:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what percentage of Scottish Office expenditure was devoted to housing in (a) 1978-79 and (b) 1995-96. [780]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: The figures are 15.8 per cent. and 4.3 per cent. respectively.

Mr. Chisholm: Now that the Government have admitted that they were wrong about the government of Scotland, will they also admit that they have been wrong to cut housing expenditure year after year and to allow councils to spend less and less on house building and modernisation? Does the Minister realise that with existing resources, it will take 20 years for Edinburgh district council to complete its window replacement programme and that thousands of homes also require central heating and other improvements? Will he think of those in cold homes and those in no homes when he makes his housing decisions? Will he also lobby the Chancellor of the Exchequer for an expansion of the home energy efficiency scheme in the Budget next week so that more job-creating insulation work can be carried out?

Mr. Robertson: The comparison that the hon. Gentleman asked for is as misleading as it is useless. Transfers of responsibility from other Whitehall Departments to the Scottish Office have significantly increased the overall size of the Scotland programme since 1978-79. As the hon. Gentleman should know, housing subsidies are now paid through the housing benefit system and 300,000 public sector houses have been sold. Both of those factors substantially affect the share of expenditure attributable to housing. The hon. Gentleman would not expect me to say anything ahead of next week's Budget.

Mr. Matthew Banks: Given the fact that public expenditure per head of population in Scotland is 14 per cent. higher than the United Kingdom average, can my hon. Friend reaffirm his commitment to the housing sector in Scotland? Does he agree that it is vital that we continue to encourage the private rented sector, in particular housing associations, to provide high-quality, affordable housing to those in greatest need?

Mr. Robertson: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to draw attention to the level of investment in housing, despite the fact that, since 1978-79, as I said, 300,000 public sector houses have been sold. Despite that, the allocation per house issued to local authorities for 1995-96 was higher in real terms than the equivalent figure for 1978-79. That comparison would have been better than the one about which the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Leith (Mr. Chisholm) first asked.

Mr. Ingram: The Minister is aware of the problem affecting 264 of my constituents in East Kilbride with the identification of asbestos in houses built by the development corporation. What additional help will the Minister give to local authority or other housing agencies in East Kilbride to remove that major danger to the health of the community?

Mr. Robertson: I am disappointed and surprised at hon. Gentleman because he has pursued this with me, and I have offered to meet with him and a delegation. I believe that that is a better way to pursue the issue than shouting at each other across the Floor.

Mr. Welsh: Has the Minister had an opportunity to read the homeless persons charter for Scotland which outlines the desperate plight facing tens of thousands of homeless persons in our country? Applications from the homeless have risen by 175 per cent.—from 15,000 to 43,000—during the past 10 years. Why are the Government cutting the finance for housing provision in Scotland? When the need is great, the Government simply say no.

Mr. Robertson: Like the hon. Gentleman, I welcome the publication of the charter as an expression of homeless persons' views. We recognise the need to take account of the views of the users of the homelessness service, not just the providers. I have a copy of the charter and I will study carefully the recommendations that particularly refer to the Scottish Office.

The Union

10. **Mr. Jacques Arnold:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give his current assessment of the state of the Union. [781]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The Union guarantees prosperity and stability. A tax-raising Parliament threatens that stability and would penalise people for working in Scotland.

Mr. Arnold: English Members are proud to share the United Kingdom with Scotland. We have heard much today about the impact on Scottish business of a tartan tax. What would be the impact of an assembly with legislative powers, producing red tape and all kinds of controls? How would that assembly limit the ability of Scottish business to compete and to attract the investment that it has secured so well under the Government?

Mr. Forsyth: The impact would be devastating. The Opposition complained when the poll tax was introduced into Scotland one year ahead of England. They are proposing a tartan tax that would be paid in Scotland year after year, destroying jobs and opportunities. It is a wicked proposal that would damage Scotland's interests. The sooner the Opposition abandon it, the better.

The hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) goes round boasting that he would reduce the first band of tax to 10p in the pound. Are we to assume that in Scotland it would be 13p in the pound—or will the tartan tax be levied only on people on middle incomes while the poorest and the richest escape it? It is time that we heard from Opposition Members how it will work.

Mr. Norman Hogg: Does the Secretary of State accept that some—I believe many—Opposition Members work for the strengthening and maintenance of the Union? Does he also accept that one way of strengthening and maintaining the Union is to have regard to public opinion in Scotland and the wishes of the people? Is he aware that

the wishes of the people of Scotland are that we should have a Parliament in Scotland, and that his proposals, which he will present on 30 November, for a tarted-up Scottish Grand Committee fall far short of what the people of Scotland require?

Mr. Forsyth: I am surprised at the hon. Gentleman. He is usually fair minded, and I should have expected him to have waited to read our proposals before judging them as inadequate. I happen to know that the hon. Gentleman is indeed a good Unionist, and he must find it very hard to go along with all that constitutional convention nonsense. He cannot even keep a straight face, Madam Speaker. In his heart of hearts, he knows that it will damage the Union.

If the hon. Gentleman is able to use his influence with the Labour Front-Bench spokesmen to persuade them to abandon those ridiculous proposals, there will be three cheers on the Conservative Benches and three cheers the length and breadth of Scotland when people discover what those proposals would really mean.

Mr. Bill Walker: Does my right hon. Friend believe that the Union would be strengthened and enhanced if all the key and important ministerial portfolios—including that of the Chief Whip—were in the hands of Scottish-based Members of Parliament? If a Parliament were proposed for Edinburgh, if a tartan tax existed and if the West Lothian question had not been tackled, does he believe that the Union would be enhanced or placed at great risk?

Mr. Forsyth: I believe that it would damage the Union, lead to the break-up of the United Kingdom and damage Scotland's ability to argue for a good deal at Westminster.

The office of Secretary of State for Scotland is a powerful one. The hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) aspires to hold it. I am sure that, if ever that day were to arrive, he would use the office to great effect. That powerful office would be lost if Opposition Members had their way. Opposition Members are sent to the House to represent the interests of their constituents. Were there a Scottish Parliament, they would have no involvement in the matters that are of most interest to their constituents at home in Scotland.

Sir David Steel: Why are Ministers so reluctant to make comparisons with other people's unions? Has the Secretary of State noticed that this weekend, Mr. Pujol and his party won their third successive election victory in Catalonia without talk of slippery slopes, flamenco taxes or separating Barcelona from Madrid? Will the Minister please explain why what is possible and welcome in Spain is impossible in the United Kingdom?

Mr. Forsyth: I am sure that, if the right hon. Gentleman had his way, we could replicate what they have done in Spain—increase youth unemployment to 25 per cent. While he is doing his tour of foreign examples, he might consider Canada, where the argument was that, by choosing devolution, they would prevent separatism. That has ended in division and disruption, with a marginal result, and the separatists continue to ask for more. The lesson of Canada is, "If you feed the crocodile, one day you get eaten."

Mr. George Robertson: Does the Secretary of State agree that when the Prime Minister, no less, said last week that he could understand very clearly why the Scots feel that Westminster is a long way off and that no one has any interest in them, and that that was very unattractive, that statement and that interview represented a major and significant U-turn on a 16-year-old policy by the Government of no change being required in the constitution, and was a humiliating admission of failure by the Government on those issues? Some 87 per cent. of Scots oppose the Government. What sort of special tartan Tory arrogance is it for them to say that the Scots will swallow the idea of some tinkering to the package of indifferent reforms? Does the Secretary of State realise that he and the Government are the biggest threat to the country's unity?

Mr. Forsyth: The hon. Gentleman should learn from his experience of the chambers of commerce survey that it is wise to wait and see what is said before rubbishing or welcoming it.

We stand on our record of giving Scotland more say over its affairs. We set up the Scottish Office and have progressively given it more and more administrative power. As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has made clear, we are prepared to look at ways of improving the government of Scotland.

When we produce our proposals, the hon. Gentleman will doubtless say that they are inadequate, but they will have been thought through and they will work. We will not be in the position of the hon. Gentleman, who had to describe the West Lothian question as an anomaly, nor shall we be in the position of the Leader of the Opposition, who had to describe the funding of Scotland as an accountancy detail. It is the hon. Gentleman who puts party advantage before his patriotic duty to Scotland and the interests of his party before the Union. The Government will never do that.

Lockerbie

11. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what action he has taken following the meeting on 8 November in the Crown Office between the Lord Advocate, the Solicitor-General and the hon. Member for Linlithgow in respect of Her Majesty's Government's response to the offer of the Government of Libya to hold a trial of two Libyan nationals accused of responsibility of bombing Pan Am 103 over Lockerbie under a Scottish judge and Scottish rules of evidence. [782]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: When my noble and learned Friend the Lord Advocate recently met the hon. Member, he reminded him that the position of Her Majesty's Government is that the accused should be tried before the ordinary courts having jurisdiction. The demand that the accused should be made available for trial in Scotland or the United States has been endorsed by the United Nations Security Council. Libya has previously received detailed advances from us on the fair trial and treatment of the accused and has accepted that they will get a fair trial in Scotland. There is no reason why Libya cannot now make them available for trial in Scotland.

Mr. Dalyell: Can we be sure that certain Ministers want the truth about Lockerbie?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Yes.

Kincardine Bridge and Bypass

12. **Ms Rachel Squire:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the replacement of the Kincardine bridge and bypass. [783]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: We shall undertake public consultation in the early new year on the conclusions of the recently completed studies of the options at Kincardine. That will allow local interests to set out their views directly on the options and ensure that we can make the fastest possible progress on implementing necessary improvements.

Ms Squire: Is the Minister finally agreeing to listen to the people of Kincardine, whose health is being damaged by traffic, noise, congestion and pollution levels equivalent to those in Greater London? Does he agree that the Kincardine bridge must be replaced by the end of this decade and is the main alternative route across the Forth for east and central Scotland? Will he clarify the timetable for the bridge's replacement and the building of a bypass and confirm that Government money has been allocated for that work to begin in the near future?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I can reassure the hon. Lady that we shall progress as fast as possible towards construction. Subject to statutory procedures and the necessary competitive processes, we should be in a position to start before the end of the century. Exhibitions are to be held in Kincardine and Alloa early in the new year. A number of routes will be shown, information will be displayed setting out their merits and the public will be invited to comment on the solutions—there will be a consultation process. After that, orders will be published. Issues such as environmental considerations have to be considered, as do those that concern local residents. We want to see progress as soon as possible.

Mr. Connarty: It is clear from the Minister's reply that, by 2000, the bridge will be in the constituency of Falkirk, East, as the boundary commission has decided that the area on the other side of the river will be in my constituency. From working with my hon. Friends the Members for Dunfermline, West (Ms Squire) and for Clackmannan (Mr. O'Neill), I know that we are trying to obtain the best solution for people on both sides of the river. Much of the traffic that crosses the bridge is generated from Grangemouth and we want the Government to come forward with the money soon. It is not good enough to say that action will be taken in 2000. As my hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, West said, people in Kincardine have suffered for 20 years.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Scottish Office will publish the statutory orders for its preferred scheme around the end of 1996. The precise date will depend on public responses to the exhibition, but we intend to make the fastest possible progress. The hon. Gentleman should not anticipate the results of future elections any more than the rest of us, but I note his interest in the matter.

Historic Buildings

13. **Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what measures he will take to ensure the structure and fabric of historic buildings in Scotland is properly preserved. [784]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Owners of historic buildings are responsible for the maintenance of their own property. We provide advice, encouragement and financial support.

Mr. Prentice: That is simply not good enough. I do not think that the Minister has read the latest report of the Historic Buildings Council for Scotland, which says that shoddy, synthetic and often imported materials are being used to restore Scotland's built heritage. That is not good enough. Will the Minister take steps to reopen some of the traditional slate and stone quarries so that those materials can be used to restore Scotland's historic buildings? Scotland's heritage is being compromised by the Government's policies.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I can reassure the hon. Gentleman that Historic Scotland is building up the necessary expertise in Scotland. We must learn some ideas from overseas, but I assure him that we are concentrating on employing people in Scotland. The hon. Gentleman's old school, George Heriot's in Edinburgh, has benefited considerably from building repair grants totalling £185,000. If he wishes to assist his old school, he should remind his colleagues on the Opposition Front Bench that 244 of its pupils benefit from the assisted places scheme and would like to see it continue.

Mr. Jessel: As Scotland's heritage of historic buildings is world famous and a prime tourist attraction, will my hon. Friend join me in welcoming substantial new funds from the national lottery to protect Scotland's heritage? The lottery is a brilliant achievement of the Conservative Government.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The lottery has achieved results out of all proportion to what was anticipated initially. We believe that it will be of enormous benefit not only to our built heritage, but to many charities and small organisations throughout Scotland.

Mr. Wilson: Will the Minister approach Historic Scotland about the regrettable absence of any physical memorial in Scotland to the poll tax, given that it was possibly one of the most costly exercises in Scotland since the Darien scheme? I suggest that a derelict public toilet in Stirling could be adapted for the purpose. Perhaps a plaque on the wall might refer to the fact that the last time that the local Member of Parliament engaged in a bit of phrase-making and dubbed a Labour proposal the "roof tax", the Tory party adopted the proposal within three months.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I recall that the hon. Gentleman strongly opposed plans for a Scottish Assembly a few years ago. Rather than erect such a memorial, I think that our built heritage should receive greater priority.

Local Government

14. **Mr. David Shaw:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the efficiency and effectiveness of Scottish local authorities. [785]

Mr. Forsyth: There is considerable scope for improvement.

Mr. Shaw: My right hon. Friend may be aware that I have just returned from giving evidence this morning to the Monklands inquiry in Scotland. He may not be aware

that, on departing the inquiry, the leader of the council made his usual threats, including threatening to visit me and my family. Does my right hon. Friend believe that such people should be in charge of councils in Scotland? Does he believe that the Labour party has a lot to answer for over the failings of local government in Scotland?

Mr. Forsyth: I am sure that my hon. Friend will understand why I am not in a position to comment on his remarks. In defence of the Labour party, I am sure that it is as anxious as the Conservative party to ensure the highest standards of conduct in local government. The hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) welcomed the recent establishment of the 211 inquiry in respect of the North Lanarkshire authority. I think that it is important to proceed on the basis that the House is determined to ensure the highest standards in local government and that we have the means to investigate any complaints swiftly and bring any shortcomings to book. I hope that all hon. Members will consider local government or any other matter of public life on that basis.

Mrs. Fyfe: As the Secretary of State chooses to dismiss with a wave of his hand all Scottish local government, will he join me in praising Glasgow district council's plans to eradicate dampness in 80,000 council houses? On his current plans for spending on Scottish housing, in what year does he expect to eradicate dampness in Scottish houses?

Mr. Forsyth: I am all in favour of councils tackling damp houses and providing key services. The hon. Lady makes a gesture indicating that they need more money. I suggest that she uses what influence she has with Glasgow district council and other Labour-controlled councils to get them to spend less on chiefs and more on indians and to spend less on expensive, highly paid officials and more on the people who do the work. If they did that, we might have more effective authorities. If she could even encourage the councils concerned to go for value for money and become enabling authorities, the people who depend on their services might get a better deal.

Mrs. Gorman: Can my right hon. Friend confirm that for every pound of tax collected in Scotland, the people who live there receive something like £2 in value? Does he agree that local government in Scotland, as well as historic houses and the building of new bridges, depends on the maintenance of the Union with the rest of the British Isles and that those strident Opposition Members who continually demand the separation of Scotland are likely to cause a great deal of loss to the people of Scotland on such projects?

Hon. Members: What about the Skye bridge?

Mr. Forsyth: I agree with my hon. Friend. The Skye bridge represents a considerable success for the Government. It was first promised in 1936, it was delivered by the Government and it will be toll free in 15 years unless the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson) has his way, in which case the tolls will last for longer because he is encouraging people not to pay them.

I wonder how many Opposition Members know that local government in Scotland receives 45 per cent. more per head in Government grant than local government in England. That is a huge additional means of support and they would put all that at risk with their proposals for a Scottish Parliament.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: Does the Secretary of State acknowledge that there is concern about the transition to unitary authorities in respect of how the equalisation will be carried through between high-spending and low-spending authorities? What steps will he take to ensure that there is not an unfair burden on rural authorities having to subsidise urban authorities? Will he step in and ensure that the transition is fair and just to all taxpayers in Scotland?

Mr. Forsyth: In the spirit of partnership and co-operation with local government that I have tried to encourage since I arrived at the Scottish Office, I am attracted by the proposals of the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities to allow for the changes to be phased in so that rural areas that will suffer and those authorities that stand to gain will have the opportunity to adjust. COSLA's proposals are quite sensible as the time period will be kept to an absolute minimum and benefit will accrue to authorities that will gain immediately. I am sure that everyone will recognise it as a sensible way forward.

Mr. McAllion: Does the Secretary of State accept that ill-tempered, ill-informed and inaccurate attacks on elected councils by the likes of the hon. Member for Dover (Mr. Shaw) serve merely to weaken an already weak Government case in Scotland, particularly when in Scotland this morning the same hon. Gentleman admitted under oath that his allegations were based on circumstantial evidence and anonymous correspondence? Would it not be better for the likes of the Secretary of State for Scotland, who currently pays chief executives of NHS trusts such as Grampian Healthcare more than £100,000 a year, to stop attacking chief executive of local authorities in Scotland who manage bigger budgets and larger work forces but are paid considerably less? If the Secretary of State is serious about working together in a spirit of co-operation to improve local government in Scotland, let us have an end to such scurrilous and unfounded attacks on Scottish local democracy, return to co-operation with local government and have a completely different relationship between central and local government in future.

Mr. Forsyth: I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman did not exercise the discretion that I indicated would be appropriate in respect of the present 211 inquiry. As to employing highly expensive people, the hon. Gentleman might like to look at the number of directors in Glasgow compared with the NHS trusts. I believe that he will find that he is on thin ice.

Mr. McAllion: I should like to know the number.

Mr. Forsyth: I am happy to write to the hon. Gentleman setting out the facts and press-releasing them, and I am grateful for the opportunity to do so.

If the hon. Gentleman is fair, he will acknowledge that some authorities are doing well and are responsible in terms of the number of people that they employ on high salaries. Other authorities seem to have lost their place. The hon. Gentleman, as a responsible person in the Labour party, should do what he can to ensure that the taxpayers' interests are protected. I recommend that the hon. Gentleman looks at what is happening and uses his influence to ensure that we get efficient local government.

Former Yugoslavia

3.30 pm

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Malcolm Rifkind): With permission, Madam Speaker, I should like to make a statement on former Yugoslavia.

The conflict in former Yugoslavia is Europe's most tragic problem. Two hundred thousand people have lost their lives over the past four years, and more than 1.5 million have lost their homes. The conflict has caused suffering and destruction on a scale not seen in Europe since the second world war.

From the start, Britain has upheld the principles that internationally recognised borders must not be altered by force and that the legitimate rights of all ethnic groups must be properly protected by their Governments. We have therefore had three objectives—to save lives, to draw the parties away from the military option towards a negotiated settlement, and to prevent the spread of the conflict.

The Government warmly welcome the agreement initialled in Dayton yesterday. We applaud the work of all the negotiators. I congratulate the leaders of the parties to the Bosnia conflict, who have shown the wisdom and courage to make the hard choices and difficult compromises needed for peace. We must recall with gratitude the work of all those who laid the foundations for this achievement—notably Lord Carrington, Lord Owen, Cy Vance, Thorvald Stoltenberg, Carl Bildt and the American officials who died so tragically a few weeks ago while engaged in earlier stages of the negotiations.

The full text of the peace agreement will be placed in the Library as soon as it is available. It is a detailed and complex document. I will not attempt to describe it in detail to the House now, but I shall highlight some key elements.

The agreement maintains a single unitary Bosnian state within internationally recognised borders. There will be a central three-man presidency with representatives from each of the three ethnic groups, a Council of Ministers and a central Parliament. Underneath those central structures will be two entities—the federation and the Republika Srpska, each with substantial autonomy.

Elections for the central presidency and Parliament and for the institutions of both entities will be held within nine months of signature of the agreements. The Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe will supervise those elections. There are to be special arrangements for refugees and displaced persons, who will be encouraged to return and will have the option of voting where they lived before the war.

Individuals indicted for war crimes will play no part in future public life in Bosnia. The United Kingdom continues, moreover, strongly to support the work of the war crimes tribunal. We believe that persons responsible for atrocities should be tried. We look to all the states of the region to fulfil their international obligations.

Sanctions against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia are to be suspended immediately. They will be formally lifted 10 days after free and fair elections have been held in Bosnia. There will also be a phased lifting of the arms embargo, alongside the establishment of an arms control regime.

Territorial issues were the most difficult to settle and took the talks to the brink, but the settlement meets the contact group proposal of a 49-51 per cent. split between the Republika Srpska and the federation. That meets the crucial principle of maintaining Sarajevo as a united city—a principle that the British Government have supported throughout.

It would be foolish to underestimate the size of the task that the international community now faces. The first requirement is that the parties live up to their commitments. Unless they abide by what they have agreed, and work to make the settlement a success, the documents initialled at Dayton are just pieces of paper. The history of this conflict is one of broken agreements. Now, as never before, promises must be kept.

The international community will deploy an international force to Bosnia following signature of the agreement to supervise the withdrawal of respective armies to the agreed zones of separation. It is the wish of the parties that NATO take the lead in establishing such a force. We hope to see a number of non-NATO nations, in particular Russia, working with us in this force.

Apart from the OSCE supervision of elections, the international community must also establish an international police task force to advise and train the local police forces, and oversee the establishment of the agreed central structures. The international humanitarian agencies must meet the continuing needs of the Bosnian population and monitor the human rights of returning refugees. With the World bank in the lead at technical level, the international community must help with the task of economic reconstruction in the region: restoring infrastructure and utilities, stimulating the development of market economies, and encouraging economic interaction in the region.

We will therefore hold a peace implementation conference in London, to mobilise the international community for the tasks ahead. This conference will ensure that the military operation meshes with the civilian, and that tasks at the crucial civilian/military interface are properly handled. It will establish a co-ordination structure with a senior political figure, the high representative, at its centre. It will ensure that those supervising the elections, assisting with economic reconstruction and undertaking humanitarian tasks, will work together as part of a coherent implementation plan. It will help to pin down the parties' agreement to the details of implementation.

We must also decide nationally how we shall contribute to peace implementation in Bosnia. We expect to play a central role alongside our American and French allies in a NATO implementation force. In particular, I should emphasise that the early commitment of the substantial United States ground troop presence which the US Administration propose is a prerequisite for our participation. We expect to arrive and leave alongside our American and French allies. But we now need to study the details of the peace agreement. We must ensure that our forces would be acting in conditions of reasonable safety, that they would have the consent of the parties, and that the burden is being shared equitably among allies, before we take final decisions.

The agreement in Dayton is an historic event. An end to the brutal and tragic conflict in former Yugoslavia is now within our grasp. But we are not there yet. With the

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London peace implementation conference, and a British contribution to a peace implementation force in Bosnia, Britain will play a central role in ensuring that the agreement in Dayton is translated into a peaceful future for all the people of the region.

Mr. Robin Cook (Livingston): May I begin by adding our welcome for the fact that an agreement for peace in Bosnia has been reached? We give a particularly warm welcome to the provision that Sarajevo is to be once again a united city. The courage of its citizens through three winters of seige has been a tribute to human endurance, and it is right that they should be rewarded by its restoration as a single, multi-ethnic city.

We also welcome the Government's intention to host the forthcoming conference on the implementation of the peace agreement. I must warn the Foreign Secretary that implementing the peace accord will require as much effort and patience as achieving agreement to it in the first place. I assure him that he will have our full support for any responsible proposal to reinforce the British forces in Bosnia to assist with policing the agreement.

British troops have every right to be proud of their contribution in bringing humanitarian relief to 2 million citizens who would otherwise not have lived to witness today's peace. The nation will now want British troops to finish the job by helping to establish the peace. May I invite the Foreign Secretary to take this opportunity to appeal to the leaders of Congress to give the bipartisan support for the deployment of United States troops that is necessary to implement an agreement successfully brokered by the United States President?

The Foreign Secretary will know that the key test of the peace agreement will be whether it restores in fact, as well as in name, a single, multi-ethnic Bosnian state. Does he recognise the existence of doubts about whether the agreement provides for a lasting foundation for a united Bosnia, and provides for a Serb republic within that united Bosnia, with its own Government, citizenship and army? Can he assure us that the House is not being invited to accept a peace agreement that restores a multi-ethnic Bosnian state as a legal formality, but in practice partitions the country between ethnic groups? What guarantees are there in the agreement that the Serb territory—or, for that matter, the Croat territories—cannot secede into a greater Serbia or a greater Croatia?

As the House knows, the greatest revulsion caused by the tragedy of the former Yugoslavia arose from the practice of ethnic cleansing. We therefore welcome the Foreign Secretary's assurance that refugees will have the right to return to their homes. May I press him, however, to tell us what that commitment means in practice? What protection will be available to Muslim refugees who wish to return to Srebrenica and Zepa, which were the scene of recent massacres?

What commitment did President Tudjman give to honour the right of return of the 200,000 Serbs who fled from Krajina? They can have no confidence in their safety if those responsible for ethnic cleansing remain free. We therefore welcome and endorse the Foreign Secretary's strong commitment that those guilty of war crimes must be brought to justice before the international tribunal. There can be no reconciliation within Bosnia unless there is no immunity for the war criminals.

This week's peace agreement was possible only because of the increased resolve that the international community recently demonstrated in retaliating against aggression and attacks on the safe areas. Had the international community shown the same resolve two years ago, tens of thousands of Bosnians might not have lost their lives, and hundreds of thousands of refugees might not have lost their homes. Until today, Bosnia has represented the failure of international intervention; now the international community has an opportunity to demonstrate that this peace agreement represents the success of such intervention. We must not fail in our resolve to take that opportunity, and to secure peace in Bosnia.

Mr. Rifkind: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his support for the work in which we are engaged, and I strongly endorse his observation that we must appeal to Congress to respond in a similarly bipartisan way. I have no doubt that British forces in Bosnia have been greatly heartened, and their morale greatly strengthened, by the knowledge that there is such a broad spectrum of support for the work that they have done in the past few years—support from hon. Members on both sides of the House. If it is clear—as I believe it will be—that that broad support will be available to them for the work of the implementation force, I believe that that will make what will inevitably be a difficult task at least easier to face. We very much hope that Congress will address the issues in a similar way.

The hon. Gentleman is right to say that there had to be doubts—that was the word that he used—about the lasting nature of a settlement of the kind that has been announced. It would be foolish to be over-optimistic about the future. We must take it step by step. We have achieved what is—in the context of the past three years—an extraordinary breakthrough, in the form of a settlement signed by the three political leaders. I believe that a degree of exhaustion helped to contribute to that. I also think it important for the Bosnia to which the three political leaders have agreed to be a unitary Bosnian state with a central presidency, incorporating representatives from each community. That will provide a better prospect of success.

The hon. Gentleman is also right to emphasise the need to ensure that the right of refugees to return is not an empty right. Of course, the next few weeks and months will show whether that can be delivered, and it must be one of the prime tasks of the international force to assist the process.

The hon. Gentleman concluded by suggesting that the past three years had been years of failure, which may now turn into success. I hope that on reflection he will reconsider the use of that term. Yes, there have been massive disappointments, but I believe that the extent to which the international community saved many hundreds of thousands of lives prevented the conflict from spreading elsewhere in the Balkans and helped to provide the framework that has led to the peace settlement. That is not only worthy in itself, but unprecedented. I can think of no comparable past conflict in which the international community has been able to achieve so much. The fact that we did not achieve nearly as much as we would all have liked is not evidence of failure; it just shows how painful and difficult the task is.

Mr. David Howell (Guildford): Does my right hon. and learned Friend accept that his balanced and cautious

assessment of the prospects for the deal is about right, and that there are many problems and difficulties still to be overcome? He talked about troops arriving and leaving. I am sure that he would accept that a great deal of cement will be needed to keep the agreement in place—and indeed, to make it work at all. That will involve a heavy and sustained commitment by NATO for a long while ahead. Does my right hon. and learned Friend feel that not only we but our American allies are committed to the long haul in terms of troop commitment which alone will ensure that the situation becomes stable again?

Mr. Rifkind: We are not contemplating a long haul in the sense that my right hon. Friend appeared to imply by his question.

Mr. Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): As in Cyprus?

Mr. Rifkind: It is important to reflect on the fact that—unlike the situation in Cyprus, which the hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay) has mentioned—the implementation force is going to Bosnia after a political settlement, not instead of a political settlement, as happened in Cyprus. That has been one of the major difficulties with that island over the years. A closer parallel might be Cambodia, where an international force went in after a political settlement, helped to cement the agreement and was withdrawn after a given period.

It is part of the thinking of the international community that the NATO-led force should be very large, so as to establish its authority at an early stage. We hope that, if it succeeds in its efforts, it will be possible to scale down its size over a relatively limited period. At the moment, the planning envisages the presence of the international force for up to a year. I appreciate that, on the basis of experience, it is difficult to guarantee such a period, but I emphasise that the role of the international force is not as a permanent international military presence, but to assist the Bosnian parties in the implementation of what has been agreed and then to withdraw.

Mr. Menzies Campbell (Fife, North-East): While we congratulate the British forces on the contribution that they have made in Bosnia, does the Foreign Secretary agree that we should be slow to congratulate ourselves, as it has taken four bloody years for the international community to achieve that fragile peace? Is it not also salutary for Europe to remember that the whole-hearted military, political and diplomatic leadership of the United States was required before the peace could be achieved? Finally, if the United States cannot put troops on the ground, can NATO ever be the same again?

Mr. Rifkind: A NATO operation cannot take place without the United States; I am sure that there can be no ambiguity about that. The hon. and learned Gentleman referred to the four years that it has taken to reach this stage, but he should reflect on the fact that, if those who are fighting a war are determined to pursue that war, there is little that external countries can do unless they wish to become combatants in the conflict—not a solution that the hon. and learned Gentleman has ever advocated. Therefore, the prime responsibility for the time that it has taken for the war to come to a conclusion must lie with the combatants.

Of course, the hon. and learned Gentleman is correct to say that the necessary involvement of the United States in achieving the progress that has been made should be a clear indication of the insufficiency of a purely European response to a problem of that kind. Clearly the problem of Bosnia has caused concern and reactions all around the world, not only in Europe but in Islamic countries as well as in the United States. It has required an international response.

That is why, over the past couple of years, the United Kingdom, France and other western European countries have sought to persuade the United States to give its full diplomatic weight to the prospects for a negotiated settlement. We are pleased and satisfied that the United States responded to that advice, and we have gradually seen the improvements on which I am reporting today.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): Notwithstanding my right hon. and learned Friend's remarks, does he accept that many people perceive that the much more united and determined approach and the true resolve that we have seen in recent months—to which my right hon. and learned Friend has made a contribution, for which I thank him—has resulted in the settlement? Does he agree that it is now essential that that resolve is maintained and that the momentum is not lost? In that context, will he tell the House when he expects the London conference to be held?

Mr. Rifkind: There are a number of reasons why we have seen progress in recent weeks, the most important of which has been the effect of the pressure on President Milosevic and his decision to break with Karadzic and Mladic and push for a political settlement. The last London conference—which led to the establishment of the rapid reaction force led by Britain and France—was important, as was the American initiative, to which I have paid tribute. We are expecting the peace implementation conference to be held in very early December, and we are discussing dates with allies and other relevant countries at present.

Mr. Tony Benn (Chesterfield): Is the Secretary of State aware that there are other interpretations of what has happened? The break-up of Yugoslavia was brought about by the recognition of Croatia by Germany, and has been followed by the arming of Croatia by the United States, the use of massive air strikes—in which more bombs were dropped by NATO than by all of the other parties throughout the war—and the ultimatum at Dayton. Is it really the case that a NATO occupation of former Yugoslavia—for that is what is involved, with about 60,000 troops deployed to keep the peace—and the requirement to introduce a market economy constitute anything other than a very unstable future which sidelines the UN? That is one of the anxieties that many people will feel when they hear what the right hon. and learned Gentleman has said.

Mr. Rifkind: The right hon. Gentleman is not correct in his historical analysis or in his current assessment. I believe that the break-up of Yugoslavia was inevitable once Slovenia and then Croatia had decided to secede from that country. The question of recognition by other states may have had some impact on the precise consequences of that, but the break-up was inevitable for internal reasons, not external.

The right hon. Gentleman referred to the proposal as a "NATO occupation" of Bosnia. He is quite wrong in that suggestion. Part of the agreement that all three parties have signed is a desire that NATO and other countries,

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including Russia, should provide an international force to help monitor and implement the settlement. We are not going into Bosnia against the wishes of the Bosnians—quite the opposite. It is part of their request. The Bosnians recognise that, without that international force, the settlement will collapse and we will be back to the carnage that we have seen in recent times.

Sir Dudley Smith (Warwick and Leamington): Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware of the invaluable role played by the Western European Union in securing the blockade on the Adriatic, and—where the embargo was concerned—in policing the Danube in Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria? These countries have been helpful. Is he further aware that the WEU is ready and willing to do whatever tasks are assigned to it in the new and much more hopeful situation?

Mr. Rifkind: My hon. Friend is right. The WEU has provided useful assistance, and there may be further opportunities for the WEU to provide practical support to the efforts of the international community. That is something that we warmly welcome.

Mr. Robert N. Wareing (Liverpool, West Derby): Does the Foreign Secretary really believe that, in a short space of time, refugees can go back to towns such as Srebrenica? Can he tell the House what is to happen to the 6,000 regular Croatian troops presently stationed in Bosnia? Will they be withdrawn? Does he honestly believe that an imposed peace can ever be a permanent peace?

Mr. Rifkind: Naturally we expect that all troops from outside Bosnia will return home in the near future, and that would apply to regular troops from countries such as Croatia. The hon. Gentleman is correct to emphasise the difficulties for refugees trying to return to areas that remain occupied by another community. That will be a difficult task in Bosnia, just as it has been difficult in many other parts of the world where there have been political settlements, but not of a form that makes the return of refugees as easy as we would wish. That will be one of the tasks to work on. I doubt whether we will achieve the success that we would like, but we must try to achieve whatever is possible in that sphere.

Mr. Michael Jopling (Westmorland and Lonsdale): Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that, following political agreement and with NATO troops on the ground, we are entering a particularly dangerous period for us all, not least because of Russian participation in the area? If the agreement, like so many others, is torn up and more fighting starts, to what extent will NATO troops be prepared to move from a peacekeeping role into a role of peace enforcement?

Mr. Rifkind: The Russian involvement so far has been helpful and valuable because it has enabled the Security Council to speak with a single voice and enabled the contact group to operate in the ways that led to the negotiated agreement announced yesterday. My right hon. Friend speculates about the possibility of the settlement disintegrating. The question that has to be asked is whether that might happen as a result of the actions of one party or as a result of the general disinclination of all the parties.

Clearly, if one party did not fulfil its obligations, the whole weight of the international community would seek to ensure that it respected the treaties into which it had voluntarily entered. If there was a lack of will on the part of all the parties, the whole settlement would inevitably collapse and we would be back to the situation in Bosnia that we have seen in the past four years.

Mr. John D. Taylor (Strangford): Although naturally we welcome the statement by the Secretary of State, we none the less share the caution that he has emphasised. We on the Ulster Unionist Bench in particular note the enthusiasm of the Secretary of State for the total exclusion from all-party talks and from any future democratic developments in Bosnia of those who during the past four years have been involved in paramilitary and terrorist activities.

The Secretary of State stressed the importance of the new central parliament and Government. Will that parliament and Government be in control of the armies within Bosnia, or will two separate armies continue to exist under separate Governments in Bosnia? Can the Secretary of State give us some guidance as to the total number of United Kingdom forces present in Bosnia under both the United Nations and NATO?

Mr. Rifkind: Those excluded from political and public life will be limited to those who are indicted as war criminals. They will not include those who come within the slightly wider definition that the right hon. Gentleman suggested. We look forward to the day when there will be a gradual reintegration of the military forces in Bosnia. That cannot happen immediately. It will take time, as it has taken in other parts of the world where similar problems have existed. We have seen in South Africa how the competing armies have been gradually integrated into a single new South African defence force. I do not say that that will happen, but it must be the objective that we work towards in Bosnia.

We are still giving consideration to the precise details of the British contribution in Bosnia. It is likely to have two elements: the forces which are currently there under UNPROFOR, which may become part of a new NATO-led force, and the headquarters of the whole NATO force provided by the allied rapid reaction corps based in Germany. Britain is a framework nation of that and, therefore, a significant proportion of headquarters manpower will be from the United Kingdom.

Mr. Jonathan Aitken (South Thanet): Will my right hon. and learned Friend confirm that the American War Powers Act requires clear and unambiguous congressional commitment to the proposal that a large number of American ground troops should be sent to Bosnia? Is he confident that the commitment will be given by Congress? Is he aware that there are a great many ambiguities in the statements of the American Administration, which need to be clarified? For example, Secretary of Defence William Perry has spoken of the American peacekeepers leaving within one year, which may seem to some of us a remarkably short haul. Would he confirm that, before British troops are committed, Congress must be on board for what will be a long and perilous haul?

Mr. Rifkind: I certainly confirm my right hon. Friend's final point. In my opening remarks, I said that British forces would enter and leave at the same time as United States forces. There can be no question of any

different approach. It is for the United States Government to determine the constitutional requirements within the United States for the deployment of American forces. The President has already indicated that he intends to enter into early consultations with both Houses of Congress, and it is worth recollecting that the vote in the House of Representatives a few days ago did not reject American participation, but emphasised the need for that House to agree to such a proposition and for that case to be argued. The President has indicated that he accepts total responsibility, to ensure that American forces are deployed. We wish him well in that task and will give him our full support.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Is the Foreign Secretary aware that, given fair wind, the treaty might last long enough to carry it beyond the American presidential elections in about a year from now and, perhaps, just beyond the British general election? Will he also comment on the fact that it is rather curious that, in this so-called peace treaty, no matter how long or temporary, as opposed to the one in Ireland, there is no talk of decommissioning; in fact, there is the opposite—there is going to be a lifting of the arms embargo? How does he manage to approve those double standards?

Mr. Rifkind: The hon. Gentleman is wrong. It is likely that arms control discussions will take place, hosted internationally, to ensure that there is a progressive reduction of military equipment within Bosnia to the amount that is reasonably required by any country in the modern world.

Mr. Nigel Forman (Carshalton and Wallington): Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that many Conservative Members will want him and his colleagues to keep the duration and nature of our commitment in the former Yugoslavia closely under review? Can he confirm that the likely number of British troops committed to that unfortunate territory may initially be about 13,000? Can he tell the House, more clearly than he has been able to do so far, exactly what they will be doing? Will they be there in support of the civilian power? If so, which is it, and what is the parallel with the normal support for the civilian power in places such as Northern Ireland?

Mr. Rifkind: I can give my hon. Friend certain additional information. Certainly, in the first few weeks, the prime purpose of the implementation force will be to monitor the implementation of the settlement. It provides for the forces of the Bosnian federation and Republika Srpska to withdraw from the existing confrontation line and for a safety zone to be inserted between those two confrontation areas to prevent a resumption of hostilities. Part of the responsibilities of the force will be to man that area and thereby ensure that what is a ceasefire becomes a permanent peace. They will also have responsibility for much of the monitoring of what is happening in regard to the other parts of the agreement, much of which will require civilian assistance, but may also have a military component.

On the size of the British force, my hon. Friend mentioned 13,000. I would not want to be committed to a specific figure, but I do not expect it to be significantly different from that level.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): Like other hon. Members, I welcome this step, while realising that it is only the beginning of what might be a long and fairly tortuous route to ensuring a lasting peace in the former Yugoslavia. With reference to the peace implementation conference, can the Secretary of State define more clearly what is meant by a high representative, because he or she, whoever the person may be, will have a critical role to play and will have to have the confidence of all the groups involved in what has been a disastrous conflict for Europe?

Will he also say whether there is any definition at this early stage of who will have the final responsibility for the establishment of the membership of that conference? Will it be the United Nations, the European Union, the United States, the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, or the United Kingdom Government? Obviously, those details have to be worked out and may appear in the document that is to be placed in the Library, but it would be helpful if we had some ideas on that matter at this stage.

Mr. Rifkind: On the latter part of the hon. Lady's question, the last suggestion that she made was correct. It will be the United Kingdom Government, who are hosting the conference, who will issue the invitations. Clearly, we will take account of all those who have a relevant contribution to make.

The hon. Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing) is also correct to say that the high representative will be a crucial participant in the work of the international community in Bosnia in implementing the settlement. I mentioned earlier that NATO will, of course, be leading the implementation force but NATO is a military organisation. There is a need to ensure that the political oversight and the civil co-ordination are also in the hands of someone who is responsible for these matters in a credible and effective fashion.

The high representative will be responsible for the co-ordination between the civil and military roles and for supervising the electoral process. It is quite likely that the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe will have the immediate responsibility in that area but the high representative will be keeping a watchful eye on the elections that are to be held as part of the settlement and questions like the return of refugees, the economic reconstruction of Bosnia and matters of that kind will fall within his remit.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Order. This is an important agreement, and I want to try to be helpful to the House and call all those Members who have heard the entire settlement statement of the Foreign Secretary. It would help me and the business to come if we could now have brisk exchanges, so that I can call all the Members concerned.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): Can my right hon. Friend explain exactly how the high representative is to be chosen, what nationality he will be, how he will relate, if that is the right word, to the theatre commander of NATO, and whether the Russians will accept his authority or whether they will refer back to their national Government in anything they are called upon to do?

Mr. Rifkind: Thought is being given at the present time to both the identity and the specific tasks of the high

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representative. I think it is likely that agreement will be reached and a conclusion announced at the peace implementation conference to be held in London. Already much of the work has been done, but I think that that will enable the various threads to be drawn together. That will be one of the items on that particular agenda.

Mr. Calum Macdonald (Western Isles): Will the Secretary of State say something more about the status of individuals indicted for war crimes? Surely we must require more than that they are simply barred from political life. Must not the international community require that they be returned to The Hague for examination and trial for war crimes, and should it not be a requirement of any level of government in Bosnia that, in return for any political and economic assistance, they must comply with the requirements of the war crimes tribunal in The Hague?

Mr. Rifkind: We attach importance to the requirements of the war crimes tribunal being respected. The reference to participation in public life was clearly part of the political settlement announced yesterday, and it was important for it to be clarified that such persons would not be able to participate in the public life of Bosnia in future. How those persons are returned for trial is a separate but also very important issue, and will have to be addressed in its own context.

Lady Olga Maitland (Sutton and Cheam): Does my right hon. Friend agree that, for the peace in Bosnia to be permanent, it would need conformation to that agreement by Mr. Karadzic and General Mladic? I understand that they have been indicted for war crimes and that they will be removed from public life, but will my right hon. and learned Friend clarify exactly what their position will be, bearing in mind that there is a real danger that, if they had personal freedom to move around, they could create an insurrection behind the scenes? That is an important factor, and we should face up to the very real dangers that could emanate from their movements.

Mr. Rifkind: The starting point is that the negotiating powers on behalf of the Bosnian Serbs were given to President Milosevic. That has been one of the reasons that we have achieved the progress that has been realised. It is also important to look to the elections that will be held for the Bosnian Serbs as well as for the other communities in Bosnia and that we hope will enable a new legitimate leadership to emerge that can speak for the Bosnian Serb interest.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Should not the American Administration be warmly congratulated on achieving, with much difficulty, what European countries, no doubt with good will, were not able to achieve in the past four years? Is the Foreign Secretary aware that those of us who took, by and large, the Bosnian position recognise all the weaknesses—and have the reservations—rightly expressed by my hon. Friend the Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook), but believe that it is the best possible agreement that could have been reached in the circumstances, should be supported on the ground and deserves full support from all those who live in Bosnia?

Mr. Rifkind: I very much agree with the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Mackinlay: Further to the Foreign Secretary's reply to the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Forman), is there not a need for clarity and precision about the role of the international forces, who are headed by a British general? Will not those forces be involved in enforcement rather than peacekeeping? Are not British soldiers going to have the unenviable task of enforcing population movements? I fully recognise that those involved will be returning refugees and that the forces will have to see that they get back. Under the terms of reference now being considered by British generals in Germany, is it not a fact that the forces will have to enforce the movements of civilian populations, if need be, at the end of a bayonet?

Mr. Rifkind: It is proposed that the NATO-led force will have extremely robust rules of engagement. The objective is to ensure that by virtue of both it size and its capability, it will be able to assist in the implementation of the settlement. That enables the rules of engagement to be significantly more robust than in the past.

Ms Angela Eagle (Wallasey): Will the Foreign Secretary say a bit more about the arms reduction talks? Does he agree that the worst possible scenario would be for there to be a huge increase in the buying-in of weapons in the various areas of the former Yugoslavia, for the peace then to unravel and for us to end up with an even bigger conflagration as a result of lifting sanctions too early?

Mr. Rifkind: The hon. Lady is correct; there are, indeed, dangers in the lifting of the arms embargo. For that reason, it has been agreed that the lifting of the arms embargo should be a phased process taking place over six months. It will also be an early intent to have an arms control conference, so it is the intention that there should be proper consideration of the implications for the future of military equipment and military assets within Bosnia and that conclusions can be reached on that within the six-month period. By the time, therefore, that the arms embargo may be lifted on all the parties, we shall have a much clearer picture about the implications of these matters.

Mr. Ted Rowlands (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney): Following that point, how does one phase an arms embargo? Will it be based on the type of material or the type of equipment that will be allowed in the six months? Given that the right hon. and learned Gentleman is now saying that there will be a NATO force of 60,000, what phasing will take place?

Mr. Rifkind: The agreement envisages two phases. After three months, there should be a partial lifting of the embargo on light weapons and other such equipment, but there will still be an embargo for a further three months on artillery, heavy weapons, mines, military aircraft and other equipment of that kind. That is the phasing that is envisaged.

Mr. Harry Barnes (North-East Derbyshire): Is the Foreign Secretary aware that there are many decent and honest people in Serbia, Croatia and Bosnia who bravely stood out for a considerable period for peace,

reconciliation and a multi-ethnic society? Is he aware that those people, often organised in their own small political parties and within community groups, have been sidelined until now, whereas the warlords have been considered all the time? Will the new situation give an opportunity for those people in Bosnia, such as the Tuzla Civic Forum, to find expression and to influence future developments?

Mr. Rifkind: The hon. Gentleman's remarks give added force to the need for the elections to take place at the earliest possible practical date. That will enable the wishes of the people of Bosnia to be reflected in their political leadership.

Mr. Mike Gapes (Ilford, South): Given the difference in the timetable—nine months for elections and six months for phasing out the arms embargo—will there not be the serious problem, when the United States decides that it wishes, presumably, to arm one side of the federation against the Republika Srpska and when there is no legitimacy for a new three-person presidency, that in effect, the United States will be arming one side in a continuation of the conflict? What thought has been given to dealing with that problem?

Mr. Rifkind: The proposal is that the elections should happen not later than nine months hence. If circumstances permit earlier elections, that would clearly be highly desirable, in part for the reasons to which the hon. Gentleman has referred.

WELSH GRAND COMMITTEE

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 98 (Welsh Grand Committee),

That the Matter of the implications of the Gracious Speech for Wales, being a Matter relating exclusively to Wales, be referred to the Welsh Grand Committee for its consideration.

That the Matter of the implications of the Budget for Wales, being a Matter relating exclusively to Wales, be referred to the Welsh Grand Committee for its consideration.—[*Mr. Bates.*]

Question agreed to.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That—

(1) Standing Order No. 13 (Arrangement of public business) shall have effect for this Session with the following modifications, namely:

In paragraph (4) the word 'thirteen' shall be substituted for the word 'ten' in line 43; in paragraph (5) the word 'eighth' shall be substituted for the word 'seventh' in line 45;

(2) Standing Order No. 90 (Second reading committees) shall have effect for this Session with the following modification, namely:

In paragraph (2) the word 'eighth' shall be substituted for the word 'seventh' in line 23;

(3) Private Members' Bills shall have precedence over Government business on 19th and 26th January, 2nd, 9th and 16th February, 1st 8th, 22nd and 29th March, 19th and 26th April, 10th May and 12th July.—[*Mr. Bates.*]

SITTINGS OF THE HOUSE

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 11A (House not to sit on certain Fridays),

That pursuant to Standing Order No. 11A (House not to sit on certain Fridays), the House shall not sit on the following Fridays:

Friday 1st December, Friday 15th December, Friday 12th January, Friday 23rd February, Friday 15th March, Friday 3rd May, Friday 24th May, Friday 14th June, Friday 28th June and Friday 5th July.—[*Mr. Bates.*]

Question agreed to.

DEREGULATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 14A(1) (Consideration of draft deregulation orders),

That the draft Deregulation (Building Societies) Order 1995, which was laid before this House on 16th October, in the last Session of Parliament, be approved.

That the draft Deregulation (Greyhound Racing) Order 1995, which was laid before this House on 16th October, in the last Session of Parliament, be approved.—[*Mr. Bates .*]

Question agreed to.

Orders of the Day

Debate on the Address

[SIXTH DAY]

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Question,

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty as follows:—

Most Gracious Sovereign,

We, Your Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Parliament assembled, beg leave to offer our humble thanks to Your Majesty for the Gracious Speech which Your Majesty has addressed to both Houses of Parliament.—[*Mr. Hurd.*]

Question again proposed.

The Economy

Madam Speaker: I have selected the amendment standing in the name of the Leader of the Opposition, and the amendment in the name of the leader of the Liberal Democrats will be put forthwith after 10 o'clock for Division purposes. Between the hours of 7 and 9 o'clock, I must limit speeches to 10 minutes only.

4.14 pm

Mr. Gordon Brown (Dunfermline, East): I beg to move, as an amendment to the Address, at the end of the Question to add:

But note Government election promises continue to be broken, with tax increases equivalent to 7p in the pound on income tax imposed to pay the costs of economic failure, with Britain having fallen from 13th to 18th in the world prosperity league since 1979, with investment worse than at this stage of previous economic cycles and living standards having fallen more sharply than for years, with widespread insecurity and one in five households of working age with no-one in work; humbly regret that the Gracious Speech excludes positive measures for jobs, productive investment and opportunities to move from welfare to work; regret the absence of action on the Greenbury Report and the boardroom excesses of the privatised monopoly utilities; regret the absence of a strategy for employment, skills, regional development and industry, including measures to raise educational standards and access to quality training, and to secure effective public-private partnership for infrastructure investment; and calls for the abandonment of rail privatisation and of the Prime Minister's pledge to abolish capital gains tax and inheritance tax.

It is now sixteen and a half years since the Government came to power, and almost five years since the Prime Minister took office. The Loyal Address gives us the opportunity to assess where the Conservatives have taken Britain and where they are now trying to take us. Our amendment makes it clear that the economic test for the Queen's Speech and the forthcoming Budget is what the Conservatives will do to build an investment-rich economy that is equipped with skills, science, training and technology for the future, and whether the Government will take up our proposals to tackle the slowest increase in investment out of recession that we have seen this century.

The Queen's Speech needed to, and the Budget must, tackle the job insecurity that permeates this country, and so reduce the annual billion-pound cost of unemployment. That is why we propose a windfall tax on utilities—to get people back to work. The Budget needs to reunite the nation, as the Queen's Speech should; to build social cohesion and a fairer Britain, including a fairer tax system.

Let us recall the central Conservative promise of 1979, the aim behind the first Loyal Address, and the objective of the first Conservative Budget. The then Chancellor, Lord Howe, said that falling behind our competitors was the issue. He said that Britain's relative decline was

"not a prospect that I am prepared to accept."—[*Official Report*, 12 June 1979; Vol. 968, c. 237.]

He said that ending that relative decline was the real challenge and the central issue, the make or break for the Conservative Government and the decisive test on which the Conservative party should be judged.

Yet what do we find after 16 years? The Conservatives said that their whole strategy was to avoid relative decline, but that has happened. We have not risen above more competitors, as they promised; we have fallen further below them. Only a few weeks ago, the league table for national income per head showed that we are not moving upwards, but we have been moving downwards. We have not reversed that relative decline, but our decline has worsened in relation to our neighbours.

We are 18th in the world league of national income per head. In 1979, we were in front of Italy, but we are now behind it; we were in front of Norway, but we are now behind it; we were in front of Hong Kong and Singapore, but we are now behind them. Under the Government, we have slipped from 13th to 18th. Last year, when the Chancellor said we were in a hole, he should have said that we were in the 18th hole, well behind 17 players. No wonder I regard with some trepidation the statement by the Chancellor some months ago that the task of overtaking our rivals needs the election of more Conservative Governments in the future.

Mr. Gyles Brandreth (City of Chester): The hon. Gentleman mentioned job insecurity and competitiveness. He will be aware that, at the Confederation of British Industry conference last week, Sir Rocco Forte, whose company owns hotels in my constituency, spoke of the devastating effect on the competitiveness of his industry and on jobs of the minimum wage and the social chapter. Given that 16,000 of my constituents work in the hotel, retail and tourist industries, and given that a leading hotelier is saying that those policies would have a devastating effect on employment prospects, how can he continue to support those policies?

Mr. Brown: The hon. Gentleman's speech last week was a little better than the speech that he has attempted today. I would have thought that he and Forte itself would be more concerned about the takeover bid that has been mounted. He asked about the minimum wage. Is he not interested in the fact that, of the 17 countries ahead of Britain in the world prosperity league, 15 of them have minimum wages?

Where do I get the information about how we have slipped down the world prosperity league? [An hon. Member: "A Labour party researcher."] No, not from a Labour party researcher, as the hon. Gentleman said; not from the Trades Union Congress; not from an academic buried in a university. I obtained that information from Her Majesty's Stationery Office, from an official Government publication, a White Paper with all the authority of the Cabinet, entitled "Competitiveness: Forging Ahead".

The White Paper was

"presented to Parliament by the President of the Board of Trade and the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the Secretaries of State for Transport, Environment and Employment, the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, and the Secretaries of State for Scotland, Northern Ireland, Education and Wales".

Half the Cabinet signed that White Paper.

As the Prime Minister said in an admiring introduction to that White Paper, it was

"the first comprehensive . . . survey of Britain's competitive position against that of our leading . . . rivals . . . a hard-headed assessment of our competitive position."

Mr. Nigel Forman (Carshalton and Wallington): For the avoidance of doubt, will the hon. Gentleman tell the House a bit more about those figures? Will he tell the House, for example, whether they are based on purchasing power parities or current exchange rates?

Mr. Brown: Not only can I tell the hon. Gentleman that those figures are based on purchasing power parities, but I can tell him that even the exchange rate measure gives exactly the same answer about the deterioration in our competitive position. I can tell him that the position was the same last year as this year and, according to all surveys that have been done, is likely to be the same in the current full financial year.

It would be worth while for the hon. Gentleman to read the report. Not only have we fallen to 18th in terms of national income per head, but we have fallen to 21st in terms of investment per head—way below Spain and Portugal.

That White Paper says that we have consistently invested a smaller proportion of national income than our competitors, that United Kingdom industrial research and development expenditure is less than that of our competitors, and that all the changes that the Conservatives say that they have brought about in the British economy come down to the fact that we have slipped, under their policies, from 13th to 18th. They should be ashamed of themselves.

Mr. Tim Yeo (South Suffolk): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Brown: I shall give way on the White Paper, which no doubt the hon. Gentleman has read.

Mr. Yeo: Will the hon. Gentleman tell me how many of the 17 countries that are ahead of us devote as large a proportion of gross domestic product to the public sector as we do?

Mr. Brown: The question, as I shall suggest to the House later, is not, "What theoretical proportion is public expenditure of national income?" but, "What is investment as a share of national income?"

Mr. Yeo: What about answering the question?

Mr. Brown: The hon. Gentleman knows perfectly well that in Germany, France and many other countries, public expenditure is a greater proportion of national income, and they are more prosperous than we are. He should also know that, when assessing relative prosperity, most countries would go on the direct connection between investment and gross domestic product per head.

What has happened to the economy after 16 years? Let us remember what was said. Do Conservatives continue to boast of the "economic miracle", as they did in 1988? Remember the boast by the then Chancellor that we had become the envy of Japan, as Japan shoots ahead of us in the economic league. Remember the claim by the present Prime Minister that there was no longer a German economic miracle, but that a British economic miracle had replaced it. Remember the proclamation that the Conservatives had transformed the British economy.

Remember that other promise—indeed, assertion—that the pound was about to replace the deutschmark as the leading European currency, a characteristically prescient statement, made only a few weeks before we crashed out of the exchange rate mechanism. What do Conservative Members say of their economic transformation now that the pound has completed its passage and is worth 40 per cent. of the value of the deutschmark that it was worth in 1979?

There are no more big promises; no more weasel words. The following phrases are found in the speeches of the Prime Minister and the Chancellor now. "Conditions are right," they say; "we are poised"; "the fundamentals are in place"; "we are well placed". Surely, after 16 years being poised on the brink of laying the foundations of the essential preconditions for getting the fundamentals right for being on our way to becoming the enterprise capital of Europe, that is simply not good enough. It is time to judge them on their record, not on their promises.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Kenneth Clarke): The hon. Gentleman makes much of the one page of the White Paper on competitiveness that he appears to have read concerning the list of GDP per head figures, at the top of which comes Luxembourg. The method used to calculate the figures involves the assets of all the secondary banks in Luxembourg, which puts it at the top of the table. But those assets are not enjoyed by all the inhabitants of Luxembourg, and it is not an ideal measure of the most successful economy in the world.

The hon. Gentleman appears to want to make an absurd comparison, to try to prove that the Thatcherite revolution never happened. Is he aware of the analysis in *The Wall Street Journal* by Mr. Marsden, an independent economic consultant, who uses World bank figures on a number of indicators that have more to do with improvements in our position? It shows that, since 1979-80, out of 16 countries, Britain is first in the list of improvements in productivity, first in reductions of tax burden, first in the increase of private consumption and overwhelmingly first in attracting foreign investment. If the hon. Gentleman studies league tables, he should use sensible ones, not misuse casual ones.

Mr. Brown: The Chancellor now seems to think that an extract xeroxed from *The Wall Street Journal* is more valuable than a Government publication—a White Paper from HMSO.

Mr. Clarke *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Order. I cannot hear two hon. Members at once.

Mr. Brown: Perhaps the Chancellor has another report to which he wants to draw our attention. Perhaps he has an extract from a Japanese daily newspaper.

Mr. Clarke: It is not the way the hon. Gentleman reads them, but the way he tells them. He keeps misusing our White Paper on competitiveness to show it as some sort of world prosperity table. The figures refer to investment, productivity and personal consumption. He knows that the Conservative party has transformed this country for the better since 1979. We are currently well ahead of the league in our recovery from the recession.

Mr. Brown: If the Conservatives have transformed the country, why are 2 million people unemployed? Why is there massive job insecurity throughout the country? Why are we experiencing the slowest surge of investment out of recession at any time this century? Why—in terms of the measures that the Chancellor chooses to use, such as national growth—do we have the lowest non-oil growth of any European country for the past 15 years? The Chancellor thinks that national income per head is not a measure worth using. I thought that he would throw up that subject—he has to create a smokescreen, because at no point has he denied my central figure.

I looked back over the Chancellor's publications and was surprised to find one entitled "Britain in Europe", which spoke of new hope for the regions. Its authors are given as Kenneth Clarke and Elaine Kellett-Bowman—[*Laughter.*] The Chancellor chooses his co-authors well. I do not know who will take the blame or the responsibility for what I am about to say.

The Chancellor talks of how everyone should benefit and asks what action can be taken to sort out the regions of Europe. He asks how we should measure the difference between the richest and poorest regions and concludes that they are calculated in terms of gross domestic product per capita—exactly the same measure that the Chancellor now doubts when I put it to him.

Mr. Clarke *rose—*

Mr. Brown: I shall allow the Chancellor to intervene once more, but this is my speech and I hope that he has a speech to give.

Mr. Clarke: The hon. Gentleman is obviously lost for words for a moment and is obviously searching for policy. I wrote another pamphlet on regional government in this country, which was adopted by the Labour party for a time as its regional policy, but it, like me, has changed its mind and has now dropped the policy. When I wrote that pamphlet—

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): When we wrote it.

Mr. Clarke: When I assisted my hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster (Dame E. Kellett-Bowman) to write the pamphlet, when she was a Member of the European Parliament and I was shadow spokesman, we were making unfavourable comparisons of every sort with the rest of the continent. But I was not using those figures as a prosperity league, as the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) keeps calling it. Will he not admit that, throughout the 1980s, we led the French and the Germans on growth, and we beat everyone else on productivity? Living standards have increased by 40 per cent. and the hon. Gentleman would see that we continue to move up any sensible league table if only he would use one.

Mr. Brown: I hope that the Chancellor will be more accurate when he delivers his Budget next Tuesday. His figures about growth comparisons with France and Germany are completely inaccurate. Our non-oil growth rate over the past 15 years is 1.6 per cent; even with oil, it is 1.8 per cent. That is way behind our more successful competitors, particularly Japan, which has a growth rate of more than 3 per cent.

As for the Chancellor's pamphlet on regional government, I know why he wants to disown it, as I am one of the few who has read it. He proposes indicative planning, a national plan, regional plans and regional economic plans. I am not sure that the No Turning Back group and the 92 group would look favourably on any of those proposals.

After four Chancellors, 11 Secretaries of State for Trade and Industry and 17 Queen's Speeches in 16 years, the Government now tell us that they have discovered the answer. They have found the key, as the questioner suggested, to the problems of the British economy. They ask us to look not at Britain—which the Conservatives have governed for the past 16 years—but at Hong Kong and Singapore, where they have not been in government. The Conservatives want us to judge them on their promises for the future and not on their record of the past. Their answer today is a return to their policy of 1979: cut public spending as a share of national income, instead of concentrating on the real task of raising the level of investment in the economy.

Why is current Government spending £80 billion higher in real terms than it was in 1979? Lady Thatcher confirmed that Government policy in 1979. Why is current public spending as a share of national income the same as it was in 1979 when we left office? The Government have not solved the problem of public spending, because they are paying the bills for unemployment, waste, decay and failure. In spite of £100 billion in North sea oil and £120 billion in privatisation proceeds, taxes have risen by the equivalent of 7p in the pound. Why have there been 21 tax increases in the past three years—nearly £1,000 per year for every family in the country?

Yesterday, the Prime Minister told us the reason for the tax rises. He did not admit his failure, but he said:

"we did so to protect people who were vulnerable".—[*Official Report*, 21 November 1995; Vol. 267, c. 456.]

He should tell that to the pensioners and to the weakest and the frailest in the country who suffered the value added tax rises imposed by the Government. The Government did not help the most vulnerable: as is typical of the Conservative party, the tax rises were so unfair that they hurt the most vulnerable the most. It is on that unfairness and that betrayal that the Conservatives will be judged.

Mr. John Townend (Bridlington): The Government have a target to bring public expenditure below 40 per cent. What would be the hon. Gentleman's target if he were Chancellor? Would he bring it below 40 per cent., would he leave it where it is, or would public spending increase?

Mr. Brown: Public expenditure would be below 40 per cent. of gross domestic product if the Government had solved the problems of unemployment, waste and the other bills of economic failure. I will not be lectured by a

Conservative party which promised to cut public spending as a share of national income in 1979, but which saw public expenditure in all but two of the past 16 years rise above 40 per cent.

I admire the honesty of the hon. Member for Bridlington (Mr. Townend). He said that there must be tax cuts in the Budget and he issued a statement announcing how many billions of pounds in cuts he wanted to see. However, he said that, even then, it would not return the Conservatives to their 1992 position. No tax cut that the Chancellor may introduce next Tuesday will undo the damage of income tax rises equivalent to 7p in the pound since 1992.

At the same time as the Government have caused us to fall behind our competitors, the country has slipped back as massive job insecurity has dragged down the economy. Job insecurity in the labour market is now dragging down the housing market. When survey after survey shows that that is the greatest anxiety of British people, what are we told by the President of the Board of Trade? He says that job insecurity is only a state of mind. He says that it is not real, but a figment of the imagination. He says that it is all in the mind.

Let the right hon. Gentleman look no further than his own Back Benches. Do Conservative Members have no worries about their jobs? Is there no fear of redundancy on Conservative Benches? We know that any worries they might have about their jobs are not real and that it is all in the mind, but if the President of the Board of Trade really believes that job insecurity and the fear of unemployment is only a state of mind, how can he explain the extraordinary zeal for travel discovered recently by Conservative Members, particularly those with majorities of less than 10,000, and their willingness to take the advice of Lord Tebbit and get on their bikes, in droves? Surely their worry is nothing more than a state of mind.

Job insecurity is only in the mind, except for the former Chancellor, the right hon. Member for Kingston upon Thames (Mr. Lamont), for whom it is in Kingston upon Thames. It is only in the mind, except for the standard bearer of Essex man, the hon. Member for Basildon (Mr. Amess), for whom it is to be found in Basildon.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: He is not here.

Mr. Brown: He has gone. He has run away as a result of his failure to hold a seat that Labour will definitely take at the next election because of the policies that we are putting forward. Job insecurity is only in the minds of many Cabinet Ministers, when it is actually to be found in real life.

As people's response to the Queen's Speech shows, Conservative Members now have short-term contracts and, for the first time in 16 years, they are facing the same anxieties as the British people. They should not reject out of hand Labour's proposals for jobs to help the unemployed, as they may need them after the election.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that many Members who are seeking new seats have simply had their boundaries changed, so their seats have disappeared? Whatever Labour Members may say, it is important to make it clear that Members are not running away from existing seats; they are simply moving because their seats no longer exist.

Mr. Brown: It is strange that the chairman of the Conservative party, who has a substantial majority in a seat that remains, is moving to another seat. People may wonder why he is so worried about defending that majority as a result of pressure from the Labour party.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Brown: I would rather give way to the hon. Lady's co-author.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. It is clear that the hon. Gentleman is not giving way.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: I am raising a point of order. I was not asking the hon. Gentleman to give way, as I knew that he would not. Is it in order for the hon. Gentleman to mislead the House by pretending that a Member is running away, when his constituency has been cut in two and he is simply taking half of it?

Madam Deputy Speaker: The Chair, perhaps mercifully, is not responsible for the accuracy of Members' remarks.

Mr. Brown: The hon. Gentleman protests too much about the position of the chairman. *[Interruption.]* I apologise to the hon. Lady.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: That is sexism.

Mr. Brown: I have apologised to the hon. Lady, and I hope that she will accept my apology.

Is there anything more symbolic of the Conservative party's lurch to the right than the content of the Queen's Speech, which announced legislation to cut help for the homeless, used the full might of the Oxford English Dictionary to redefine exceptional hardship as uniquely severe suffering in order to deprive people of housing benefit, and picked out single parents for further onslaught?

Although the Government really wanted yet another social security cuts Bill for the withdrawal of benefit, they hesitated, not from compassion, but, as the Secretary of State for Social Security said in a leaked memo, because they had no parliamentary majority to get it through. The Government do all those things, while at the same time they do nothing about excesses in the privatised utilities, implementing the Greenbury report in full, reforming capital gains tax to avoid excesses and abuses or dealing with the scandal of National Grid. Instead, day in, day out, the Government pour scorn on the measures that we propose.

Nowhere is the abuse of power clearer and the Government's failure to act in relation to privatised utilities more obvious than in the sale of National Grid, which was announced today—a £5 billion asset from which consumers and taxpayers will get only £1 billion in refunds on their bills. That makes every day the case for imposing a windfall tax. What is to happen to the other £4 billion?

Four National Grid directors have been able in the past few months—since Greenbury—to award themselves huge share options, even before shares were available on

[Mr. Brown]

the open market. The Government did nothing. Directors were able to buy and sell shares even before there was a market in shares, and nothing was done. Directors were able to cash in their share options before the share price was set, to the tune of £1.6 million. Again, the Government did nothing. The share price was set by auditors, but cannot be set by the market. Again, the Government have done nothing. Despite more handouts to the directors and special dividends that they voted for themselves, still nothing has been done. Nothing has been done even about the compensation built into the share options.

National Grid's chairman, Mr. David Jefferies, is to retire, but he is to come back three days a week and, with his pension, will earn in total £300,000 a year—as much as he used to earn for working five days a week. How can we believe that decisions are being made in the national or public interest, or even in the interest of the electricity industry, when such powerful people are able to set the terms on which they benefit from demergers and privatisations without recourse to the public?

The half-a-dozen directors of National Grid are answerable only to a dozen regional electricity chiefs—who themselves have not only received a present of shares in National Grid but are reported to have had their tax bills paid, so that they get the full profit from the shares that they are receiving. That is the worst example of a privatisation or demerger. It is worse than the shocking abuses that arose from previous sales—so much so, there has in my view been a lurch to the right in the attitudes of the Conservative party more than that which is acceptable.

From National Grid's report, I have calculated today that the former chief of London Electricity, Mr. Roger Urwin, has done well 10 times over, bringing him an annual income of £1.5 million—and he moved from London Electricity to National Grid in the past few months. When such abuse is tolerated, there can be no doubt that matters have been allowed to get worse since the Greenbury report, not better.

What happened to the Greenbury proposals for legislation to disclose pensions, which I expected to see in the Queen's Speech? The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry said that the Greenbury proposals would be considered, and the Institute of Actuaries examined them and prepared a report. The proposal to legislate was accepted in principle by the Government, to be implemented after the measure was drawn up by the relevant bodies. The Government have not only failed to introduce the new Companies Act necessary, but have been persuading people that there is no need for action in that important area. Why has nothing been done?

The company report for British Gas reveals that the pension contribution for Cedric Brown is £19,000. In fact, his pension is worth £300,000 a year, and it will cost the pension fund an astonishing and budgeted £4 million. Because the Government do not want us, the shareholders or employees to know those facts, nothing is done to insist that the full figures are published. At National Grid, a figure of £8,000 a year is declared—but the pension is worth £160,000, and it could cost £2 million.

There is no evidence that the Government want those figures disclosed to the public, shareholders and employees. [Hon. Members: "Shameful."] As my hon. Friends say, it is shameful that consultation papers are prepared, promises made and legislation pledged—then the matter is sidelined, with no guarantee that the problem will ever be dealt with under this Government. A few powerful interests in the privatised boardrooms and elsewhere are blocking the full disclosure of pension information—and in yet another lurch to the right, the Conservative party is prepared to go along with it.

The Government want to do nothing and hope that the controversy will go away. Let us examine the Greenbury recommendations and what has happened to them. Two-year rolling contracts were to be outlawed in favour of one-year contracts. Nothing has been done. The utilities were to examine their remuneration and put their house in order, yet small shareholders have still been told nothing. The stock exchange listing changes have been delayed until the end of the year.

As for consultation on long-term incentives and share options, nothing has been done either. The promised review by the utilities to explain their remuneration packages, with a requirement for discussion at the first available annual general meeting, has not materialised. The report of a few days ago showed that only one of 24 utilities had taken steps to implement that recommendation.

What about the share option proposals? It was recommended that no share options should be awarded during the first six months after a privatisation. Nothing has been done about that. It was further recommended that share options should not be awarded at 85 per cent. of their value—nothing has been done. How can the Conservative party tolerate the Prime Minister and Cabinet promising in the summer to take action, but doing nothing by the autumn, even as the abuses continue? The Conservative party has become a faction promoting the interests of the powerful few.

What has happened to one-nation Toryism in Britain? The Conservative party stands by as the main recommendation to prevent exploitation and harassment is removed, in the Queen's Speech, from the housing and homelessness Act. At the same time, the party does nothing while abuses are identified. There was a time when one-nation Toryism controlled a majority in Cabinet. It was once even in control in 10 Downing street—it was even the dominant force among Conservative grassroots. But in the 1980s, one-nation politicians in the Conservative party were reduced to holding fringe meetings and attending the occasional lecture or well-fed dining club—

Mr. Michael Fabricant (Mid-Staffordshire): It is interesting to hear the hon. Gentleman's discourse on the history of the Conservative party. What we have not yet heard are any tangible Labour party policies, or how the hon. Gentleman intends to pay for any of them.

Mr. Brown: I have just outlined 10 recommendations by Greenbury which the Government have failed to implement or whose implementation they have failed to supervise. We shall not take lectures from the Conservative party, which promises to implement proposals and then, as with Greenbury, fails to do so.

To return to one-nation Conservativism: even the solitary token wet speech traditionally given by Peter Walker to the Tory party conference is no more. At this year's conference the one-nation group could not even,

muster a fringe meeting—they had to make do with a drinks reception. The Macleod society, which was to have been set up in a blaze of glory, could not find a sponsor for its first pamphlet, and is said to have only seven known members.

Mr. Fabricant: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. It is one thing, perhaps, to comment on what is not in the Queen's Speech; but is it in order to discuss the Conservative party conference in this debate?

Madam Deputy Speaker: That depends entirely on whether it is a passing reference or the mainstay of a speech. I am assuming that it is the former.

Mr. Brown: It is indeed, Madam Deputy Speaker. The hon. Gentleman appears to be somewhat carried away after his appearance in "The Final Cut". Perhaps he is trying to sketch out a scene for a future edition of the programme—but it carries little weight in this place. He would do better to tell me whether he supports the one-nation group or whether he is on the extreme right of the Conservative party.

The country wants to know what has happened to the social conscience of the Conservative party. It used to exist, but it has now almost disappeared—

Mr. Ray Whitney (Wycombe) *rose—*

Mr. Brown: A one-nation Conservative? I shall take one intervention from a supporter of the chairman of the 1922 committee, and then another from one of his opponent's supporters—I do not know which the hon. Gentleman is.

Mr. Whitney: The hon. Gentleman talks of what the country wants to know. What the country wants to know, and what we have now been waiting to hear for 34 minutes, is the policy of the Labour party.

Mr. Brown: I have been outlining the investment and employment measures, and the action on the privatised utilities—

Mr. Brandreth: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Brown: Does the House think that I am going to give way to the hon. Gentleman—who might do better to spend more time in his constituency, given the narrow majority that he must hold on to? I shall proceed with my speech, and respond to no more interruptions.

A further lurch to the right in the Conservative party relates to taxation policy. We now find that the Prime Minister has set the party a tax objective: the abolition of capital gains tax and inheritance tax. Who are the main beneficiaries of the new proposal? None other than the directors of the privatised water and electricity companies, which stand to gain £40 million each.

The richest 5,000 in the privatised utilities have gained £500 million. Here is an idea that originated with the poll tax and from the No Turning Back group, the 92 group and the Adam Smith Institute. It was peddled on the right of the Conservative party, and then adopted by the Prime Minister for his leadership campaign. Capital taxation has been supported by every Conservative Prime Minister this century, from Bonar Law to Lady Thatcher, because they understood that it was necessary—in particular, to prevent tax avoidance through the declaration of income as capital. Yet the Conservative party has now come up with a proposal that can benefit only a small number of people, and the Chancellor is having to adopt it as a major objective in taxation policy.

Mr. Tim Devlin (Stockton, South): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Brown: I will not give way again.

Abolishing capital gains tax and inheritance tax is now a tax priority. What has happened to the Chancellor—the person who once represented one-nation Conservatism, and who once called himself a one-nation Tory? How has that proposal slipped past him?

The Chancellor has never been a details man—as he confessed after his speech on the Maastricht treaty, which he had never read. Does he now wish that he had been a little more careful with the detail? Does he wish that he had studied it more accurately? Is it not true that a new objective in taxation policy that can reward only the richest has been smuggled through the Treasury?

Sir Peter Tapsell (East Lindsey): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Brown: No, I will not.

The whole Budget process has been planned in Conservative central office, just like the Queen's Speech, and directed by the chairman of the Conservative party. The narrowest interests of the Conservative party are to come before the interests of the nation. It is all directed less towards getting the economy right than towards—in the words of the Conservative party chairman—"wrong-footing the Labour party". That is what the right hon. Gentleman said yesterday, when he held a press conference on tax and spending issues.

Even the Chancellor is now forced to admit that this will be "a political Budget". We know that it is not about the needs of the country, but about the needs of the Conservative party. Just as the Chancellor has been bounced into a policy favouring the abolition of capital gains tax and inheritance tax, on Budget day he will be bounced into doing things that he knows are not in the interests of the country.

What shall we see next Tuesday? The door of No. 11 Downing street will swing open; the photographers will step forward for the traditional shots; the Chancellor will appear on the doorstep, looking around for the official Rover that will drive up and from which, eventually, will emerge the chairman of the Conservative party to hand over the red Budget box. The Budget will have been conceived in Conservative central office rather than in the Treasury, but, to be fair to the Chancellor, he will already be well aware of what is in it: the chairman of the Conservative party will have briefed the press on its contents the day before.

So where is the Conservative party now? There is nothing in the Gracious Speech to rebuild our industries. There is nothing to tackle the huge skills gap revealed in the White Paper on competitiveness. There is nothing to bridge the gap between rich and poor in this country, and nothing to rebuild its infrastructure. There is nothing of which the Conservative party can be proud. There is no grand strategy, no broad vision, no new programme.

Even after the Budget next Tuesday, the Conservatives will still be in difficulty, still in the hole that the Chancellor says they are in. Nothing that they can give

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away next Tuesday can restore what they have already taken away. Even if they brought down taxes by 2p, 3p or 4p in the pound, the Chancellor would still have to find £6 billion to £10 billion to restore to the taxpayer the equivalent of the 7p in the pound by which he and his colleagues have raised tax since 1992.

That is the Tory strategy to try to win over the people, but a tax cut every five years will never make up for the 21 tax rises in the years in between—tax rises followed by tax cuts. No doubt, if the Conservatives had the chance, the new tax cuts would again be followed by tax rises after the election.

That is all part of a pattern that exposes a short-termist Government, motivated and driven only by electoral calculations, negative in all their campaigning and acting like an Opposition rather than a Government. Next week the Prime Minister will have had five years in power but, as the former Chancellor of the Exchequer, the right hon. Member for Kingston upon Thames, has said, he has been in government, but he has not been making the decisions. There will be no prize of five more years, no street parties and no celebrations.

In 1990, the Prime Minister promised a classless society, opportunity for all and a nation at ease with itself. Instead, under his leadership his party has become a group dominated by extremists who have abandoned the centre in pursuit of unity—a two-nation party when there are no longer two-nation answers to the problems that the country faces.

The Conservatives are a party of the past, huddling round burnt-out ideologies, too weak to face up to the challenges of the next century. As we heard in the Gracious Speech, they are reducing complex problems to the repetition of the simplest and crudest slogans—scapegoating, xenophobic and turning on minorities. They do not care what is left among the ruins.

A divided nation and an unsuccessful economy are too high a price to pay for the last days of the Conservative Government. They are out of touch and their Ministers are out of their depth; they are out of time, and they should be out of office.

4.57 pm

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Kenneth Clarke): Earlier this week, on a more solemn occasion, the nation was glued to its television sets as a major public figure made important pronouncements: the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) was trying to make an announcement about tax policy. It misfired—yet the author of the 10p tax gimmick has the nerve to accuse me of being "never a details man".

The hon. Gentleman has not mentioned his new idea today. I thought that we might be given a few more details, but apparently the policy that nearly emerged over the past weekend of error has already been withdrawn, and it played no part in the speech of the shadow Chancellor in the House of Commons four days later, a week before the Budget.

Mr. Gordon Brown *rose—*

Mr. Clarke: No. I shall give way in a moment, but first I ask the hon. Gentleman to tell us which of his shadow Cabinet colleagues gave him the strong advice that they wished to hear no more about income tax at 10p in the pound.

Mr. Brown: The Chancellor's first two jokes have misfired. Which does he think is fairer—the objective of a 10p starting rate for income tax or the abolition of capital gains tax and inheritance tax? Will he give a truthful answer?

Mr. Clarke: It was not my joke—the 10p in the pound rate was the hon. Gentleman's joke. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman expected me to come back with a 5p in the pound rate, as he appears to want to conduct economic policy in that way. The hon. Gentleman knows perfectly well that it was a bizarre and ill-judged policy, and it is the nearest he has ever got to showing us an inch of detail that we could discuss in the House. That is an abuse.

Mr. Brown *rose—*

Mr. Clarke: Will the hon. Gentleman give us a measure? Is there a Labour party tax commitment that he might wish to offer the House?

Mr. Brown: Will the Chancellor answer the question I put to him? I have set down the principles for a modern taxation policy as fairness, encouraging work and opportunity and being honest with the public, none of which is achieved by the modern Conservative party. Which is the fairer—a 10p starting rate for tax to help work opportunities and to reward effort, or the abolition of capital gains tax and inheritance tax?

Mr. Clarke: I believe in the principles of fairness in taxation, and we demonstrate those principles. I believe that taxation should encourage work and enterprise, and I am delighted to hear the Labour party at least pay lip service to the principle of incentive, which has guided the Conservative party's approach to taxation for a long time. We are committed in the long term to the abolition of capital gains tax and inheritance tax. The ex-socialist in the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East has not yet discovered the importance of capital taxation in an enterprise economy. His remarks on capital gains tax go back to the old politics of envy.

The hon. Gentleman's policy of a 10p in the pound rate of income tax is an incredible gimmick, and independent commentators have pointed out that such a rate does not serve the objectives that he said it would. The hon. Gentleman is merely trying to enter into a bidding match outside this House and is aiming below our clear objective of a 20p in the pound basic rate, to which I shall return.

The hon. Gentleman's speech was wholly typical of his approach to these occasions. He insists on having an economic debate less than a week before the Budget, and it is an obvious opportunity for the shadow Chancellor of the Exchequer to come to the House of Commons and give a shadow Budget. But he never does so.

If the hon. Gentleman can praise one-nation Conservatism—which I certainly support—I can praise the Liberal Democrats, although this may never be repeated on the Floor of the House. The Liberal Democrats always set out their proposals on taxation at this time of year, and they say what they would spend that taxation on. They set out their views on interest rates and set out their economic policy. The hon. Member for Dunfermline, East always comes here and gives a rant and he always goes back to a

few of his favourite themes, such as the state of the Conservative party, but he hopes that he will not upset the shadow Foreign Secretary as much as his attempts to say something about economic policy always seem to do. The forced smile of the hon. Gentleman does not conceal the fact that arguments about divided parties do not come too well from that side of the House.

The shadow Chancellor should come to the House and give us a full set of tax plans, spending plans and borrowing plans. But he cannot do that, because the numbers must add up. The hon. Gentleman cannot deliver a shadow Budget, because he does not have the policy components necessary to do so.

Mr. Peter Hain (Neath): Will the Chancellor give way?

Mr. Clarke: I will give way to the hon. Gentleman, who I hope will give me a policy on interest rates or inflation. I would also like to know whether he is rising in support of the official Opposition amendment, which was supposedly moved a moment ago by the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East. Does he support the amendment tabled by the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) and others, which has some policy in it? That amendment attacks the market economy and goes back to the old values of the Labour movement. I would like to know which amendment the hon. Gentleman supports, and then I want to hear a point of policy.

Mr. Hain: Will the Chancellor give us a clear commitment that, when he is the shadow Chancellor in two years' time, he will deliver a shadow Budget one week before my hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, East gives his Budget? Will he promise that that shadow Budget will give marginal tax rates, detailed spending commitments and all the other paraphernalia of the Budget he is demanding from my hon. Friend? Will the Chancellor give a solemn promise to the House this afternoon that he will give a shadow Budget in two years' time?

Mr. Clarke: I have been in opposition, and the Conservative party in opposition had clear economic policies. We most certainly knew what we were attacking the then Government for, as they had reduced this country to being the laughing stock of western Europe in any industrial league table. We put those policies into effect in the 1980s when we transformed this country into an industrial success story. We have clear objectives—

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr. Clarke: I will not take any interventions for the moment. The hon. Member for Dunfermline, East was generous in giving way, but I do not want to take as long as he did.

We have a clear set of objectives for our economic policies—Government borrowing falling to zero; public spending below 40 per cent. of GDP; inflation below 2.5 per cent.; a basic rate of income tax of 20 per cent. Those are clear and consistent objectives, and we are putting them into place. We are delivering a recovery that will be for keeps and will increase the living standards of families year after year.

The Labour party, after years and years in opposition, does not have a single element of a policy framework that has either been agreed upon by itself or that its Front-Bench Members have ever expounded or set out.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): The Chancellor has clearly set out his objectives, and has articulated them on a number of occasions. During the debate on the summer economic forecast, he said:

"borrowing is actually taxation deferred."—[*Official Report*, 12 July 1995; Vol. 263, c. 979.]

Does he agree that—against the background of a huge overshoot in current borrowing—any tax cuts in next week's Budget would have to be clawed back after the next election?

Mr. Clarke: I have just set out our policy on borrowing, and one of the reasons for that policy has just been correctly set out by the hon. Gentleman. We are committed to reducing the borrowing balance to zero over the medium term, and that remains our firm commitment. We intend to return to a situation where the ratio of debt to GDP in this country is declining, and that is a policy that my predecessors and I have followed consistently. I have never heard the shadow Chancellor express a clear opinion on that objective, and certainly he did not do so this afternoon.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr. Clarke: I shall give way later, or I shall be giving way more frequently than the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East did. I shall give the background against which our policies should be seen, so far as the Budget next Tuesday is concerned.

The economy has been growing steadily for three years. Output in this country is now 6 per cent. above its previous peak in the boom a few years ago.

Mr. Roger Berry (Kingswood): Will the Chancellor give way?

Mr. Clarke: The International Monetary Fund expects Britain to be joint top with Germany in the league table for growth in the seven main industrial countries next year. Unemployment has fallen by more than 700,000 since its peak, and 1 million new jobs have been created since the recovery started.

Mr. Berry *rose*—

Mr. Clarke: Some 250,000 of those jobs were created last year alone, and the majority of those new jobs were full-time jobs.

Mr. Berry: Will the Chancellor give way on unemployment?

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I shall make it clear that hon. Members must resume their seats if the Chancellor does not give way.

Mr. Clarke: I was about to add that we are enjoying the best run of low inflation for half a century.

Mr. Berry: Will the Chancellor give way?

Mr. Clarke: I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman. I am the Chancellor of the Exchequer in the only country in western Europe that has got unemployment down by 750,000, and the only country in western Europe that has been creating jobs—some 500,000—since the recession, so I will not be shouted at about unemployment by a member of a party that is in favour of a minimum wage and the social chapter, but does not even have the nerve

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to say at what level a minimum wage would be, because it knows that we would put a figure on how many jobs the minimum wage would destroy. I shall listen out of courtesy to the hon. Gentleman on unemployment, as he might produce a policy. That would be more than his Front-Bench spokesman has done.

Mr. Berry: I thought that the right hon. and learned Gentleman was the Chancellor of the Exchequer, and not me. If his policies and those of his predecessors have been so effective in tackling unemployment, why has unemployment under the Tories not been less than the level they inherited in any single year since 1979?

Mr. Clarke: We employ a higher—*[Interruption.]* There have been huge changes in our labour market and those of our international competitors since 1979, and this country has prospered from these changes when compared with the rest of the western world. There are far more people in our work force now than in 1979. We have a higher proportion of our work force in employment than any other major western European economy. [HON. MEMBERS: "That is irrelevant."] It is not irrelevant. We have a lower level of unemployment than either France or Germany. The background is that we alone of the western European economies are creating new full-time jobs. We have a background of falling unemployment.

The Labour party has no policy on the labour market except the social chapter, the minimum wage and a bit of policy about bringing back trade union recognition. Labour Members never speak about it. They give no detail about it. They would not even tell the Labour conference what figure they would put on the minimum wage. They know that the only policies they have on unemployment would drive it up, destroy jobs and put us back in our good performance compared with the rest of western Europe. That is why—

Mr. Berry: Will the Chancellor give way?

Mr. Clarke: No. It is enough. It is one consequence of the rules of the House that, when one gives way, one has the last word. I cannot keep coming back to the same point.

Mr. Berry: It is not my fault.

Mr. Clarke: It is not the hon. Gentleman's fault. It is because Labour Front-Bench Members have nothing to say on unemployment.

The record that I have just described is the reason why an independent body such as the OECD has described our recent economic performance as impressive. I will not give the House all the other favourable adjectives that it has used about the current performance of the British economy. I have no intention of putting any of it at risk. The Labour party does not have the slightest clue what it would do about it if ever the whole thing were put into its hands. I hope that that will always be avoided.

This year, growth in the economy has slowed. That is because I raised interest rates in order to keep inflation down. I did so because rising inflation destroyed the last three recoveries. I increased interest rates early to nip inflation in the bud. That, and my control of public expenditure, allowed me to resist pressure that might otherwise have taken interest rates further.

The approach of the Labour party to public spending control, the tax measures that I had to take, public borrowing in general and all the interest changes that I have ever made or refused to make has been non-existent. There has been no response. The official Opposition, pretending to be a Government in exile, have no views on the struggle that we have made to ensure that the recovery is not jeopardised again by a return to inflation.

We used to have an official Opposition. We used to have a Labour party with socialist policies. We beat it time after time in elections. The Labour party has vacated those policies. Labour Members have turned from those policies to light entertainment in their speeches. They hope that they will get away with that and put themselves in charge of the best and strongest economic recovery in western Europe. Heaven forfend; the future of Britain is far too important for that.

No serious independent forecaster expects the economy to move back into recession. All the signs are that growth will be sustained. A great deal of that will depend on investment. Of course we agree on the importance of investment and improving Britain's investment record. Business surveys suggest that the prospects for investment are good. Good economic conditions stimulate investment.

Manufacturing investment rose by 12 per cent. last year. Consumer spending is on a steady upward path. Rising incomes and employment should keep it that way. We have retained our competitive position in the overseas market. Those are the policies. Those are the results on which the well-being and prosperity of British people and their families depend. Those are the serious matters to which the Labour movement in the House and outside contributes absolutely nothing.

We have heard a great deal about league tables. The Labour party has used the table out of the competitiveness White Paper, to which it has added a little. It has bought advertising space to publicise the table and said that the OECD figures of GDP per head since 1979 are some kind of prosperity league table. GDP per head is open to its difficulties. Is the Labour party going to turn Britain into a secondary banking haven? If so, exactly how does it propose to go about it? Are we going to compare the proportion of oil revenue per head of population to that of Norway? Is that somehow rediscovery of oil? Norway is always one of the countries that the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East cites as having overtaken us.

We have overtaken social democrat countries in Scandinavia which have followed the policies which until recently the Labour party advocated. Of course we have been overtaken by Hong Kong and Singapore, which are small island states in Asia. We should consider our position now in relation to productivity, inward investment and competitiveness in world markets. The hon. Gentleman misuses the tables.

The hon. Gentleman starts with 1979, when we took over an economy racked by debt, recession, strikes and unemployment. For a time in 1981 the United Kingdom's economy dropped to 19th—even in the hon. Gentleman's league table—but that was because of the hon. Gentleman's party's recession, and, even in his table, we have recovered from that recession.

Mr. Gordon Brown: Will the Chancellor give way?

Mr. Clarke: I shall give the hon. Gentleman some fresh figures and then give way.

Let us just examine where we are now. I agree that the measure of purchasing power parities is the way to do it. The United Kingdom's GDP per person is in line with the European Union average. The Central Statistical Office's recent "Business in Europe", another of our glossy publications, shows that, between 1981 and 1993, the United Kingdom's economy grew faster than those of Germany, France, and Italy, and it grew faster than the European Union average. That growth is showing on the ground: there are now 3.5 million active businesses in the United Kingdom, which is 50 per cent. more than there were in 1979. Business numbers are still rising, and business profitability is very high.

The hon. Gentleman referred to nationalised industries. The first thing to say about nationalised industries is that they used to cost the British taxpayer £50 million every week. Privatised companies now contribute about £55 million every week in revenue.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. There is some noise in the Chamber. When the Chancellor was speaking about those comparisons, I could not hear whether he took as his starting year 1979, when the Conservatives came into office, or 1981, which was after a very deep recession.

Madam Deputy Speaker: The Chancellor can deal with that himself.

Mr. Clarke: The starting point that is always used by Opposition spokesmen—it is logical to look at when we first came into office—is 1979. In 1979, we took over from a Government who had an enormous amount of public borrowing because of its attempt to reduce taxation. It was an economy in steep decline which, between then and 1981, had to be turned round. Using 1979 as the date pulls down the average figures. Until 1981, the decline that we had been left carried on. The argument is very old, and it is only because those figures have been dug out that I resort to it. We had that argument all the way through the 1980s, and we always won it because people clearly remembered why we had to increase taxes and get borrowing under control when we first came in. They remembered how we got to the 1981 position, for which the comparisons are very different.

Throughout the 1980s, our growth pattern was faster than those of the other European countries I have named.

Mr. Gordon Brown: Will the Chancellor give way?

Mr. Clarke: The hon. Gentleman should listen a little further because he might learn something, perhaps for the next speech.

Mr. Salmond: How on earth can the Chancellor seriously compare the records when he misses out the first two years of an extremely deep recession? If he wants to compare the Government's record against that of other countries or against that of other parties, he should compare it over the whole 16 years; he should not miss out the first two years.

Mr. Clarke: I make it quite clear when I say that, throughout the 1980s, we grew faster than Germany, France and Italy. In his intervention, the hon. Gentleman pretended to mishear what I said, and he said that I was wrong. He knew perfectly well, however, what I was talking about. He wants to include the first two years after the winter of discontent in order to pull our record down. The winter of discontent was the creation of the Labour party, and it was the achievement of the Conservative party to get us out of it and set ourselves on the way to being the enterprise centre of Europe.

Mr. Gordon Brown: Will the Chancellor therefore confirm that he accepts that we were 13th in national income per head in 1979 and that we are now 18th? Will he also accept that we were 13th in 1974 and 13th in 1979, and that all the decline has happened under a Conservative Government? Will he explain why we have slipped from 13th to 18th under a Conservative Government?

Mr. Clarke: I have already pointed out to him that using GDP per head figures in that way is ridiculous. We published a whole document. The hon. Gentleman has become a monomaniac about one table, which he misuses in order to make his totally specious point. Our inward investment, our consumption, and our personal prosperity have risen throughout the years which, using this one table in a rather eccentric fashion, he claims were years of decline. It is no substitute for policy. We are doing better than the others now and the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East is trying to pretend that he has some hidden secret that might enable him to do better.

Mr. Brown: The right hon. and learned Gentleman now wants to talk about investment. Will he explain why we have fallen to 21st in the investment league since 1979?

Mr. Clarke: I shall give the hon. Gentleman some comparative figures on investment. Let us look at investment in the whole economy [HON. MEMBERS: "From 1979."] I do not mind responding on the whole period of office. I am one of the last survivors of the long march and I am still here. I even survived a period in opposition to the Labour party, when it had a policy and it was a wrong one—it perhaps was even worse then.

Investment in the whole economy under the last Labour Government grew by a grand total of 1.4 per cent. Since the Conservative Government came to power, investment has grown by 31 per cent. Obviously, we have been in power far longer than the Labour party, so one has to look at the annualised rate of increase—for the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East, this man of detail, that means how much per year. It has been 1.8 per cent. per year under us, as compared with 0.3 per cent. each year under Labour. Investment has grown six times faster under Conservative Government than under the last Labour Government.

Let us look at a few international league tables—

Mr. Brown *rose—*

Mr. Clarke: Let me give the hon. Gentleman just one more figure from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development on increased investment—*[Interruption.]* I have dealt with unemployment and now we are on to investment, which was the next point that the hon. Gentleman laboured.

Judging from the annualised rate for the increase in investment between 1979 and 1994, we have moved to the top of the investment league for major economies in Europe. I just gave the annualised rate for the United

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Kingdom, which was 1.8 per cent. but in France it was 1.2 per cent., in Germany it was 1.1 per cent. and in Italy, 0.7 per cent. We have outstripped those countries, although they all did a great deal better than Britain ever did under a Labour Government. We are top of the table; we are not bottom any more.

The prospects for future investment, which is what matters—*[Interruption.]* That is what we are tackling in the Budget and that is what the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East will have to talk about next week—the prospects for future investment. Most forecasters share the Treasury expectation that investment will pick up strongly this year. The signs of investment growth are there. Manufacturing investment is, as I said, up 12 per cent. on a year ago. Business surveys all show that prospects for investment remain healthy and the Confederation of British Industry investment intentions balance remains buoyant.

All that investment record—the strong record now—shows that we are making progress towards our goal. It is one of the reasons why the British economy has been growing faster than the G7 average for the past three years. If we are looking at league tables, the International Monetary Fund expects the United Kingdom to be joint top with Germany of the seven top economies—the G7 growth league table—in 1996. That is because of the success of our policies, to which the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East presents not the slightest alternative.

Mr. Roy Beggs (East Antrim): Does the Chancellor agree that Government policies have largely contributed to the success that Northern Ireland now enjoys in attracting inward investment? Does he further agree that the location of that investment is best left to individual companies to decide rather than being subject to the direction of officials?

Mr. Clarke: Yes, I entirely agree and I am absolutely delighted that the Northern Ireland economy is performing so strongly. As part of the United Kingdom, it is quite rightly benefiting from the success of British economic policy and of our success in making this country the most attractive location for inward investment in western Europe.

I can set out a policy, although I am in Budget purdah. The hon. Member for Dunfermline, East knows that he has the advantage of me on this occasion, or he ought to have, because I cannot give specific measures beyond that. With no purdah, he produces nothing. The veil remains tightly drawn and nothing is believed. Every time he comes to the House on occasions when he ought to be saying what he would do if he was given stewardship of the national economy, he ought to answer our questions—the questions that I always ask.

Does he think that public borrowing is too high, too low or about right? Does he believe that we are controlling public spending too much or too little, and would he control it more firmly to achieve his incredible 10p rate? I have asked him questions, but he retreats into the childish obfuscations, "We will wait to see what the economy will be like. We will await the full information."

As is obvious from the folders that the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East clutches when he comes to the Chamber to speak, we shower him with information. We have a Red Book of the Budget. Would a Labour Government put out a different Red Book? What on earth would be added to the knowledge of the British economy by a Labour Government, if they ever came to power? What about the statistics from the Central Statistical Office? We have put it aside; it is a totally independent agency. What statistics does he want it to produce to enable him to form some judgments on these vital matters?

It is not that the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East is waiting to see the books, or that he does not know anything about the British economy. Every other financial commentator in the country bombards me with advice on what to do in the run-up to a Budget. Everyone I meet in the Rose and Crown tells me what he or she wants me to do in the Budget. The hon. Gentleman is the only man with no advice and no opinions—the only man in this country who thinks that talking about politics and economics is not allowed in polite company. He is shadow Chancellor and he has no opinions on any of those matters.

At the last election, Labour stood on a policy. The party had a policy of increasing taxation and public expenditure. It was set out with clarity. There was a shadow Budget and there were no excuses then. Labour was a tax-and-spend party. We stood on a platform of aiming for lower taxation and cutting taxes—*[Interruption.]* Both policies were obviously based on the mistaken belief that the recession was about to end. Faced with £50 billion of borrowing, we acted in the national interest. We raised taxation and controlled public spending. In every sensible step we took, we were opposed by the Labour party.

Had Labour won the last election, what would it have done? Yes, a Labour Government would have raised taxation because they would have raised public spending, which is what they committed themselves to. They would have increased taxation more and more because they would have discovered that they had to tackle that borrowing.

Since that time, we have consistently set out our aims—our low taxation agenda, our desire to get borrowing down to zero and our desire for recovery. The Labour party—the all-tax-and-spend party, which it still is—has relapsed into silence.

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson (Coventry, North-West): The Chancellor must be aware that, just before the last election, the Government knew that the public sector borrowing requirement would go up to £50 billion.

Mr. Clarke: No.

Mr. Robinson: Of course the Government knew that. Given that set of circumstances, how could they have gone into the election with the promises that they made at the time?

Mr. Clarke: If the hon. Gentleman thinks that all economic forecasting is spot on like that, so that Governments always know what is going to happen, he is making the job of Chancellor of the Exchequer sound a lot easier than I have discovered that it usually is. At the last election, all the parties plainly proceeded on the basis that we were out of the recession. We reacted in the public interest and the Labour party reacted by going into a burrow, from which it never emerges with any policy.

We know that tax and spend has not been abandoned. In one week last month in speeches in the House, 40 per cent. of Labour Members called for more public spending. Nearly half the interventions from the Labour party around this silent trappist monk who speaks on economic policy are to demand more public spending. The silence of the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East merely leaves him exposed to all the pressures in his party. It is no good him pretending to be a better one-nation Conservative than I am. I was there first and I know my way around this course much better than he does. He is no one-nation Conservative—he is not a shadow Chancellor of the Exchequer at all.

Let us have a look at what some members of the hon. Gentleman's party say about his pronouncements. The right hon. Member—I am sorry, I am premature, the hon. Member—for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) used these words early this week when she heard of something that struck into her soul so that she felt she had to respond to the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East; I think it was the 10p promise but it might have been workfare for young people. On the air, she said:

"Gordon can say anything he likes if he thinks it is going to win the election. But ordinary Labour party supporters in this country, particularly the poor and the unemployed, when Labour is in power will be looking for other priorities from tax cuts."

What about the TUC general secretary, John Monk, a man for whom I have considerable admiration? He said:

"Rather than tax cuts, the emphasis should be to increase spending on areas that need it."

We have had enough of this stupid bidding match where the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East tries to emerge from his silence to claim that he is likely to cut taxes more than a Conservative Chancellor is likely to cut taxes—complete nonsense and quite incredible unless he gives us some policy.

It is not an impossible question, on the eve of a Budget, to ask the Labour party what it thinks the basic rate of tax should be. It does not know whether I am going to change it or what my views are, but it presumably knows what the basic rate of tax should be. Obviously, it will raise the higher rates of tax. It must know about that and have some ambition. To what is it going to raise the higher rates of tax?

Will anybody tell us what is the policy of the Labour party? Is there any Labour Member prepared to get up and say on this key issue, a week before a Budget, what the policy of the Labour party on this issue and what the basic rate of tax should be? Are interest rates too high or are they too low? What inflation target should be set? Is there any member of the Labour movement, from the left, right or middle or from the shadow Treasury team, who has the slightest view on that simple matter? This is a total farce. *[Interruption.]* Oh, we have a figure.

Mr. Fabricant: Does my right hon. and learned Friend realise that the reason why Labour Members cannot answer is that the shadow Chancellor's puppet master, the hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson), is not in his place?

Mr. Clarke: I think that that is probably right. The hon. Member for Hartlepool came up with what he thought was a remedy for the Labour party: "Let's stop having these policies, leave the rest to me, shouting over the telephone to BBC producers." That is no basis on which any political party should ever aspire to government in a modern state. *[Interruption.]* I will not go back to the questions that I have already answered.

On the key things on which Labour has a policy that it will not withdraw—the minimum wage and the social chapter—no detail is given or referred to, but they would be destructive of our competitive position. Everybody knows that I am pro-European, but I am vehemently against ever accepting the social chapter in this country, and vehemently against setting a minimum wage. All the talk of the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East about moving from dependency into work—it was the theme of my Budget last year when I worked on family credit; he has stolen it from me—is made nonsense of by his talk on the minimum wage, as my hon. Friend the Member for City of Chester (Mr. Brandreth) made clear in his intervention.

Let me remind the House of what Adair Turner, the director general of the CBI, said on 15 November. This is the view of British industry and business. He said:

"We do not agree at all on the Social Chapter and the minimum wage. We fear that the European Union and Social Chapter would force us to sign a blank cheque to cover the huge raft of workers rights it promises."

He went on:

"Mr. Blair claimed he would not sign up wholesale to everything in it. He may believe he does not want everything the EU wants. But because of this structure there are some things he won't be able to avoid."

I am accused by the shadow Chancellor of not having read the Maastricht treaty. I can find my way around the Maastricht treaty a whole better than most people in the House, and as well as any. The Leader of the Opposition made it quite clear that he had not got the first idea about the social chapter and did not realise that he would not be able to pick and choose on the things that were introduced by a qualified majority vote.

This debate is occupied by the Labour party with no economic policy or plans at all, but a large number of threats loom in the background from some of its supporters and interests, and its record of incompetence in power in the past. It is no good saying to the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East, "Where's the beef?", to use the old phrase; he does not even produce a skinny kebab by way of policy when he comes to the House.

I will come to the House next Tuesday free of purdah and present the Government's detailed economic policies for next year. They will be guided by the clear, consistent principles that I have set out ever since I have been Chancellor of the Exchequer. They will be dedicated to making this country the enterprise centre of Europe, an economy that can earn the wealth in which all the people can share and which will pay for the public services about which they care.

We are on our way to out-performing the rest of Europe. We have recovered from the disaster of the 1970s. The 1990s are going to see this country at the head of every economic league table that matters if we stick to the course on which we are set.

5.35 pm

Mr. Tony Benn (Chesterfield): I was elected 45 years ago next week in succession to a Chancellor of the Exchequer. I have heard many Chancellors of the Exchequer since, some of them eminently forgettable. I think that we may have heard another.

[Mr. Tony Benn]

One thing that has not impressed people over the years is the selective use of statistics and selective quotations. People are not entirely and solely economic animals with a Treasury mode of thinking. Even if tonight, as he will, the Chancellor carries a majority in the House, he has not carried the British public on the policies that he has pursued. That is not only because of the so-called competence or incompetence of the Government; it is because the objectives of the Government are not shared by the generality of the British people.

My hon. Friends and I have put down an amendment to the humble Address, which though not called—I cannot complain about that—it is in order for me to read into the record. It states:

"But humbly regret that the Gracious Speech made no reference to the injustice and suffering caused by policies based upon the supremacy of market forces in the United Kingdom and world-wide, which have had the effect of elevating profit above the satisfaction of human need, widening the gap between rich and poor, causing mass unemployment and homelessness, starving industry of the investment it requires, harming the public utilities and the social infrastructure, eroding the Welfare State and universal benefits, neglecting essential public services in health and education, denying adequate pensions necessary for retired people, diminishing local authority and trade union rights, producing widespread personal insecurity and fear, creating social tensions and increasing the risk of conflict, encouraging the spread of racialism and intolerance, inflicting damage on the environment, undermining the democratic process and civil liberties and spreading disillusionment, pessimism and cynicism, all of which are features of global capitalism; and calls for the adoption of modern, democratic and socialist policies designed to secure the full use of all Britain's human and physical resources, and their fair distribution, for the benefit of the nation as a whole."

It is by their objectives that Governments are judged. During wartime, victory is the only test. Nobody talks about inflation in wartime, only of defeating the enemy—killing the enemy. When I was first elected—and I am proud of it—the objectives that I have read out were widely shared by both sides of the House. After all, Winston Churchill had been an old Liberal. He had himself nationalised British Petroleum when he was First Lord of the Admiralty. He introduced the Sunday shopping rule and the wages councils. Since 1950, the centre of British politics has altered radically to the right.

We see the consequences in the opinion polls. I do not have a great deal of time for opinion polling. I have no time for political images. The image that I have is the one that I use to shave in the mornings. I cannot change it. However, the Chancellor would be foolish to believe that one can run a society on the basis that profit is more important than human factors.

My right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition, speaking in the House in June after the Halifax summit, said:

"is not the central issue the revolution in the globalisation of the financial and currency markets, which now wield massive speculative power over Governments of all countries and have the capacity seriously to disrupt economic progress?"—[*Official Report*, 19 June 1995; Vol. 262, c. 23.]

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has no real control over what should happen in Britain because he has to satisfy the international markets that his policies will not interfere with their objective of the maximisation of profit. That is the function of a Chancellor of the Exchequer and if, by any chance, we were foolish enough to adopt a single currency, so that his job moved to Frankfurt, not only would those factors determine British policy, as they now do, and what we are allowed to do, but the power of the law would be in the Frankfurt bank rather than in the Treasury.

I, and people whom I meet when I go round the country, ask ourselves what the real cause of the problem is. Is it an incompetent and unfair Government? That is an easy thing for an Opposition Member to say. I believe, however, that there is something much deeper. If the House is in disrepute at the moment, it is not just because of sleaze and all the arguments, but because we in the House do not address the central questions that have to be addressed if we are to provide a decent society.

Mr. Matthew Carrington (Fulham): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Benn: I do not intend to be provocative. I hope to be thoughtful, and not to say anything that will bring a Conservative Member to his feet with a quotation that he might think will embarrass me. That is not the sort of speech I want to make.

Mr. Carrington: I was not going to quote.

Mr. Benn: I do not want to give way at the moment.

The county of Derbyshire, which I have the honour, in part, to represent, needs £100 million for school repairs. Derbyshire, like all local authorities, has been strangled by the Government. Local democracy—this matters to Conservative as well as to Labour councillors—has been absolutely strangled. In the 19th century, long before the Labour party was formed, Joe Chamberlain in Birmingham introduced municipal housing, municipal hospitals, municipal water, municipal gas and municipal museums. When I was an RAF trainee, I learned to fly at the Birmingham municipal airport. That was the heyday of local government, which has been absolutely destroyed by the Government's policies.

Let us look at health. I and the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath) are the last remaining Members who sat in the House when Anuerin Bevan was Minister of Health. Anyone who looks at what we were able to start in 1948, when we were bankrupt after the war, will see that there was absolutely free health care when we needed it. It has never, of course, been a free health service. It was free when we needed it, but we paid for it when we were well. That health service has been utterly destroyed. The increases in prescription charges have been so high that prescription charges can even exceed the cost of the drugs if bought in a chemist's shop without a prescription—if that is possible. There are long waiting lists and services are being privatised.

I expect that the House has heard of the little document, which is circulating, about the boat race between the NHS and a Japanese crew. Both sides tried hard to do well, but the Japanese won by a mile. The NHS was very discouraged and set up a consultancy. The consultancy came to the conclusion that the Japanese had eight people rowing and one steering, whereas the NHS had eight people steering and one rowing. The NHS appointed people to look at the problem and decided to reorganise the structure of the team so that there were three steering managers, three assistant steering managers and a director of steering services, and an incentive was offered to the

rower to row harder. When the NHS lost a second race, it laid off the rower for poor performance and sold the boat. It gave the money it got from selling the boat to provide higher than average pay awards for the director of steering services. That is what is happening all over the place. There is masses of bureaucracy in the health service and a denial of what people need.

The people who will have to pay for all this are the people for whom the welfare state was devised. I have been searching for the origins of the Secretary of State for Social Security's new proposals for dealing with welfare. I found them because, after 30 years, Government papers are published. The stationery office has just put on a CD-ROM all the papers for 1964. I give the Chancellor this quotation from his colleague. This is the Conservative Chief Whip, Martin Redmayne, sending a minute to the Prime Minister on 19 June 1964. The Conservative Chief Whip said:

"The first essentials are to accept that the benefits of the Welfare State should not be universally received and secondly, the insurance principle, which is already eroded, is not sacrosanct. In this connection I would like to see all above a certain income level excluded from benefits."

The Conservative Prime Minister, Alec Douglas-Home, wrote in his own hand—I have a photocopy of this:

"Beveridge was very costly. Would another inquiry be as bad or if we win, should we not impose our own scheme?"

It was only the defeat of the Conservatives in 1964 that prevented the welfare state from being dismantled then. It is now the present Government's intention to dismantle it.

We then come to the arguments that are put forward when people say that things are unfair and when they protest. One argument is, "You have no rights without responsibilities." That is a very popular phrase nowadays. I looked at the origin of that phrase and found that those very words are in the Brezhnev constitution in the Soviet Union in 1977. An authoritarian system is being introduced, through the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 and so on, which aims to repress the dissent against policies that are manifestly unfair.

The Chancellor questioned us—that was fair enough—on what the Opposition would do in power. As a candidate, taxation is not an issue that has ever embarrassed me. There are two questions about taxation that ought to be asked: "What is it for?" and, "Who pays for it?" If we tax old-age pensioners by imposing VAT on their fuel to buy a Trident, that is wrong. If we tax people who are better off to fund a proper health service, that is right. The Chancellor, who is a member of the Government, has given 50 billion quid away to the richest 10 per cent. Every family of four—I had the figures broken down for me by the House of Commons Library—spends 40 quid a week on weapons, 40 quid a week paying for unemployment, which is a deliberate policy, 40 quid a week on law and order, much of it caused by mass unemployment, and 20 quid a week on the common agricultural policy.

The Government should not tell us that money is not available for the things that need to be done. Of course it is available, but it involves recasting the priorities to bring the nation's resources fully into use. That should be the objective of government. The Government should see that there is no waste of human resources when so much has to be done. In wartime, as I mentioned, market forces did not prevail. The weapons were provided by the Government. If we could have full employment to kill people, why can we not have full employment now? Why cannot we use unemployed building workers to build the houses that we need? Why cannot we recruit the nurses and teachers we need? Why cannot we have the people who are needed to look after the old? Why not? Because it is not profitable.

The core of the Chancellor's argument is that profitability should be the test of everything that we do. I utterly reject that. The Government use the word "customers". Someone who does not have any money is not a customer and that is why the Government have invented this use of the word "customer". The homeless in cardboard boxes are not customers because they cannot afford a house, so they can be disregarded.

The Government talk about competitiveness as if everything was competitive. Most things that matter in life are not profitable. Schools are not profitable, hospitals are not profitable, the police are not profitable, the Army is not profitable and the Chancellor is not profitable, but the nation knows that it requires those services to survive. We must get on—I do not say get back—to the position where the employment of all people is a national objective. The health of the nation is a national objective and we should ensure that we develop policies for that purpose.

I know that I speak at a time when left-wing views are supposed to be out of date. My own assessment is simple. It is not just socialism that market forces have attempted to destroy, but Parliament, democracy and the social fabric. The House should not think that the situation will remain like that. We need only look at the defeat of Lech Walesa, or what has happened in Russia. Look at the defeat of the right-wing leader of the German SPD. The people are now gaining a new perception of what they want in the 21st century. They want fairness, and they want to use the resources of their own countries for the benefit of their own people for the short span during which we live on the earth.

Debates of that character would be more interesting and relevant to people outside than what passes for an exchange of management expertise. We in this House are not, dare I say it, managers. We are representatives. Who represents the unemployed? Who represents the old who have been denied a pension related to average income? Who represents the kids who cannot get work when they leave school? Who represents the women who get married and cannot get a home? Who represents the people waiting for hip operations? They look to us to represent them in Parliament.

I am proud to be in a party with a strong trade union base because those trade unions, having won the vote, knew they needed to have representation for working people in Parliament. The reason I am a dedicated socialist, and get more so, is that I know that any party that adheres to a market economy or profit as its prime objective will never solve the problems that confront my constituents.

Although the Chancellor had fun in his speech, and I am sure that he felt that he had done well, the country cannot be run by disregarding human need and putting the almighty pound, dollar, deutschmark or ecu above people. Debates in the House about the economy should relate more to people and less to what we heard from the Chancellor today.

5.50 pm

Sir Terence Higgins (Worthing): I am rather surprised that the shadow Chancellor is not still in his place, because there has been a long convention in the House that, after one has spoken, one remains at least for the next two speeches. It is a great shame that the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) did not do so, because he would have been able to hear the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn), and that would have given the hon. Gentleman some idea of the problems that he will face if he really thinks that in future the Labour party will become a party of low taxation and low public expenditure.

We could not have had a clearer indication of the way in which the Labour party—and it would be true if it were in government—is still a party that believes in high public expenditure and high taxation than the speech of the right hon. Member for Chesterfield. No amount of change by the shadow Chancellor will convince people otherwise. Such economic thinking is still deeply ingrained in the Labour party, as the right hon. Member for Chesterfield clearly demonstrated.

I am bound to say that this is the third occasion on which we have begun a parliamentary Session with an unsatisfactory timetable ahead of us. We have spent a number of days debating the Queen's Speech. We will then spend a number of days next week and the week after discussing the Budget. Before we know where we are, it will be Christmas. It is no longer possible under the current legislative process to have Second Readings of Bills, which could then go into Standing Committee and make progress, before Christmas.

What is even more surprising is that, ever since the change in the legislative programme, the Opposition have repeatedly insisted on debating the economy during consideration of the Queen's Speech—the week before the Budget. The shadow Chancellor is coming up for his third Budget and, by now, I should have thought that he had realised that that strategy is a mistake. As my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor has pointed out, today's debate gives the Opposition a marvellous opportunity to put forward their policies ahead of those of the Chancellor, who is severely handicapped by being in purdah. But what happens? Year after year, the shadow Chancellor has totally failed to produce any policies, except for one this year on 10p tax, which I shall discuss later.

Although I have been somewhat persuaded by the Chancellor's view that a unified Budget helps the Government by focusing Ministers' ideas on the relationship between taxation and public expenditure, I am far from clear which way round that relationship operates. Does taxation determine the expenditure, or expenditure the taxation? As for the House, the Budget has not become a unified one, because for well-known reasons we still do not have the power to increase public expenditure or taxation. We can only reduce one or the other, or both, so we cannot exercise a choice. We cannot have a truly unified Budget in the sense that the House can trade expenditure and taxation against one another.

I am somewhat persuaded, however, by my right hon. and learned Friend's view that a unified Budget at least concentrates the mind of Ministers. Although we have only the same amount of time to discuss expenditure and taxation, we can take a view on both according to the events of next week. I want to defer my remarks on that until next week, which is the appropriate time to discuss the major issues of macro-economic policy.

If it is intended that the Budget should deal with public expenditure and taxation, I hope that my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor, and the Leader of the House, who will reply to the debate, will consider whether the Budget should be produced in the spring. I know that that would require a radical change in the Government's internal workings, but it would be vastly preferable from a parliamentary point of view.

Since I do not believe that this is the appropriate moment to discuss macro-economic policies, I merely want to refer to two specific issues, not least because they are of great concern to my constituents. The Gracious Speech referred to legislation being brought again before the House regarding the high speed rail link. That raises the question of compensation for those who are affected by such programmes. The high speed rail link will not affect Worthing, but it is important to consider compensation for those blighted by road programmes in my constituency.

The Chancellor is aware that that issue of economic policy potentially involves huge sums of money, but we are not giving members of the electorate a fair deal. I am strongly of the opinion that we are getting our road and rail infrastructure on the cheap and at the expense of those who happen to be in the way of a particular scheme.

A number of ombudsmen reports have been written about compensation to be paid in my constituency, where there has been a great deal of blight along the route of the A27. The Government have also lost a court case relating to compensation. I had hoped that those facts would provoke them to include in the Gracious Speech better and fairer proposals to compensate people affected by blight, not least that caused by rail projects. To my disappointment, instead of introducing new legislation to overcome the problem, which we could have debated and, if necessary, amended, the Department of Transport, no doubt aided and abetted by the Treasury, issued new guidelines for compensating people affected by blight.

The court case led one to believe that those who had been affected by a road or rail scheme would get compensation if the benefit they had gained from ownership of property was seriously compromised. One imagined that that compensation would relate to loss in the value of the property. That has not happened. In addition to making it clear that a reduction in the value must be apparent, the new guidelines still retain the old noise criterion. That means that the Department of Transport is saying that one must meet that old criterion on noise apart from that relating to reduction in the value of the property.

That is a serious issue. When we come to consider the matter in detail in relation to public expenditure, I very much hope that the Government will consider the implications. I am glad to see that the Chief Secretary to the Treasury is present. I recognise that even in my constituency the sums involved could run into tens of millions of pounds or even hundreds of millions. As for the rail link mentioned in the Queen's Speech, the sums involved could run to hundreds and hundreds of millions of pounds. It is still true, however, that the community as a whole is getting such infrastructure schemes without adequately compensating people who suffer because their homes happen to be in the line of a proposed route.

No doubt the Budget will contain proposals for changes in public expenditure. We have suffered from a number of rumours in the press about cuts in the road programme or other projects. That causes great distress to those who are expecting to benefit from a bypass or some other project.

We all acknowledge that the Government are likely to give priority to education or the national health service. It is common ground that those sectors need to receive priority. However, if there are to be cuts in other sectors, such as in transport infrastructure, it is tremendously important that full consideration be given so that we avoid wasting public expenditure that has already been incurred.

In a specific example that I can think of, we have already expended more than £6 million. It would be foolish if, in such cases, one were to stop the operation dead in its tracks, causing that money to be wasted.

Similarly, it is important that the Government consider the effect on expectations of sudden changes in public expenditure programmes. For that reason also I am glad that my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury is in the Chamber. It is important that the Treasury, in dealing with other Government Departments, should take into account the human impact—the Treasury, of course, is always very concerned with humanitarian issues—of rapid changes in public expenditure programmes.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer has discussed the proposal that suddenly emerged from the shadow Chancellor, before the publication of the Sunday newspapers, for an introductory lower rate of 10p in the pound for income tax. That is an extraordinary proposal.

Sub-editors wrote marvellous headlines in the Sunday paper: "Labour goes for 10p rate of income tax without any regard at all for where it is coming from". That is not true. This time we were told where it was coming from. With all previous promises of that type by the Labour party, we were never told where the money was coming from. This time the shadow Chancellor said that it would come from economic growth.

If I may misquote Mrs. Beeton, first get your growth. Post-war history is littered—my goodness, the right hon. Member for Chesterfield knows enough about that—with promises that the Labour party has made in the expectation that there will be growth. One must get the growth first and then decide what to do with it.

Even if the Labour party had got the growth, is a 10p introductory rate a sensible way to proceed? It would be more complicated administratively—especially now, because we are adopting a system of tax self-assessment—and that would be a waste of resources. Surely it would be better to lift the threshold and help people at the bottom of the scale.

This is an extraordinary gimmick. Totally impartial organisations such as the Institute for Fiscal Studies have said that it was an extraordinary thing to say. It reflects the shadow Chancellor's lack of judgment in those matters. He has, if I may phrase it that way, no feel for matters economic. That is a serious handicap—one that would cause anxiety if we believed that there was any prospect of his undertaking the job that he now shadows.

As my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor said, we heard nothing about what Labour policies will be. If the shadow Chancellor wants to hold this debate ahead of the Budget, surely he should tell us about that. He gave us no assessment. We are constantly told that he is having a battle with his shadow Cabinet colleagues about public expenditure, but we are given no sign of what his priorities in public expenditure are, and no explanation for his belief that there should be a 10p introductory rate of income tax.

The shadow Chancellor tells us nothing about how wide the band will be. If there is to be a 10p rate of income tax for income of up to £60,000 a year, it would be of interest; but it was a 10p rate of income tax divorced from any band. For all that we know, it was a 10p rate of income tax on the first £1. We were given no sign. That is a literally unbelievably superficial view of the way in which one should propose economic policy. It should therefore be treated in the way that it deserves.

The Leader of the House will reply to the debate. I hope that he may say a little about the parliamentary timetable. I find incredible the way in which he has stood up to the events of recent months, chairing the Select Committee on Standards in Public Life and the Privileges Committee, involved in public expenditure decisions, standing in until recently for the Prime Minister, as well as being Leader of the House, and now replying to the Queen's Speech debate.

The Queen's Speech includes several extremely worthwhile measures, which I am happy to welcome. I hope that the Chancellor of the Exchequer, in the Budget that he introduces next week, will be able, outside the purdah that inhibited him this afternoon, to propose a positive policy that will have excellent prospects with regard to taxation and public expenditure.

6.4 pm

Mr. Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): The right hon. Member for Worthing (Sir T. Higgins) is right to warn about the dangers of basing spending proposals on future growth, but I hope that he would acknowledge that the same must apply to the Conservative Government, and that the Chancellor should not be talking—he is not yet talking—about tax cuts until he has achieved his objectives on the finances. I shall return to that subject later.

The right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) also took us to an argument. Of course there is an argument about what overall taxation should be, but there is a legitimate and proper argument, within that framework, about the priorities that divide the parties. It is very unfortunate that sometimes our debates do not allow that argument to take place, and that only the absolutes, in terms of financial framework, are discussed.

The present debate may be regarded in future as historic. We are reaching the end of a Government who are further behind in the opinion polls than any Government have ever been and secured re-election. We might be holding the last debate on a Tory Queen's Speech, and in that context it might be the last chance to determine the extent to which the Government have performed on economic policy on their own terms.

It may be worth reminding the House that, since the Conservatives came to power in 1979, boasts have been made throughout successive Parliaments, by successive Ministers, that we are in a new era for Britain—that an economic miracle has been wrought, with higher growth

[Mr. Malcolm Bruce]

and lower taxes. In fact, 16 years on, in most material ways, nothing has fundamentally changed and the Government have failed to deliver on all those promises.

It is not that nothing has changed. I am happy to acknowledge that, within the balance sheet, some good things have happened. The reform of the trade unions is especially important, may be long lasting and was actively supported by Liberal Democrats and our predecessors.

The recognition, which was not heard in the speech of the right hon. Member for Chesterfield, that one does not get something for nothing and one must operate in a disciplined budget framework and take account of market forces, is correct. The Government have acknowledged that one must have a policy about balancing the budget in the medium term, although it is interesting to note that the Chancellor has changed his language on that. His object used to be to balance the budget in the medium term. Now it is to get the budget towards balance in the medium term—a more relaxed attitude at this stage of the Parliament.

Having acknowledged that there are some achievements, it is worth recording the scale of the failure. Taxes under the present Government are greater than they were under Denis Healey, for all the talk about tax cuts. Growth has been, on average, about 2 per cent.—currently 1.6 per cent.—manufacturing output continues to be less than it was in 1979, and investment as a percentage of gross domestic product is the lowest on record. Unemployment is more than double what it was when the Conservatives came to power and has remained at that level. It is generally recognised that our education system and training standards are poorer than those of most of our competitors.

There is therefore no economic miracle, and it is interesting that Ministers no longer speak about it in the way that they did even a few months ago.

Manufacturing production growth is Zero per cent. and unemployment is 2.2 million and static. A very critical fact is that the public sector borrowing requirement is heading for a 50 per cent. overshoot on the current year.

Liberal Democrats have targets on those issues and publish them, unlike the Labour party, so we feel that we may with some legitimacy make a constructive critique of the Government's performance.

Retail price inflation is 2.9 per cent. It is greater than the 2.5 per cent. target that the Government set themselves for the present Parliament, and the Bank of England is sure that there is little or no chance of the Government achieving their forecast. Investment is low.

I had a meeting last week with the German chamber of trade in London. Its representatives said that the extraordinary thing about investment in the British economy was that it was appreciated by foreigners—the Government were constantly boasting about levels of inward investment—but they did not understand why there was such low investment by British-based investors. I ventured to say that perhaps British investors knew the British Government better than foreign ones and had less confidence in their ability to deliver policy in the long term.

There has been a devaluation under this Government, but its benefits are clearly waning, as this week's balance of payments figures demonstrated—they were the worst ever. Ministers had boasted abroad about a strong recovery—an economic miracle—but it is fading, weak and fragile and needs to be handled with considerable care if it is not to be derailed. That is why the debate about the drive to reduce taxes which has seized the Conservative party is worrying. The economy is now performing substantially less well than it was a year ago and borrowing has not been brought under control. It is therefore extraordinary that, having been told last year that the position was so bad that there had to be a 3 per cent. increase in taxes, we can now apparently, against an even worse background, discuss tax reductions. That policy does not add up.

The Government, who have claimed that they have an unyielding war on inflation—to reduce it and keep it permanently low—are clearly using much more relaxed language when they refer to inflation. The Chancellor of the Exchequer says that the target is 2.5 per cent., but if inflation turns out to be something above 4 per cent. we will be relaxed about it. That does not show the same degree of determination as when he first set the target.

The need to reduce interest rates is more important to virtually everyone involved in the British economy than immediate short-term and unsustainable tax cuts. A 1 per cent. reduction in interest rates would save the Government £2.5 billion a year in interest payments. *[Interruption.]* Hon. Members are making remarks from a sedentary intervention so perhaps I should quote the Chief Secretary to the Treasury when he was speaking about last year's Budget. He said:

"This year . . . we are set to borrow £34.5 billion, which is more than £25 a week of borrowing for every household . . . We forecast for next year a PSBR of £21.5 billion . . . Even at those levels of borrowing, no prudent domestic or international observer of the British economy should have expected to see tax cuts in this Budget . . . in the real world . . . it is more important for the British Chancellor of the Exchequer to be right than to be popular."—[*Official Report*, 30 November 1994; Vol. 250, c. 1237.]

We seem to be hearing a different story. If £21.5 billion did not justify tax cuts when they were forecast and we are now talking about £30 billion as the outturn, it is difficult to see how the Government can justify the debate that they have allowed to take off among their Back Benchers. The Chancellor is being pushed to bribe the electors with their own borrowed money. He is borrowing at the rate of £1,000 per second. Some £160 billion of debt has been added to the national debt over the past five years—in addition to the equivalent of 8p extra on the basic rate of tax. Earlier, I intervened on the Chancellor to quote from his summer economic statement, in which he said:

"public borrowing is actually taxation deferred."—[*Official Report*, 12 July 1995; Vol. 263, c. 979.]

That is a good summary and should be noted. It will be noted after the election if taxes are cut before the economic circumstances exist to justify and sustain them.

There was a time when Ministers took pride in the fact that they were sound financial managers of the economy, but they no longer listen to their own advice. The general election is pressing down hard on them and good economic management is less important than kidding the voters that the Government can deliver a miracle and hoping that the electors will not take account of the failure of the Government's forecasts.

In the same debate on the economic forecast, the right hon. Member for Fareham (Sir P. Lloyd) said:

"With the overshoot in public borrowing last year, this year and next year, I fear that any tax cut, large enough for the Chancellor to boast about it, would rightly undermine confidence in the City and abroad in his consistency and good housekeeping, and would leave taxpayers thoroughly unimpressed to boot . . . They"—

the electorate—

"would note that the election was getting closer, and they would ask whether it would not have been easier all round not to have hiked up taxes last year just to lower them this year . . . Higher interest rates would not be good for investment, and the historically low rate of investment is probably our most persistent economic problem and the greatest threat to economic growth in the longer term."—[*Official Report*, 12 July 1995; Vol. 263, c. 992.]

That was a Government supporter speaking in the House. Yet such is the political imperative that all that sound advice and sensible analysis is now being forgotten.

Conservative Members, perhaps understandably, criticised the shadow Chancellor's speech because it did not give an alternative policy, but he has tabled an amendment which we can support because it identifies many of the things that are wrong. I agree with some of the Conservative criticisms that Labour's position lacks clarity on a policy about which electors are increasingly anxious to hear. The Labour party does not have a clear economic policy or tax policy to convince anyone. It may have a useful electoral strategy, but not an economic policy.

The deputy leader of the Labour party has said on numerous occasions that cuts in the standard rate of tax could not be justified at present and should not be supported, but there has been no sign of what the Labour party will do. It seems that it will criticise policies, but allow cuts to be imposed even when they are irresponsible and will ultimately have to be reversed because they have been introduced at the wrong time against the wrong economic background.

It is hardly surprising that the late John Smith's economic adviser, John Wells, left the Labour party in disgust last week. He said that Labour's policy was "simply dishonest". He said:

"To argue the case for increased national investment . . . and then fail to provide and advocate the necessary means for achieving this is . . . a great deceit on the British people."

Labour is apparently committed to a 10p tax—the right hon. Member for Worthing (Sir T. Higgins) was right to say that the level of tax is not known—5 per cent. VAT on fuel, higher benefits and higher spending. I wonder whether the shadow Chancellor is taking tax advice from Sting's accountant. The shadow Chancellor has been able to make his figures add up, but nobody outside the House can square them. It has been estimated that the minimum cost of a 10p tax rate would be £6 billion and we are entitled to know how that would be funded. It is not the most efficient way to deal with poverty anyway.

As the Chancellor of the Exchequer acknowledged in his speech, we set out our alternative strategy in the Liberal Democrat's alternative Budget that we published yesterday, from which I shall pick out four points. Our Budget comes in advance of the Budget and the Chancellor is still in purdah so he might benefit from advice. We believe that reducing interest rates would be the biggest single contribution to assisting the economy. Interest rates in the UK are higher than those of our main competitors; they are higher than those of America, Germany and Japan. The Chancellor must not put at risk any opportunity to reduce them and he certainly must not place them in danger of being pushed up.

That is one reason why we have consistently argued for an operationally independent central bank. It is important to include and understand the adjective "operational". The policy parameters for the independent bank should be set by Government, but their day-to-day administration should be a matter of economic judgment, not political judgment. If we operated on those terms, we would achieve lower inflation and permanently lower interest rates. Our inflation target is in the range of 0 to 3 per cent. because we believe that the 1 to 2.5 per cent. range is proving unrealistically narrow.

I wonder whether there should be some review of the operation of the inflation report. The discussions that I have had with the Bank of England suggest that trying to second-guess what will happen in two years is a very tricky business that is open to different interpretations. We must reach some agreement on how the report can operate more effectively and how we can take into account the balance of arguments. We must not have a futile argument about who is right, but must make a realistic assessment of the best estimate.

We have proposed several tax reforms in our alternative budget. As a Member of Parliament representing a Scottish constituency and one who is interested in Britain's trade, I am glad to announce that we have specific proposals about the spirits tax. It seems that the pique displayed by the Chancellor last year following his defeat over value added tax and his decision to introduce extra taxation of 26p per bottle on spirits has backfired. The Treasury received less revenue from the sale of spirits this year than in the previous year. I hope that the Chancellor will learn from that experience and will take account of the Treasury Select Committee's report on the matter. He must recognise that the time is right to reverse that decision, if not go further and cut spirits duty by 56p per bottle. Spirits are our single biggest export earner and it is astonishing that we should treat them so badly in our home market.

We have also introduced a progressive proposal to reform taxation which independent experts acknowledge is extremely efficient at delivering a transfer of funds from the better off to the poor and helping people to climb out of the poverty trap. We would impose a 50 per cent. tax on earnings over £100,000 per year and we would then use the resulting tax yield to remove 750,000 people from the tax bracket altogether by raising the threshold and harmonising the starting level for tax and national insurance. That would be a useful tidying-up exercise and I believe that the Chancellor should take our advice. Our proposal is progressive, fair, easily costed and self-financing.

The most important commitment in our alternative budget is our pledge to allocate £2.5 billion over and above the sum allocated by the Government to education and training. Unless we raise the standards of education in nursery schools, secondary schools, universities and training colleges, we will not lay the foundations for the sustained economic performance that will deliver the economic strength to finance future programmes.

In conclusion, the Government can no longer claim to have presided over an economic miracle. The economy is faltering, the Government have failed to meet their own

[Mr. Malcolm Bruce]

targets and we desperately need money for education and training in order to secure our future. We must invest now if we are to deliver success in the future.

In that context, I shall make two points. First, if the Chancellor introduces irresponsible tax cuts in next week's Budget, we shall vote against them on the grounds that the money should be spent on education and on bringing borrowing under control. Secondly, if the Government do not switch from short-termism to a long-term vision for the future, they must recognise that they have been in power for too long and they should make way for those with fresh ideas and a fresh approach who may deliver what the Government have failed to achieve in the past 16 years.

6.22 pm

Dr. Keith Hampson (Leeds, North-West): I was interested, at both a personal and an economic level, in the suggestion by the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) that we should slash the duty on spirits. However, he forgot one important argument. If we were to see the level of devolution in Scotland for which he and Labour Members argue, extra tax would have to be generated to pay not only for the cost of running that Government but for all the commitments that a left-wing Government in Scotland would inevitably impose.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: No, it will not. We will have proportional representation.

Dr. Hampson: The Labour party might have some thoughts about that. Under the present constitutional arrangements, we have seen the massive transfer of resources from south of the border into Scotland. Public expenditure per head in Scotland far exceeds its levels in England. People in my constituency in the north-east and in Yorkshire will not agree to continue to fund high cost programmes if Scotland is afforded the degree of devolution that is proposed. Therefore, the Scots would have to meet the funding gap themselves. That seems totally absurd economically, and even a reduction in the spirits duty would not generate enough economic growth to meet that gap.

The hon. Member for Gordon—who has served on the Trade and Industry Select Committee—is one of the few hon. Members who studies the Committee's reports. Labour Members never read the reports, and Opposition spokesman after Opposition spokesman acts as if the information, tables and statistics contained in them are totally irrelevant—they certainly do not understand them.

The Committee's report on the competitiveness of the manufacturing industry contained some valuable assessments of productivity levels. The hon. Member for Gordon served on the Committee during that inquiry. The Committee found that productivity in this country improved by 6.3 per cent. last year and, throughout the 1980s, the figure was 4.5 per cent. That was the fastest rate of improvement of any of the advanced nations in the 1980s—admittedly, from a lower base—apart from Japan. The rate of productivity improvement in the 1970s was 2.2 per cent.

The shadow Chancellor is correct to refer to the relative decline—although he forgot to use the word "relative"—of the British economy. There has been a relative decline, as the Government documents on competitiveness clearly point out. However, at the heart of that relative decline are the rotten levels of productivity sustained, year in, year out, under Labour Governments. That is why we are now so far behind most of our major competitors.

On page 37 of the report there is an interesting box graph which illustrates the direct wages and the social add-on wage costs in the automobile industry across Europe. The Committee travelled to Munich and visited the BMW factory. The managers at that factory told us how they had spent two years negotiating with the unions to get rid of some of the imposed social costs. They said that they were looking forward to investing in industry in this country.

The figures are clear: wage costs are approximately the same in the United Kingdom and in Germany, but the add-on costs are 26 per cent. in this country and 47 per cent. in Germany. The add-on costs in Sweden are 46 per cent.; in Belgium, 37 per cent.; in the United States, 33 per cent.; and in Japan, 33 per cent. We have an enormous advantage, so why do the Opposition parties wish to saddle British industry with the sorts of additional costs that Germany is trying to be rid of?

Mr. Bruce: The hon. Gentleman is correct in his analysis. However, I attended that meeting when the managers spoke of voluntary costs, such as paying for their employees' weddings. They had agreed to meet those costs; they had nothing to do with the social chapter. Government Members must stop misrepresenting the situation. If social costs are too high in Europe, it is because countries have reached internal and domestic agreements, not because the costs have been imposed by the social chapter.

Dr. Hampson: But it is symptomatic of the psychology and culture of industry on the continent that is part and parcel of the social chapter. The social chapter embraces that sort of thinking. European industry is trying to get rid of some social costs, so it is sheer economic lunacy to try to impose similar costs on industry in this country.

The Chancellor referred to the fact that there has been substantial growth and that unemployment has fallen dramatically. In Leeds, in my constituency, there has been a dramatic improvement on the job front. There are now many unfilled places in the job market. I shall move from the Chancellor's Rose and Crown philosophy to the philosophy and outlook of the Fox and Hounds in Bramhope. Last week, business men told me that it is important that the Budget stimulates them to recruit new employees—particularly young people. The economy in Leeds is booming. Leeds remained successful throughout the recession, but it would still like some extra encouragement.

In one sense, I agree with the hon. Member for Gordon. Interest rates are at the heart of it. We have to ensure that they do not go up and that our economic strategy is not at the cost of preventing lower interest rates. As has been pointed out, the Treasury still has time to make adjustments. I am in favour of tax cuts, depending on exactly where they fall, as they are part of maintaining the enterprise system. We need that degree of stimulus and reward to ensure growth. We should aim and strive for a low-tax economy, and there is scope in the Budget to move further towards it. The business men in the Fox and Hounds were asking for help with national insurance.

They thought that the NIC was inhibiting them taking on quite as many people. If there is still a chance, that tip and hint might go down very well.

I should draw attention to the role of the training and enterprise councils, which represents one aspect of the success of Leeds. TECs have had a bad name from an awful lot of people, particularly Opposition Members, but in Leeds the TEC has worked extraordinarily well in partnership with the private sector and has achieved dramatic success in increasing the number of young people and adults getting qualifications and work experience, while lowering the unit costs.

In the past three years, youth training provision has doubled and, in terms of national vocational qualifications, the Leeds TEC stands 27th out of 81. It has achieved dramatic success in increasing the number of young people getting qualifications and two and a half times as many adults go through the system. That is crucial to Leeds, where there has been enormous diversification in the city's economy, which has developed from a few stable, heavy industries to a broad range of high-tech and service sector industries, including insurance and law in particular. The city physically has benefited and gained enormously. It is vital, therefore, that the training base is developed as successfully as before and even more so. The whole country needs a more highly and broadly educated work force.

I have some figures from the *Financial Times* which show that, because of inadequacies of numeracy and literacy, an estimated £5 billion costs fall on industry. When we discuss our education programme and the measures in the Queen's Speech, we must not overlook a basic fundamental failure which has continued through every Government. One in five young adults needs urgent help with numeracy and one in seven with literacy, and 35 per cent. of 21-year-olds do not have the maths skills expected of 12-year-olds in the national curriculum. Report after report comparing the standards of those leaving education at 16 shows Britain falling way behind the standards of most of our rival nations, particularly in maths.

It is not enough to acknowledge that there is a problem; we have to deal with it and at last the Government have done something about it. Had the process of getting to grips with the problems been started earlier under the last Labour Government, we would be in a different position now.

Mr. David Clelland (Tyne Bridge): That was 16 years ago.

Dr. Hampson: As a former teacher, I can tell the hon. Gentleman that education always has a lead time of at least 15 years. By the time a young person who enters the school system gets stimulated to take maths, for example, goes through school to college, into teacher training and back to school, different techniques have been introduced. There is a long lead time.

Hon. Members may recall the "great debate" when Labour was in power. The then Mrs. Williams launched that great debate, following the speech of the then Prime Minister, Lord Callaghan, at Ruskin college. He said that the education service was failing the nation, particularly industry, as it was not producing enough people with the right standard of maths and so on. So there was a great debate on the national curriculum. It went all round the country to conference after conference and what happened? Because the Labour party was the pawn of the teaching unions, nothing happened. They dismissed the whole thing.

Had there been a national curriculum in the mid-1970s or had Prime Minister Wilson, after his accurate diagnosis in the 1960s that we needed the white heat of the technological revolution, done something other than put as head of the Technology Ministry a clapped-out trade union magnate—Frank Cousins—and if those opportunities had not been missed, the lead time would now be producing results. The Opposition did nothing. We had to do it and they opposed the national curriculum every inch of the way.

When we set the standards and introduced the testing system, they opposed it. Of course the system had to settle down. It was not ideal in its early days, partly because we listened too much to the education experts with whom the Labour party is hand in glove. We have at least the basics in place, and the Queen's Speech takes the process further. We now have to ensure an awareness of learning and the seedcorn of literacy and numeracy as early as possible in the system.

I welcome thoroughly the voucher scheme for nursery provision. Yet the Labour party in Leeds ruthlessly attacked it and therefore did not apply for the pilot scheme money. So, for political reasons alone, the Labour party in Leeds has denied families in Leeds the opportunity of a huge expansion in nursery provision as early as next year.

According to the Audit Commission report, Leeds is not a good story in terms of nursery provision. It is below halfway down the list and requires a great deal of extra nursery provision. It simply will not do for the city group leaders in the Labour party to argue that the voucher scheme would deny the city money that it was already spending—the fact that it has not spent that much is another matter. It has to be stressed to the people of Leeds that they are missing out. If the city were producing such good nursery provision, it would not lose money under the scheme because there would be the same number of children in the schools or, if provision were so brilliant, there would be more. If nursery schools took more children, they would get more money and they would lose money only if fewer children entered the nursery education that the city provides.

Leeds needs a more diversified provision than is offered by the city itself. Out of a total of 130 nursery schools in the city, only three are in my part of it. So two young mothers, having found that there was a waiting list of more than 260 to get their three-and-a-half-year-olds into nursery school, decided to set up their own school. It is called Clever Clogs and operates in Cookridge primary school. It represents an excellent working partnership between the state school and a private enterprise initiative. If Leeds had the voucher scheme, parents could use that school on a bigger scale.

Other parents would be tempted to set up such new schools, but different from that one. The advantage is that a nursery provision incentive such as the voucher scheme stimulates different varieties of provision. It encourages some to be progressive and others to be more traditional. It allows parents that choice. The state provision would still exist, but parents might decide on a more progressive or traditional environment. They would be able to cash in their vouchers and enjoy a degree of choice, which would

[Dr. Hampson]

put competitive pressure on the city council to ensure that its provision is good enough to attract parents to its schools.

Mr. Beggs: I am pleased to hear about that excellent co-operation between parents and schools in the hon. Gentleman's constituency. I say with regret that the Department of Education in Northern Ireland would require such expensive modifications to vacant existing accommodation in primary schools that similar provision would not be possible there. Does the hon. Gentleman agree, given that children grow up in homes that do not have special toilets or hand basins for them, that massive adaptations to primary schools offering vacant accommodation are not necessary and that we should welcome provision in such locations?

Dr. Hampson: That is a valid point in the context to which the hon. Gentleman refers, and no doubt it will be taken on board by the appropriate Ministers in operating a system with which I am not au fait.

My final point concerns the higher end of the education system. A modern economy must offer the widest possible range and real excellence. If Labour had done anything about reforming and expanding higher education, the country's economy would be much stronger. I remind the House, and the shadow Chancellor, who has just returned to his place, that the only time since the war that the proportion of the age group entering higher education fell was under the last Labour Government. It was not high then—only 12 per cent. The figure has increased from one in eight 18-year-olds entering universities to one in three today. That target was set for 2000, but has already been achieved.

No other Government have ever expanded opportunities for young people on such a scale. The only Administration that came anywhere near was that of Harold Macmillan, who created the last major expansion in higher education provision. The Government need to boast more about their achievement.

Part of that expansion process involves giving financial assistance to students. The increase in their numbers could not have been funded by the traditional maintenance grant—there had to be a loans scheme, for which I argued over many years. However, I do not believe that the present scheme is operating effectively. The proposals in the Gracious Speech will help, provided that the banks are willing to participate in a generous way. Some of us called for the scheme to be operated initially through the private banking sector. That would have had the inestimable advantage of allowing the student to walk across the street to the local branch, where he probably deals with the manager about an overdraft anyway, to arrange a loan tailored to his needs. Instead, students have to operate at arm's length with a huge bureaucratic operation in Glasgow that has cocked up time and time again.

The new head of the Student Loans Company is doing a fine job of improving it, but only 55 per cent. of eligible students are taking up loans and that is not enough. The scheme must be expanded, and I trust that the banks will be given enough freedom to allow that. Will the banks be allowed to exercise discretion over the repayment period? One disincentive of the present loans scheme is that students must make repayments at a steady rate over five years. The worst time for any young person to repay a loan is when he has just entered into a mortgage or started family commitments, when he is at the low end of the income scale—yet faces the prospect of starting repayments at that front end. If the banks can have more freedom on repayments, we shall be on our way to funding properly the finest expansion of student opportunity that the country has ever seen—and one achieved by a Conservative, not a Labour, Government.

As with all the education reforms that the country desperately needs, if the economy is to compete effectively, that expansion has been overseen by a Conservative Administration but frustrated year in, year out, by Labour—whether in or out of Government. The sooner the people of Leeds recognise that fact, in a city in which Labour has its dead hand on the school system, the better. A Leeds university independent report published some years ago clearly proved just what a dead hand on the primary school sector Labour had. It was nothing to do with resources, and everything to do with expectations set by the LEA and with the nature and quality of teaching in those schools. Both locally and nationally, the country must recognise that Labour has done an enormous disservice.

6.45 pm

Mr. James Molyneaux (Lagan Valley): I share the reservations of the right hon. Member for Worthing (Sir T. Higgins) in regard to the curious timetable in the early weeks of each new Session. That timetable, and the reasons for it, become more bewildering every year. The only advantage is that one can indulge in tendering advice to the Treasury Bench in regard to the Budget, which I shall try to do with restraint in the brief time available to me.

In two major debates a year ago, my hon. Friend the Member for East Londonderry (Mr. Ross) and I reiterated the consistent views of our Ulster Unionist party on key aspects of the economy. They were that there should be no fixed exchange rates, which view is gaining great popularity throughout Europe; that the national debt should be repaid, which ought to be an admirable principle for individuals as well as for nations; that the Government's excellent achievement of lower inflation, on which all else depends, should be maintained; and that there should be a steady reduction in the public sector borrowing requirement, with consequential beneficial effects in many areas of our national affairs—a point made well by the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce).

Those objectives will not be achieved if the Chancellor yields to demands for tax reductions, which will really mean a reduction in revenue. Another serious loss of revenue resides in the expanding smuggling industry, which is reaching alarming proportions. There must be an early crackdown on those illegal activities.

Tax reductions in particular would jeopardise the present enviable position, in which Britain's long-term fiscal prospects are the strongest in the world—although that remark may be at variance with the comments of the shadow Chancellor. A curious feature is that investors, particularly overseas, do not seem to recognise the truth of that. The Chancellor reported a significant increase in investment but much more is needed. Perhaps potential investors are paralysed by the spectre of a general election

that, with a bit of luck, is more than 18 months away. [HON. MEMBERS: "We agree."] Get the crystal ball out. Investors should take heart from the knowledge that we are all monetarists now.

Some months ago, the Chancellor was correct to overrule excessive caution by the Bank of England with regard to interest rate cuts. Modest further reductions would give a much greater boost to the economy than a confetti-like scattering of tax cuts, which would have only a short-term effect. A reduction in interest rates, on the other hand, would bring lasting benefit to the construction industry, for instance. Expansion in such areas would have beneficial knock-on effects on unemployment and social security, and would soon help to reduce the PSBR.

Not surprisingly, I found my feelings in tune with those of the right hon. Member for North Shropshire (Mr. Biffen), who has just left us, especially during his broadcast of this morning. I reflected as he spoke that he and I are the only true guardians of the right-of-centre faith left in the House.

I shall now deal with the report by the president of the European Court of Auditors of 14 November, which commented on the amount of public moneys lost through fraud or in other ways—at least 400 million ecu, with probably more to be discovered. Careless citizens may shrug off such losses in the belief that it is all Brussels money anyway, but they are unaware that it is mainly British and German money. Losses through fraud touch directly on the very reasons for the existence of Parliament: accountability and the control of supply. A substantial cause for concern lies in the considerable errors found elsewhere when payments have been made to recipients whom the court considers ineligible for them under the programmes concerned. The errors take place in member states, where tens of thousands of national, regional and local officials are involved.

Improved financial management and control are clearly required at all levels, but essentially responsibility for policing and disbursement of public moneys lies with national Governments—a point emphasised in the long-running saga of a certain beef scandal concerning one of Northern Ireland's close neighbours. [*Laughter*]. I am trying to be delicate. It is therefore extremely important to change the behaviour of member states, which should attempt not to maximise the funds that they can obtain but to gain the maximum value for money from them.

Nowhere in the United Kingdom is this more important than in Northern Ireland, where we hear much about proposed partnerships and accountability, especially in the context of the programme for peace and reconciliation. Her Majesty's Government have a heavy responsibility to ensure that the commendable objective of partnership does not supersede the vital issue of accountability. Nor must officials usurp the authority or functions of Her Majesty's Ministers. In his exchange with the Chancellor of the Exchequer, my hon. Friend the Member for East Antrim (Mr. Beggs) made a relevant point in this regard.

I remind the House that new and ad hoc structures do not necessarily have the in-built safeguard of long experience in meeting the close scrutiny of, say, the local authority audit. Our sound traditions and practices in those areas are worth preserving if we are not to degenerate into the laissez-faire methods that we find so unacceptable in other places.

Commissioner Liikanen said in Strasbourg recently:

"Where legislative improvements and clarifications are needed the Commission, Council and Parliament have to pay more attention to the requirements for effective implementation. Simplification, clear qualified objectives, ex-ante, mid term, and ex-post evaluation, should become standard for all programmes."

I entirely agree with that proposition.

6.53 pm

Mr. Tim Devlin (Stockton, South): In welcoming the Gracious Speech I must say in passing that I was staggered to hear the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) say that nothing very much had changed in the past 16 years. Seventeen and 18-year-olds who will be voting next time at their first general election look at the Tories and say, "What a shower; the Labour party would do things much better." Once upon a time, not so many years ago—in 1979—I was a 17-year-old. If people think that nothing has changed in the intervening years, they must be amazingly badly informed.

I remind the House of what was happening in the last years of the Labour Government. Rubbish was piling up in the streets because the Transport and General Workers Union did not want to collect it. There were strikes in our major industrial plants every day. The gravediggers were refusing to bury the dead. Hospital porters told people that they would vet them on their arrival at hospital to see whether they were ill enough to go in.

It seems extraordinary now that, when people went to the shops, they never knew how much they would have to pay for goods of the same kind as they had bought the week before. The same amount of money as was spent the previous week bought less the following week. Inflation rose to the quite unbelievable level of 27 per cent. at one stage.

Opposition Members will lean back on their Benches and say that that was old Labour, whereas they represent new Labour. I grew up in a Labour household, dedicated to the sort of socialism that the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) propounded earlier this evening. When I was young, I met a lot of people from the Labour party—all nice, idealistic types like those who sit on the Opposition Benches. They all wanted to do a good job. With their trade union backgrounds, they wanted to build a better nation. They all thought the Conservative party was making a mess of things and that everything would be better under a Labour Government.

Matters got worse, however—dramatically worse. People of my age with small children will tell their three-year-old kid not to put his hand in the fire: "Tommy, you'll burn your hand." They tell the child the same thing two or three times, but one day when they are not looking little Tommy puts his hand in the fire and burns it. He never does it again. I think that the 16 million people who have never voted in a general election when the Labour party has won are rather like Tommy. They are going to put their hands in the fire just to see if it is really as bad as granny says it is. They are in for a shock if they do—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. It would be a good idea if the hon. Gentleman now turned to the Queen's Speech and the amendment to the Loyal Address.

Mr. Devlin: All this is why I welcome the Queen's Speech—it builds on the achievements of the past 16 years.

[Mr. Devlin]

It is staggering that the Leader of the Opposition called it irrelevant. I have always thought that a Government's first responsibility to the nation is to provide peace and security, on which score this Government stand second to none. The Queen's Speech includes three Bills that deal specifically with military security.

Times have changed, however. In the 19th and early 20th centuries, questions of military security loomed large. Nowadays, our security is threatened not so much or so immediately from any military quarter as by an economic problem, which is why I welcome some of the economic measures both in the speech and in the forthcoming Budget. Another threat to our internal order is posed by crime and drugs, which constitute a significant threat to the peace and security of the realm. I am pleased to see measures in the Gracious Speech to tackle them as well.

In terms of economic security, we find ourselves in a position that no Labour Government have ever been able to achieve. Inflation is under 4 per cent., and we have had one of the longest runs of low inflation that we have experienced for 30 or 40 years. Industrial investment is at an all-time high.

I was amazed that the shadow Chancellor had not managed to find time in his busy day to look at today's *Financial Times*, which published an article headed

"Industry investments reach four-year high".

I know that the hon. Gentleman is not very good on detail, however. Let me read hon. Members the first paragraph of that report:

"Manufacturing investment in the first quarter of the year was the highest for more than four years, official figures showed yesterday."

I do not want to embarrass the shadow Chancellor by reading the rest of the article, but its general tenor was that Britain's economy is doing extremely well.

Labour has now set up an industry forum. It charges companies to go along and tell its members what they do not really want to hear, hoping that they may nevertheless glean something from it. I have attended a number of such meetings. Last night, I heard Sir John Egan addressing the Air league. He told us that the only companies that would succeed in the 21st century were companies that excelled—companies that were of high quality, and did whatever they did better than anyone else in the world. Indifferent performers would not survive, he said. Europe should play to its strengths—and Britain in particular was playing to its strengths better than many of its European competitors.

A couple of months ago I attended another forum, at which the chairman of BMW said:

"Great Britain, for example, is currently the most attractive country among all European locations for the production of cars. This results from the structural reforms initiated by Margaret Thatcher in the early '80s, the most significant of course being the re-arrangement of industrial relations between companies and trade unions".

From time to time, unlike the shadow Chancellor, I look at OECD reports. The latest report states:

"There also appears to have been an underlying improvement in the competitive position of the manufacturing sector, reflecting inter alia an influx of foreign direct investment, and an upgrading in technology and quality control standards. A competitive exchange rate and low inflation have consolidated these gains. In 1994, strong net exports further boosted output in production industries".

Forgive me if I am getting it wrong—I am no economist—but that strikes me as a fairly glowing endorsement of Britain's current and economic performance.

I do not want to talk about abstract measures; I want to talk about specific issues that affect my constituents. My constituents have undoubtedly been affected by the continuing fall in unemployment. That is the topic about which they always ask me, and the topic about which I worry most. I tell them that we have had month-on-month improvements in employment rates. Under Labour Governments, unemployment never fell; it always increased.

Moreover, we in the north of England have seen the fruits of the one third of all inward investment that comes into the European Union. Recently—along with the Queen—I attended the launch of Samsung's investment in Stockton-on-Tees. I also went to the Siemens launch on Tyneside. Fujitsu has just launched a huge expansion in Newton Aycliffe, and, according to a recent edition of *Electronics Weekly*, the north of England has become a globally significant area for the production of semiconductors. That has happened as a result of the Government's policies.

There is no possibility that the industrial renewal that I see when I visit factories in the north and the midlands would have come about if we still had Red Robbo and the old trade union bosses. They did not want to know. People now say that the British work force is one of the most flexible and highly skilled that can be found, and we are now exporting cars all over Europe—cars built by British workmen to better standards than those built in Japan. The north-east, and Britain as a whole, should be proud of that.

When the Leader of the Opposition visited Newcastle university recently, he said that the north of England had made fantastic changes and he poured praise on the region for its marvellous achievements, but did he mention the Government policy that had brought that about? Did he heck. That is amazing. No one would have known that the Department of Trade and Industry had been involved in the various investments; the name of Michael Heseltine would not have passed the right hon. Gentleman's lips as he passed the site of the new Siemens factory. People do not want to know where all the good news is coming from; what they want to hear from the Labour party is that everything is wrong.

Mr. Jimmy Hood (Clydesdale): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Devlin: I do not want to waste the House's time by listening to the hon. Gentleman, who may make his own speech if he is called.

Not only are we living in a highly competitive country in terms of industrial relations; we are one of the most technologically advanced countries in terms of our investment in cable. I find it unbelievable that the Labour

party wants to sign up to a deal with British Telecom to link every school, hospital and library to the information super-highway. The Leader of the Opposition's constituency is next to mine. My constituency is currently being "cabled up" by a company called Comcast Teesside, which is connecting every school, library and hospital free of charge—not five miles from the constituency of the Leader of the Opposition. Either the right hon. Gentleman does not know, or he does not want to tell the British public. Either way, there is something very wrong with what has been going on in the Labour party.

Labour's sole strategy now is to be an idea and commitment-free zone, as it tries its best—having paddled furiously for all these years—to let things drift and see whether the tide will take it into government. That is the ultimate counsel of despair; Labour has nothing to offer.

I welcome the marvellous opportunity provided by the Queen's Speech for us to tackle the problem about which our constituents are most worried: crime. Having recently spent a night on the beat with the police force at Stockton-on-Tees, I know that drugs are behind a good deal of crime. Given the state in which people are brought into the cells having been arrested at 4 am, I can only pay tribute to the heroism of our police officers. If I may use that great old LSD phrase, these people are completely out of it: they do not know what they are doing. They are as high as kites on all sorts of drugs. We must do something about that.

I believe that tackling the drug problem is the most important priority for the Government in the years to come. That is why I welcome the deployment of MI5 in the fight against drugs. I would very much welcome the redeployment of the Royal Navy in the Caribbean, where our solitary ship is doing marvellous work in tracking drugs that end up in this country. I also welcome—as will my constituents and local police force—the 5,000 extra police officers who will be deployed on the beat.

Mr. Hood *rose—*

Mr. Devlin: Before the hon. Gentleman intervenes again—perhaps to tell me about my majority—let me remind him that, in the previous Parliament, he wrote me off. He said goodbye to me, and told me that I would lose. I returned with a majority that was five times bigger and represented the largest swing in the country. That was done in the north of England, but I believe that it can be done again in all the constituencies in the south.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I remind the House that Madam Speaker has placed a 10-minute limit on speeches between 7 pm and 9 pm.

7.9 pm

Mr. Ian Pearson (Dudley, West): It is apposite that I should follow the hon. Member for Stockton, South (Mr. Devlin), who talked about election swings, because less than 12 months ago at my by-election Labour received the biggest swing in post-war history, producing a majority of more than 21,000.

Economists tell us that, technically, we are three and a half years into a recovery. That is news to many people in my constituency. The Government should try telling it to Baggeridge Brick, a leading building materials manufacturer that is now warning of meltdown if nothing is done to support the housing industry. They should try telling that to the people who are unemployed in Brierley Hill, and in Brockmoor and Pensnett, who are still suffering desperately from the decline in traditional manufacturing industries in the black country, and the complete failure to create sufficient jobs and wealth. They should try telling it, too, to the many people who are suffering from job insecurity, which far from being a state of mind, is an evident fact for the people who talk to me at my advice surgeries.

I shall confine my remarks to four areas—economic growth, public sector accounting, the role of company profitability and inflation—and touch briefly on each in turn. First, anyone who is seriously committed to establishing high and sustainable levels of employment must recognise that the Government should set growth targets as well as inflation targets.

There is an urgent need to raise the economy's long-term sustainable rate of economic growth by increasing investment not only in plant, equipment, buildings and other works, but in human capital. Only in that way will we reduce unemployment, by increasing the employability of the work force, and thus the underlying productivity growth of the economy.

Secondly, the Government should use not the public sector borrowing requirement but the general government financial deficit—the GGFD—as the main indicator of fiscal stance. They should recast the public accounts in line with commercial practice. As the Minister will be aware, the GGFD is the criterion used in the Maastricht treaty as the European Union definition of Government debt for the purposes of measuring the degree of convergence between member states in advance of the single currency. So far as I am aware, in the other countries of the EU, it is accepted as the major indicator of fiscal stance.

The Government need to speed up their review of public sector accounting, and move towards more of a private sector approach. I should like to see a Government balance sheet, profit and loss account, and a statement of source and application of funds. The distinctions between current and capital spending are still far too vague and need tightening.

In particular, I should also like to see regionalised accounting of expenditure and assets, so that for the first time we would know how much money was being spent in each individual region. We could use that information as a starting point for establishing regional economic development strategies.

I see no rationality in our current public expenditure system, which treats NHS trusts as public corporations but GPs as private sector unincorporated businesses. Most schools are treated as part of central Government, but grant-maintained schools are treated as part of the private sector. Like universities, they are described as private non-profit-making bodies serving persons. And I see no justification for classifying, as the public accounts do, the Bank of England banking department as a private sector financial institution.

Thirdly, company profitability is important to economic growth. Profits and profit growth are good for the economy. Sometimes I feel that the Opposition do not

[Mr. Ian Pearson]

emphasise that fact sufficiently, and do not say enough about the role of profits in a social market economy—the role of profits as a signalling mechanism.

Mr. Devlin: A signalling mechanism?

Mr. Pearson: Yes. Standard economics says that industries making higher profits than normal tend to attract companies into those industries. Where profits are below normal, the reverse tends to apply.

Mr. Hood: He does not understand; he is only a lawyer.

Mr. Pearson: Do not believe it.

Retained earnings provide the bulk of investment in small and medium-sized companies. They are also a major source of investment for many large companies. However, as the Opposition fully recognise, retained earnings do not automatically lead to a strong surge in industrial and commercial company investment. Certainly the rise in corporate profitability in 1994 did not translate into any increase in meaningful investment in the United Kingdom economy.

Profits are also important because they fund pensions for an increasing proportion of people in the United Kingdom. I do not want to enter what is called the Dorrell debate about the level of dividend pay-outs by companies. I say only that I am not persuaded that current dividend growth is excessive; there are strong arguments why dividend growth must be maintained for the sake of long-term investment vehicles, which will be required to pay for the pensions of the future.

My fourth topic is inflation. At present, there is a great misunderstanding about how inflation is created in the economy and about who should take the credit for reductions in inflation. A major reason why inflation has declined in the United Kingdom, as in almost every other western European country, has to do with the effects of global market competition.

The old economics lecturers used to talk about cost push inflation and companies raising their margins when there was strong demand in an economy, thereby increasing company profitability, but today we have price-based costing, not cost-based pricing. It happens in large swathes of manufacturing industry. Ford, for example, is imposing price reductions of 5 per cent. a year on its supply chain. Companies are taking that on board, taking the price as given, re-engineering their processes and driving costs out of their products. That is a completely different rationale for business, and it means that fears about inflation over the medium term are largely misplaced.

I await next week's Budget with interest. I expect to hear about measures to stimulate the housing market and to encourage investment and training. I should like to expect, too, that the Budget will encourage job creation and bring back job security. The people in my constituency have a right to expect that, but my deep suspicion is that we shall not see it.

7.18 pm

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale): It is a great pleasure to be back in the House after my recent illness. If we did not have a 10-minute limit on speeches, I would sing the praises of the NHS and particularly the doctors at York district hospital.

I want to talk about the rural economy and rural affairs. That is timely, because the Government published their excellent rural White Paper last month. People in rural areas have their own views about what should be in the Budget next Tuesday, and—if it is not too late—I shall suggest a few of these to my right hon. and hon. Friends in the Treasury.

No doubt we shall have further opportunities to debate the White Paper in detail, but it contains an important section about jobs. The White Paper asks how we can create new non-farming jobs in rural areas, and I would suggest that we add non-tourism jobs—in other words, jobs in the manufacturing sector—to that. The White Paper proposes a new "business use" class within the planning system. At best, that may be highly deregulatory, allowing no-fuss moves from farming into other enterprises. However, one envisages that it will not be quite that simple.

There will be pressure from conservationists, local planners and some local residents, which will mean that, in reality, the process will be much more difficult. Several constraints on the number of vehicle movements and the hours of operation may be imposed on firms, and that is a real worry. We need some early action on planning guidance, followed by action on structure plans and local plans.

My constituency is fortunate to have a number of go-ahead, enterprising manufacturing firms. Slingsby Aviation and Micro Metalsmiths are based in Kirbymoorside, while McKechnie vehicle components—which is making enormous strides, and is at present supplying Vauxhall—is based in Pickering. We also have the successful Ward business, and anybody who goes to Scarborough cannot fail to see the Ward building systems factory in Sherburn, some 10 miles west of Scarborough. We have the Malton bacon factory in, interestingly enough, Malton.

All those firms provide an enormous contribution to local employment, but many of them were started a generation or so ago and have premises for which it is doubtful that they would get planning permission now. One has only to look round the market towns to find that land that planners had allocated for industrial use was quickly filled up by workshops and warehouses. No one is suggesting that we want to put factories all over rural areas, but the factories to which I referred and which were started a generation ago have meant a great deal to the success of the Ryedale economy. If we want a vibrant and prosperous rural economy in the future, we must not just find similar sites, but encourage similar entrepreneurs to set up.

I shall give hon. Members another idea of the planning problems in a part of my constituency. In Scarborough borough, we have the very important and beautiful seaside town of Filey. Some hon. Members may remember that there used to be a Butlin's holiday camp at Filey, called Amtree park. On a good day in June, July or August, there might have been as many as 15,000 people on the site.

The site is now known locally as "little Beirut" and it is totally devastated. But Scarborough borough council refused to give outline planning consent for 600 houses on the site. One might argue about the number of houses,

but by refusing the application, the council lost out on development providing up to 200 jobs. Why? Because the scheme does not fit with the local planning process. All the local people want the development, while the fact that it is covered with asbestos dust ought to fill everybody with utter horror and concern. Planning constraints mean that we are having a real struggle to sort out such a problem, of brown site that has been deeply contaminated. Clearly, something must be done.

I wish to mention rural shops and service industries. The rural White Paper suggests that there might be a rate relief scheme for village shops. But what about market towns? Far too many small businesses and services in the retail sector are in financial difficulty because they are having to pay rent and rates based not on what they can afford, but on what the building societies and national chains think they can afford. Action is needed on that. If we mean what we say in the White Paper about ensuring that market towns have a future, the cost of rent and rates needs our attention.

The White Paper also refers to the sparsity factor in rural areas in allocating support grant to local authorities. That is the most crucial problem affecting my constituency at present. We shall be one of the first areas to undergo local government reorganisation in April next year, when the new York district council comes on stream. Disaggregating the budgets between York and the residual Ryedale and North Yorkshire areas is proving to be a huge problem. I want to raise the matter on the Floor of House on behalf of many constituents who have written to me about it. We must have a fair distribution of the money, and we must do what we can to uphold our promise that reorganisation would not lead to a cut in local services to residents. Both Ryedale and North Yorkshire have serious problems, the latter especially.

The first priority in the Budget next Tuesday must be a better settlement for schools. We have again had excellent examination results, according to the league tables published for North Yorkshire schools, but we cannot dig for ever into the reserves, which are depleted. Schools have used up their balances, and we need a better allocation this year. The Government must heed the warning that, if we do not honour our obligations and responsibilities to education but still cut taxes, many of our supporters will be deeply resentful.

That said, I believe that we still must find some money to reduce taxes in the Budget next week, although not for the kind of party political advantage that the Labour party talks about. It must be obvious to anybody who looks at what is going on in their area that, while factories such as those I have talked about in my constituency are doing very well in an export-led economy, local services and the local economy are not doing so well. That economy is flat, and people need more money in their pocket. In my judgment, that can come only from a low-inflation economy, lower taxes and lower interest rates.

If we are trying to find the money for tax reductions, we should also increase personal allowances to take a lot of low-paid people in the rural economy out of tax altogether. Our failure to uprate allowances in line with inflation over the past two or three years has brought those people into the tax system, and we ought to take them out again.

Finally, those who say that abolishing capital taxes—capital transfer tax and capital gains tax—is simply a way of giving money back to the rich are wholly and utterly wrong. This month's edition of *Country Landowner*, the journal of the Country Landowners Association, contains an article that describes how capital taxation is wrecking enterprise. It stops businesses—particularly farm enterprises and other enterprises in rural areas—from doing the kind of thing that they want to do. The capital taxation structure is too complex, and the best way to deal with it is to get rid of it completely.

7.28 pm

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson (Coventry, North-West): I shall not follow the hon. Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) down his ever-lengthening wish list, and I shudder to think what his ideas would cost. Suffice it to say, scrapping capital gains tax and inheritance tax could cost £4.6 billion by the end of the century.

Before coming to the substance of today's aspect of the Gracious Speech, I want to refer in passing to the Asylum and Immigration Bill and a lady from the Philippines whom I am representing jointly in the House with the hon. Member for Warwick and Leamington (Sir D. Smith) and other hon. Members. Her name is Mrs. Teresita Bentley, whose permission to stay in this country was refused by the Home Secretary. I hope that the Bill will not prejudice her position and that the Home Secretary will look favourably on the representations that we have made.

We heard today from the Chancellor an attempt to redate the period of office of the Tory Government. Some time ago, my hon. Friends will recall, 1983 was taken as the start of the period of Tory government. That was the most propitious date that the Government could find at that time. They have been forced to change that. They now take 1981 as the start. They still refuse to take the obvious starting point of 1979, when they first came to office.

Whatever the Chancellor says, when one looks at the bare facts, the Tories' record is not one of great success, certainly not in the terms in which they have asked us to judge their performance. We did not set that standard. It was set by the former Chancellor, Lord Howe. He said that we must be judged against the relative performance of comparable countries' economies.

The Chancellor made the point, fairly enough, that growth was a key criterion. In terms of growth, we are 13th out of the 18 G7 and EC countries. That is not much to write home about. The Chancellor referred to jobs. There are 400,000 fewer jobs now than at the time of the election in 1979. I am sure that the whole House sincerely welcomes the recent period of declining unemployment. It is good that we have had such a period. However, the simple fact is that unemployment remains 400,000 higher than it was when the Conservatives took office.

In terms of employment creation, we are 20th out of the 24 OECD countries. In terms of male unemployment, we are fourth highest of the 15 EC countries. Since 1979, unemployment in Britain has been above the average for major industrial nations, the EU countries and the OECD countries. It is still above the average of the OECD countries, even after the welcome period of decline in the overall level. In terms of investment, we are still 21st in the league. Of the OECD countries, only Turkey has

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fewer 18-year-olds in education than Britain. That is not a particularly sparkling economic achievement on the part of the Government.

Let us take the precise factor on which the Government have set out to redress the balance and improve the position that they inherited—that is taxation. There, too, their performance is poor. However, before I deal with taxation, I should like to deal with the vexed question from which the Chancellor sought to distract our attention. Why have we slipped from 13th to 18th in the league of GDP per head and purchasing power parities since the Conservative Government came to office? I am pleased to tell the House that I am aided in my argument by access to a Conservative research department brief prepared by Mr. James Walsh for the Queen's Speech debate on 22 November 1995.

The Chancellor diligently exploited the points in Mr. Walsh's brief. Mr. Walsh wrote:

"Labour's table is misleading and inaccurate."

He does not tell us why. He went on to say:

"Labour's league table is another example of their cynicism: they don't care how spurious their figures are as long as they show Britain in a poor light."

How can we reckon Mr. Walsh's chances of promotion if he is prepared to say that, when the chart that we used was produced by the Government and signed by half the Cabinet—the Prime Minister, the Deputy Prime Minister, the Chancellor and all the rest of them? It showed precisely the figures that we have given. It was not some chart tucked away at the back of the document in some obscure appendix. It was given prime position on page 13 of the Government's key document.

Far from the table being an irrelevant consideration, it is the most relevant of all the considerations. It shows income per head, which, in its summation, tells us about all the other aspects of policy. It is true that productivity has increased. We welcome that, but unless it leads to an increase in output per head, it is of only relative value. The total output of the economy as a whole expressed per head and in terms of purchasing power parities is a measure of the Government's success. By that standard, they are found woefully wanting.

The Government are found equally wanting on the question of tax. The tax burden and the tax share of national income in the economy rose between 1979 and 1995, from almost 35 per cent. to more than 37 per cent. Ominously, it is the Government's own forecast that it will rise even higher, to more than 38 per cent. During the 16 years in which the Conservatives have been in office, the tax burden has averaged 37 per cent., compared with the previous averages of 36 and 34 per cent. under Labour Governments.

A typical British family now pays more in direct tax and indirect tax than when the Conservative Government took office. That brings us to the most recent period of government by the Conservative party. The Chancellor tried his best to explain how, with a burgeoning prospective budget deficit of £50 billion, the Government could find it in them to make the statements that they did just before the previous election, which they had to reverse within the year.

We know that the increases in taxation that the Government have implemented come out at 7p in the pound, or getting on for £800 per family. Whatever the Government do, there is no way in which they can make good that enormous impost of taxation on the British people. What is the Conservatives' reaction? We have just heard the reaction of the hon. Member for Ryedale. The reaction to the fact that ordinary families are paying more tax than ever and that tax takes a higher percentage than ever of the income of working people across the board—not only the least well-off, but all those on average or even double average income—is to propose doing yet again something that will benefit only the very well-off at the top of the pack.

The Government want to abolish inheritance tax and capital gains tax at a cost of £4.6 billion by the end of the century. The Government's response to the increase in the tax burden for all those who really need help is shameful. There is a similar failure on investment. In the Budget, the Chancellor intends to cut capital spending yet again. He says that it will be made up by the private finance initiative. As we know from the preceding Chancellor, the PFI was meant to achieve an increase in public expenditure, not to replace Government expenditure. So we have the prospect of a further rundown in the quality of our infrastructure. I think that all hon. Members will agree that a singular failure of successive Governments is that they have cut capital spending on the improvement of services. What we should be doing is increasing that investment.

I shall now examine the Labour party's approach to the economy. It is wrong for Conservative Members to say that we are not beginning to evolve the policies that we shall put into practice when we form the next Administration. I do not agree with what the Liberal Democrats do. It is not appropriate to come up with a draft alternative Budget. That is not a job for the Opposition, whoever is in opposition at the time. What we must present are the policies that we intend to adopt and fill out in the period leading up to the general election.

In terms of investment, we have already proposed doubling first-year allowances. That is a modest proposal, and I think that other Labour Members will agree with me that we could do something more than that. It is the one proven measure that really—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Time is up.

7.38 pm

Mr. Barry Legg (Milton Keynes, South-West): May I begin my remarks by welcoming my hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) back to the House. It is good to see him back in the House after his illness, and it was particularly good to see him give such a vigorous speech. I think that we were all greatly encouraged by his performance.

I should like to comment on one or two other speeches that we have heard this evening. We have had an eminently sensible speech from the right hon. Member for Lagan Valley (Mr. Molyneaux). He made some very sensible comments about the balance of fiscal and monetary policy, and he made some even more interesting comments about how long he sees this Parliament lasting—some 18 months or so. Indeed, those might be the most significant comments that we hear in the Chamber this evening.

I also endorse the speech of my right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing (Sir T. Higgins). We will probably have three economic debates in less than three weeks. This one is less than a week from the Budget, which we will debate for a week from next Tuesday and shortly after that will be the Second Reading of the Finance Bill. Then we will probably have to wait until July for a further economic debate. The House authorities should consider the balance of our debates so that they can be held in a sensible way during the year.

This debate, which the Opposition have chosen, is too late to influence next week's Budget. I am sure that it has been set, but I hope that the Chancellor will be able to bring more confidence to the British economy when he addresses the House next Tuesday, and impress on people how good our economic prospects are. They are extremely good indeed. There is abundant scope for tighter public expenditure. During the past few months, many of my parliamentary colleagues have set out how that can be achieved, especially my hon. Friend the Member for Bridlington (Mr. Townend) and my right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood). There is plenty of scope for carefully controlling public expenditure and finding further savings. Consequent on firm control of public expenditure, there is scope for tax reductions.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale was right to say that people need a bit more money in their pockets. Conservative Members believe that people are more likely to make the right decisions with their own money and to exercise their choice over spending that money. We do not believe that the Government by any means have a monopoly of wisdom. That is still a clear distinction between us and Opposition Members.

There is scope for tax reductions next week and we also need some adjustments in monetary policy, with interest rates coming down. I do not say so for political, but for economic reasons. When we see the Red Book next week and the way in which the economy performed in 1995, compared with what was forecast last year, we will see an economy that is growing less strongly. I believe that we will see weaker domestic demand, consumer expenditure, gross domestic product growth and fixed investment than was forecast in last year's Budget.

Significantly, we will also see a much lower GDP deflator—the measure of public sector inflation will be much lower than was forecast this time last year. That is the key reason why the spending totals for next year should be reduced and the reduction should be of the order of £7 billion to £8 billion. That is the degree of scope—[*Laughter.*] The hon. Member for Clydesdale (Mr. Hood) may laugh, but he once again demonstrates the ignorance of the Opposition on economic matters. It is an ignorance that stretches from the shadow Chancellor all the way down to the most humble Labour Back Bencher, who is giggling at the moment.

When we see the figures next week, we will realise that the economy has grown less strongly in the past 12 months than was forecast in the last Budget in November 1994. If an economy is growing less strongly and has plenty of potential for further growth, as this one has, lower interest rates are the appropriate mechanism to use. During the year, we have heard arguments from the Governor of the Bank of England that interest rates should be kept high and pushed higher. Those were misjudgments and I am glad that the Chancellor overruled him.

That also shows that the Bank of England is not yet ready for independence. Before one makes fundamental changes to institutions, one must be confident about those changes, and the Bank of England is not in a state to be independent. For an independent bank to operate successfully, it must have a strong collegiate approach, and the Bank of England is many years away from achieving that.

We do not need to see next week's Budget to realise how strong the deflationary pressures still are in this economy. We only have to look at the results of a major retailer, such as Sainsbury, to find that that company is under tremendous pressure to keep prices down in the high street. Those are competitive pressures.

Look at the latest figures on stock building. Many businesses have built up stocks in the past quarter and have probably done so to a higher level than necessary. If they are to release them into the economy, they will have to be sold at very competitive prices.

We heard a lot of nonsense about the privatised utilities from the shadow Chancellor. The Opposition want to concentrate on one issue, directors' pay, but we must consider how the utilities are operating, and the efficiencies and improvements in productivity that they are achieving.

The shadow Chancellor said that the next electricity privatisation would only result in a £1 billion rebate for the consumer. Under Labour, there would be no rebate because that business, like every other business that has been privatised, would have been retained in the public sector. By releasing those businesses into the private sector, we have provided the mechanism to improve efficiency and productivity. What does that mean at the end of the day? Lower prices for the consumer. That would never have happened under Labour. Those lower prices will continue to come through in our retail price index figures.

Next year we face the prospect of very low inflation levels. I suspect that RPI inflation may well be 1 per cent. What a crowning achievement for the Government to get inflation back to a level that we have not seen for 40 years. That is the prospect that we are holding out to the country. With inflation at that level we could also have significant reductions in interest rates. Low inflation and low interest rates—that is the recipe for economic success in the United Kingdom. They provide the scope for businesses to invest and not the efforts of the shadow Chancellor and his colleagues to build some airy fairy partnership with no economic framework behind it and are positive achievements that will get the economy moving at full steam, and there is plenty of scope for those during the coming year.

There is still only one party that can provide the leadership that this country needs and one party that understands how the economy works. I have no doubt that my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer will present a confident Budget next week, which will lead to firmer control of public expenditure and produce tax reductions and lower interest rates. That is the recipe to ensure that consumers, investors and business men achieve their full potential and that Britain takes all the opportunities in the global economy that are available to it under this Government.

7.48 pm

Mr. Jimmy Hood (Clydesdale): The hon. Member for Milton Keynes, South-West (Mr. Legg) started his speech by being delighted at the prospect of another 18 months of this Government. He went on to make a speech that made him sound like a man in a condemned cell who is delighted with a reprieve. He might be delighted if he gets 18 months, but at the end of the day the condemned man will come out of that cell and will be no more.

I compliment my hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown), the shadow Chancellor, on an excellent speech and on his imaginative and refreshing approach to Labour's quest for fairness and social justice.

I heard some comments from Conservative Members about reviewing history. Some of them were trying less to review history than rewrite it. I especially welcome the commitment of my hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, East to taxing millionaires who evade tax—something that Conservative Members do not want to talk about.

I also welcome my hon. Friend's decision to impose a windfall tax on public utilities. Let us remember that we are talking about what were good public industries, which were taken out of public ownership and turned into private monopolies and which have made millions of pounds of profit off the backs of the consumer. Directors dip their dirty snouts in the trough of sleaze and we do not hear one word of criticism from the Tories.

I particularly thank my hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, East for nailing the lie that this is the Government of low taxation. I welcome his initiative on the 10 per cent. rate of tax for the low-paid. He has caught the Conservatives out on that. If the Chancellor of the Exchequer's response to the shadow Chancellor's speech proved anything, it was that the Government are rattled by my hon. Friend's initiative. I compliment him on that.

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hood: No, I will not give way. Conservative Members did not let me intervene earlier and the hon. Gentleman was shouting and making noises, so he can sit down.

We know that the Government's real agenda is to cut taxes next week as a bribe for the general election. However, we know, as night follows day, that the real agenda is to get over the election if they can and then hype the taxes up again. I have heard some wonderfully interesting things tonight. The hon. Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) spoke about needing to put money back through tax cuts into the pockets of consumers, but who took the money out of their pockets? Who increased income tax by 7 or 8 per cent. since 1992? Then Conservative Members stand up and say that we need to put money back. Conservative Members have robbed the taxpayer and wasted the taxpayer's money, but what do we hear from them—that they are the party of good management. As the opinion polls show, we are about to see what the people think of the party of so-called good management.

I want to discuss economic and monetary union and, in particular, the single currency. I share some of the concerns about the convergence criteria laid down by the Maastricht treaty. However, in response to the discussions on the single currency that we have had during the debate on the Queen's Speech, I should say that I am no believer in throwing the baby out with the bath water. Unlike the Government's response, which is driven by a right-wing agenda from the right-wing sceptics, Labour's response is constructive, correct and in the national interest.

In my capacity as Chairman of the Select Committee on European Legislation, I am fortunate to meet politicians from other member states as they visit this country and I visit theirs. There is equal concern in those countries about the single currency and monetary union. However, the Government are keeping us out of the debate because they are, sadly, the Government of the opt-out and the lock-out. They are locking us out of a constructive part in the debate that needs to take place in Europe about a single currency.

I shall give an example of the responses that I have had from politicians from other member states—especially new member states. A few weeks ago, I visited Finland and Sweden, which have had different experiences since joining the Union. In Finland, food prices have gone down 10 per cent. and in Sweden they have gone up by 10 per cent. That had something to do with the state of their economies when they joined the Union. They are equally concerned about the impact of monetary union but they are keen to be part of a single currency if it happens. That is the opposite of the Government's position. The Government are not taking part in the constructive debate.

The Government and the sceptics sometimes say that the single currency is a matter of sovereignty. I have never been persuaded by that argument. Where was the Government's concern about sovereignty when they imposed the poll tax on Scotland a year before they imposed it on England? There was no mention of the sovereignty of the Scottish people because we did not want the poll tax. The Government knew that but it was shoved down our throats and down the throats of England and Wales the next year. There was no question of sovereignty then. It was a case of, "This is Parliament. This is where decisions are made. We are the Government, we are going to have it whether you like it or not."

What was the effect of the poll tax? We have heard a lot about the plight of the taxpayer. It cost the taxpayer £14 billion to bail the Government out of the poll tax—the equivalent of £300 per man, woman and child. This is the same Government who tell us about sovereignty. We are not going to forget the poll tax or the Government who imposed it. When the general election comes, the Government will find that out.

Let us consider the exchange rate mechanism and whether we should go back into it. I remember how and when we went into the ERM. We went into it because the Prime Minister was corralled at an intergovernmental conference by the then Chancellor, Lord Lawson, and the then Foreign Secretary, Lord Howe, and threatened with their resignation if she did not join the ERM. She agreed but, as an act of spite to get her own back, she took the country into the ERM with a grossly overvalued pound. She wanted to impose her tool of high interests rates to keep inflation down as an act of spite. The million householders who now live in negative equity know the impact of that economic policy, because it was that single

act, more than anything else, that hyped up interest rates and the problems of home owners. It is important that we remember that.

Conservative Members do not want to discuss the time when the right hon. Member for Kingston upon Thames (Mr. Lamont) was laughing in his bath. The former Chancellor of the Exchequer was singing in his bath just after he had wasted £15 billion in one day trying to prop up sterling and increased interest rates by 50 per cent. from 10 to 15 per cent. He went to his bath, had a glass of champagne, laughed and said how relieved he was. The British taxpayer carries that burden to this day. That is the burden that we are going to leave on the Government. When the general election comes, we will not rewrite history in the way that I have heard it rewritten tonight; we will remind people about the history of the Government and it is that history that will defeat them.

7.57 pm

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): I find the comment of the hon. Member for Clydesdale (Mr. Hood) on the exchange rate mechanism rich. I sat in this Chamber when the Conservative Government decided to join the ERM. I heard the Opposition spokesman say not only that we should be in the ERM but that we should be in the narrow band. If it was a fiasco that cost the sort of money suggested by the hon. Gentleman—that is disputable—we would have had that loss and very much more had there been a Labour Government at the time.

That is exactly the sort of the comment we had from the shadow Chancellor earlier this afternoon. I wonder how many hon. Members timed the shadow Chancellor. He took 43 minutes and his speech was an absolute smokescreen because there is a total lack of economic policy laid down by him on behalf of the Labour party.

The hon. Gentleman spent nearly 50 per cent. of his time on the subject of corporate governance—that is the correct name for it. We may ask why. The reason ties in with the Labour party's obsession with the politics of envy. The hon. Gentleman wallowed in what he called sleaze for an immense amount of time. He talked about top people's pay and perks and he offered us no solution. Why? The reason is that these issues are very complex and quite beyond his tiny mind. Nevertheless, they are important. They must be dealt with and that is precisely why my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister appointed the Greenbury committee to go into the matter in the greatest detail. Such matters should be got right because they are a serious problem, but one to be solved by the stock exchange, by corporate investors and by the shareholders who are the very people who are being ripped off.

The matter is complex, and it is no wonder that the shadow Chancellor did not dare to tackle it. The Greenbury committee itself got it wrong. It declared on Monday and by Thursday it admitted that it had got it wrong on a matter of detail which hit ordinary people. To suggest that the matter is simple is wrong; it is not and it must be tackled properly.

For most of the remainder of his speech, the shadow Chancellor ran down Britain. He mocked the way in which this Conservative Government coped with the recession. The problem was serious because we faced the worst recession since the 1930s. Our tax revenue was down. How did our Conservative Government respond to that? What did their predecessors, the Labour Government in the recession of the 1970s, do? They cut spending, they scrapped the hospital building programme, they cut the pay of nurses and they axed the pensioners' Christmas bonus. Is that what Labour would recommend to deal with the problem?

This Conservative Government stuck to their growth programme in education. We are now spending, over and above inflation, more than 50 per cent. more per pupil on our schools. We are spending, over and above inflation, more than 60 per cent. more on our national health service. The Government safeguarded the pensioners from inflation right the way through the recession.

Let us remember what the Labour party did to the pensioners. Labour changed the basis of calculation of the uprating to earnings and away from inflation. Why? The reason was that earnings lagged behind inflation under a Labour Government. They thought that the pensioners should be hurt as much as the rest of the public.

We kept up our spending increases on health and education and we safeguarded the pensioners. How did we do it? We borrowed. Why could we borrow? We could borrow because Conservative Governments have a sound reputation for sound finance, unlike Labour Governments. We should remember that the Labour Government of the 1970s could not borrow in the markets because of their rotten reputation for unsound finance. They had to go with a begging bowl to the International Monetary Fund. This country queued up with third-world countries at the IMF. Is that the kind of Government to whom the Labour party wishes us to return?

We kept our reputation. How did we do so? We kept our reputation because we demonstrated how we would close the deficit in Government finances. We have cut spending plans by £45 billion in the past two years or so and we also increased tax. I hear Labour Members gloating about increased tax; they believe in it, we do not. However, responsibly, taxes had to be increased without flinching despite the unpopularity of that move.

We are now through that phase. We had 4 per cent. growth last year, and our economy is growing faster than that of France, Germany and Italy. Our inflation rate, which has been under 4 per cent. for three years, is the best for a generation. Government spending is under control and unemployment is down by 710,000 from its peak. In my constituency of Gravesham, it is at its lowest since April 1991.

We should compare those figures with our European partners. Unemployment is serious and rising in France. In Spain, 20 per cent. of the work force are unemployed. Under Spain's socialist Government, who abide by the social chapter, 30 per cent. of young people are unemployed. Is that what we want? The whole gamut of economic indicators, be they exports, investment, manufacturing output or consumer spending, is steadily increasing. If all is going so well, where is the feel-good factor? Why is it not yet here? The reason is the tax impact on the working family, the burdens on enterprise and the massive hangover from which the property market is suffering following the 1980s which hit the value of people's homes.

I shall now deal with the tax impact on the working family. It is a fact that since 1979, for a single person earning, the tax burden has gone down by one tenth. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and

[Mr. Jacques Arnold]

Development figures show that the tax and national insurance burden on the single earner is 26.5 per cent., which is slightly higher than the figure for the United States, but way below European Community levels. Our tax burden on the single earner is very much lower than that of our European partners.

However, the tax burden on the married couple has shown no reduction over that period. In Britain, there is a 24.1 per cent. burden of tax and national insurance. That is very much higher than the figure for the United States, with its 19 per cent., and very much higher than the figures for France, Italy and Canada. We have a higher tax burden on the family than is the case in any of the other G7 countries, bar one.

We should redress the balance in this Budget. We in the Conservative party believe in the working family, which is the bedrock of Britain. With the economy growing the way it is, now is the time to look at how we should put back the money in the taxpayer's pocket, whence it came in the first place. We should restore the married couple's allowance to the standard rate band, which would cost the Exchequer £2.4 billion, but there should not be an increase in the additional personal allowance for single parents with children other than those who are widowed, thus providing a disincentive to illegitimacy and divorce.

We should introduce a capacity for non-working mothers to transfer their basic allowance to their working husbands. In 1993-94, there were 9.1 million male married taxpayers and 5.8 million tax-paying wives. That would suggest that 3.3 million wives could transfer their allowances, providing their families with young children with a tax saving of 25 per cent. on the basic allowance of £3,445. That would mean a saving of £861 in the pockets of families, which would have a significantly greater impact on the less well-off earning families. We should concentrate on that idea.

We must also concentrate on doing everything to support enterprise. What made this country great? It was our entrepreneurs who went out into the world to trade and invest. After all, the flag followed trade. That investment abroad is having a massive impact on our cash flow balances into this country. We are the biggest investor in the United States. We are a major player in the international markets and those investors should be supported. Next week's Budget is the opportunity to start giving back to people their own money. We should target families, small businesses and home owners.

8.7 pm

Mr. David Hanson (Delyn): You will have to excuse me, Mr. Deputy Speaker, if I refuse to take lessons from the hon. Members for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold) and for Stockton, South (Mr. Devlin) on Labour Governments in the 1960s and 1970s. I grew up under those Governments with job security in my father's household and in a house built by a Labour Government. I went to university without having to draw a student loan and I had job security when I left university. I want a return to those days for the people whom I represent. I do not want any lessons about Labour Governments from the hon. Member for Gravesham.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hanson: The hon. Gentleman can sit down because we are on a 10-minute limit today.

The Queen's Speech and the Chancellor's speech today are missed opportunities. The Chancellor is living under a delusion and the Government are masking their failures. The economy is not as the Government would like to think it is. The Gracious Speech mentions the need for economic growth, rising employment and low inflation. No Labour Member would disagree with that, but there is a need for the Opposition to look at whether the Government's achievements to date bear witness to what they are trying to achieve in the future. From where I sit, the Conservative party is living on another planet.

The Conservative party proclaims itself as the party dedicated to reducing the benefits bill. When my party left office, one in 12 people were dependent on benefit, but now it has risen to one in six. The Conservative party claims to be the party of low taxation, yet when my party left office average family taxation was 32.2 per cent. of gross income—now it is 35.6 per cent. As my hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) said, since the last general election income tax rates have risen effectively by 7p. Only those earning more than £64,000 are better off as a result of the Conservatives coming to power.

The Conservative party claims to be the party of home owners, but between 1990 and 1995 some 295,000 people have had their homes repossessed. This very year, according to the Government's own statistics, provided in a recent parliamentary answer to me, 850,000 people are caught in the negative equity trap. The Conservative party claims to be the party of low taxation and home owners and states that it is dedicated to reducing the benefit bill, yet, when difficult choices must be made, it remains the party that hits the poorest people in our community. The poorest 10 per cent. in our community are now 17 per cent. worse off than they were under the Labour Government, while the richest 10 per cent. are now 62 per cent. better off than they were when my party left office. One in three children are now living in poverty, yet in 1979 the figure was one in 10.

Those figures show that the Conservative party's economic philosophy has not only failed but caused great economic and social damage to our community. As the years and months progress, the resulting tab is crippling our future economy. Unless a radically different approach is adopted, nothing will change.

We are failing to invest in our local community. We invest half as much as Japan in our local community. We invest £863 less per head than the United States. We invest £2,766 less per head than Switzerland. Even Portugal has a higher rate of investment per head than the United Kingdom.

The unemployment rate is double what it was when my party left office. Today, 800,000 people have been out of work for more than one year at a cost of £20 billion per year. What a drain on our economy. In my region, Wales, 106,000 people are currently out of work. Unlike the claims of various Conservative Members today, the unemployment rate in my constituency has risen by 36 per cent. between 1990 and 1995. Many of the jobs that are offered in my constituency are low-paid, part-time, insecure and available on short-term contracts. They are doing nothing to build a strong future economy. One in six people remain out of work in my constituency; 18 to 24-year-olds account for 650,000 of them.

All that unemployment has been created in the pursuit of low inflation. I am sure that my colleagues on the Opposition Front Bench would share the objective of low inflation, but if it is the cause of so much misery and social division, while pushing up the Government's bills on wasteful expenditure, we need to look at that strategy urgently.

Just yesterday I received a press release from Touche Ross, which I doubt is particularly favourable to my party. Robert Ellis of the company's Cardiff office reported that the insolvency figures in Wales in October were the highest ever recorded. He said:

"The figure this month is the worst ever recorded for October. You have to go back to January 1992 and the height of the recession for a higher monthly toll of receiverships."

A study of the sectors in which receivership occurs reveals some dramatic figures. In the past 12 months, 52 businesses have failed in Wales; 45 failed in 1994. The miraculous pick-up in the economy has not hit my region.

The sector that has suffered most difficulties and experienced most receiverships in the past 12 months in Wales is construction. In the 12 months to October, 12 businesses failed compared with six in the previous 12 months.

I must emphasise that it need not be like that. The Gracious Speech could have contained measures that won the support of my party, which were designed to boost the economy, meet social need and provide reasonable and decent levels of service in the future. [HON. MEMBERS: "What are they?"] Money could be allocated to local authorities from their capital receipts to build local council housing for rent. That would mean that the 2,000 homeless in my constituency would be housed; employment would be offered to building workers; and the local economy would be boosted.

In my borough council area, this year alone £800,000 capital receipts have been taken and not one penny of them can be spent on local authority housing. That has happened at a time when construction workers are out of work. I know that it has been said before and it sounds old hat, but the basic kernel of truth is that people are unemployed and in social need while money is available that could be spent on social housing.

Mr. Stephen Day (Cheadle): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hanson: No. Time does not permit me to do so.

One in 12 homes in the United Kingdom remain unfit for habitation. Wales has the greatest proportion of such homes. Money is available that could be spent on boosting the economy, creating jobs and meeting social need.

Further action could be taken. The Labour party has called for more investment in the information super-highway in partnership with the private sector. That directed partnership could provide key investment to create jobs, put people back to work and meet the needs of our society. We support the establishment of regional development agencies, which would create stronger economies in areas such as Wales by allowing them to draw on venture capital funds. We should invest in public transport, the infrastructure and the environment. Many public expenditure programmes could be introduced to create a competitive society that puts people back to work rather than a society in which money is wasted on huge dole queues.

There is much work that we could do, but we must look at the Government's taxation and social policies. My constituents are poorer because of the Government's policies. We need to ensure that taxation is fair. It should not be increased, but it should be fair. The Government will shortly have to choose whether to reduce the capital gains tax and the inheritance tax. They must decide whether to allow £4.6 billion to be cut from those taxes by 1999 or whether to introduce fair taxation, and use that money for productive good. I urge the Government not to cut those two taxes but to consider ways in which we can make tax fairer. For example, we have proposed cuts in the VAT on fuel, which would assist people in my constituency. We have advocated proposals to make taxation fairer.

If there is £4.6 billion to be given away, the Opposition could list community projects on which that money could be spent, and which would create employment opportunities and improve social conditions. In doing so, we would be able to reduce the Government's overall spending on unemployment benefit and other wasteful expenditure.

I want to see fair taxation, a fair programme of investment and—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Time is up.

8.17 pm

Lady Olga Maitland (Sutton and Cheam): I warmly welcome the proposals in the Gracious Speech and the Government's commitment to firm financial policies. The Government have shown great courage in standing up against the national tide calling for easy options.

The truth is that our policies have worked. We are witnessing a continual, sustainable growth in the economy. The unemployment rate is coming down steadily. In my constituency it is now down to 7 per cent. and is declining month by month. I have seen new businesses coming on stream—it is interesting to note that many of them are successfully led by women—while established ones are pressing ahead with ever greater confidence than before.

There is, however, an area which in recent years has been an unexpected drain on national resources in both financial and social terms. I refer to the growing breakdown of the family and the consequent costs to the nation—a factor which can only concern my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor very much. Total spending on lone parents has leapt from £1.7 billion in 1979 to £9.1 billion for the year 1995-96. That, I should add, is 41 per cent. of our entire defence budget, which has the responsibility of looking after the security of the whole nation.

So not only are broken families creating a disproportionate cost in financial terms, but the cost in human terms is greater. Hence the importance of considering seriously ways to boost the family. We should be doing everything possible to keep families together instead of tearing them apart at top speed, as proposed by the family law Bill.

It would seem that we have reached a watershed in our society. What respect do we have for the institution of marriage? What role does it play in our community? Is it as relevant as before?

[Lady Olga Maitland]

The family law Bill is forcing us to have a serious rethink of the type of society that we want. The Bill also poses the question: should Parliament reflect society, or should Parliament shape society? Indeed, should Parliament have a vision for society for us to aspire to?

Parliament has had no difficulty in other aspects in trying to set standards and build up a moral base. How, otherwise, does one bring a country to fight a war? If Churchill had not set the right tone in 1939, who knows how the debate about rapprochement with Hitler, the difficulties with rationing, or body bags coming home, would have ended.

What is for certain is that Churchill recognised that there was no easy option and firmly announced his intention—we had to fight. We added that the going would be tough, with

"blood, toil, tears, and sweat."

Similarly, we need to have a vision for our society today, and that means a vision for the family. Nurturing the family also means blood, toil, tears and sweat.

No one can deny the urgency of taking a close look at the family today. This nation has bred a growing disembodied family at the rate of 150,000 couples divorcing a year—the highest rate in Europe. Add to that the 1.5 million "never married" single parents with 2.5 million children and we become aware of the scale of what is before us.

Are we really content to create more legislation to hasten the process even further? Have we really taken into account the fact that the costs of even more broken families will only be an increasing burden on the state and therefore the economy? History has shown us that divorce has become easier with every piece of legislation that is passed, so more broken families have been thrust into society.

At whose behest is the family law Bill being introduced? Have there been mass demonstrations in Hyde park calling for it? Where are the vociferous lobbies calling for swifter, easier divorce? Have the children, the neglected VIPs in those scenarios, been crying out for yet more rapid break-ups of their homes? The answer is that the Law Commission, in its infinite wisdom, has decided that it would be humane to end marriages swiftly and painlessly and to

"reduce the trauma for the children".

That is an escape clause for guilt-ridden parents. The trauma for the children is the break-up of the family home. The legal process is immaterial.

The real issue is the value that we place on marriage in today's society. Only when we come to terms with that can we think clearly about how and when it should end. If we decide that marriage is a short-term arrangement of mutual convenience to two people—with children as an option—then for the secular-minded it is plain logic that, when it falls apart, it should be ended as expeditiously and seamlessly as possible.

However, there is another opinion. Marriage is the foundation stone of society and it carries with it responsibility. Stable families bringing up children in emotional security can only be of benefit to society as a whole.

Marriage is not merely a contract between two people. It is a contract witnessed by society on behalf of the community at large. We are not farmyard animals. We do not approve of people living by an amoral code. We govern our lives according to an accepted framework, which seems to work pretty well. Breaking the law is an offence. We pay our taxes. We drive on the correct side of the road and so on.

Marriage, however, which is the bedrock of our society, seems to have no such boundaries. When it breaks down, it is a misfortune for the couple concerned. The reasoning, "Why keep a dead marriage alive?" means a hasty divorce, which, under the new proposals, will move from speedy to complete overdrive.

What really disturbs me is that, while the debate has raged in the past few weeks, I have heard scant concern expressed about the children's well-being. The oft-repeated phrase, "They are very understanding and adult" does not wash. It reflects self-absorbed people seeking to gloss over an inconvenience.

In truth, the children pay a heavy price. If one asks any teacher about the problems of dealing with distressed children whose parents have split up, one will hear of children, if small, becoming clingy and attention-seeking. In any case, they lose confidence, cry easily, lose concentration and fall back in class. Later, some never settle down. They fall out of the social swim and turn to crime, drugs, early pregnancies and so on.

Study after study has demonstrated the ill effects of divorce on children. So prevalent is the break-up of the family that another nightmare falls on children, as emphasised by Ruth Deech, principal of St. Anne's college, Oxford and a specialist in divorce and family law. In a paper on Lord Mackay's proposals, she drew our attention to a MORI survey for *Reader's Digest* last month, showing the fear held by many children that their parents will separate, and the years of longing on the part of those children whose parents have parted that they will be reunited.

Medical Research Council studies carried out over decades have shown that children whose parents divorce have less good life chances—poorer health, fewer jobs, more children born out of wedlock. They are less likely to finish school and have more broken marriages in the next generation, with all the resulting social security costs borne by the taxpayer.

Under the proposed new law, marriage will be ended with less formality than the hiring of a car: if you do not like the spouse after all, send her home. That bedrock of our society, marriage, from which everything flows in a civilised world, will be irretrievably damaged if we surge ahead at break-neck speed to end in a single year a commitment that had been made for life.

If nothing else will move liberal-minded thinkers, I beg them to consider the hapless victims—the children who have no say in the matter. They suffer, and in the end so do we all.

I urge the Chancellor to give very careful consideration to the growing costs of increasing broken families, and make his own representations to the Lord Chancellor, whose Bill will do so much to undermine his own excellent work in securing a firm financial base for the country.

8.27 pm

Mr. Andrew Miller (Ellesmere Port and Neston): It is

always a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland) because it brings us back from "Alice in Wonderland" to the real world. I often wonder, when I drive through Sutton and Cheam occasionally, in which part of Sutton and Cheam the hon. Lady finds those examples, because I do not believe that people in her constituency accept her model of the world.

It is curious that the debate on the royal speech has not received a great deal of press coverage. We all know the reason for that. A friend of mine suggested to me that the hon. Member for Crawley (Mr. Soames) is on the carpet in front of the Prime Minister for daring to attack the Princess of Wales. She kept the Queen's Speech out of the media.

However, some serious things have been discussed in the past few days and it is a great pity that the debate has not had a great deal more coverage.

Let me start with nursery education, the bedrock of our investment in the future, in people, in our society.

What has happened? There was a pilot scheme for vouchers—the Government decided to start with a pilot scheme for a change. After all the experiments in social planning had gone disastrously wrong, perhaps the Government thought that it was a good idea to have a pilot scheme instead of going full blast into a new programme that collapses in disarray. What was that pilot scheme? It was offered to local authorities to take up. Time after time we have heard criticisms of Labour and Liberal-controlled local authorities for failing to take up that programme.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: Quite right.

Mr. Miller: The hon. Gentleman says, "Quite right." That is interesting—perhaps he can say why Conservative-controlled Cheshire county council also refused the pilot scheme. It refused the scheme because it was bound to fail—

Mr. Arnold: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Miller: I shall not give way as the hon. Gentleman does not represent Cheshire.

Mr. Arnold *rose—*

Mr. Miller: Oh, very well. I shall give way.

Mr. Arnold: Cheshire county council did not take up the scheme for precisely the same reason as can be clearly seen in Kent. We have always pioneered projects; the only time that we did not do so in my county of Kent—which is one that I know about—was precisely because it is controlled by Labour and the Liberal Democrats, who are under instructions not to participate in the scheme. Poor old Kent.

Mr. Miller: The hon. Gentleman is clearly not listening. Cheshire county council is one of the last bastions of Conservative administration and it refused to adopt the programme.

Mr. Peter Butler (Milton Keynes, North-East): Cheshire county council is not Conservative-controlled.

Mr. Miller: Cheshire is Conservative-controlled; I represent a Cheshire constituency, so I should know.

The Conservative party has rejected the pilot scheme. The issue needs to be considered in terms of the overall programme of investment in education which is not taking place throughout that county. It is interesting that there is an all-party alliance—all three major parties working together to seek to persuade the Government that they are wrong. That is an interesting little concept about which we never hear from the Conservative Benches. All we ever hear are criticisms of Labour-controlled authorities which are seeking to do their best in impossible circumstances.

Earlier we heard about one aspect of investment. I listened briefly to the contribution of the hon. Member for Stockton, South (Mr. Devlin) who criticised the Labour party for having discussions with British Telecom. He has the gall to criticise the Labour party for talking about investment in the nation's future. It seems extraordinary that, when the Labour party starts to promote ideas that will create competition, it becomes the subject of criticism from Conservative Members.

Last year, we heard the Deputy Prime Minister, on his crusade for deregulation, say that every regulation had to be wiped out of industry's way. But when it comes to British Telecom, he says that the asymmetry rules must stay in place. Those rules were devised in 1984, when they may have had some logic—history will determine whether they did—but by the time those small cable companies were taken over by American multinationals, the logic had disappeared. There must be an agreed and phased programme of release from those regulations on a region-by-region basis, which is what the Labour party was saying. It is extraordinary that a mechanism to create greater competition in one of the industries that will provide the basis for the regeneration of the British economy has been criticised by Conservative Members.

On several occasions I have heard criticisms of industrial relations under previous Labour Administrations. I have heard the phrase "Red Robbo" used about six times—it must have been in a Conservative party handout which I have not seen. I met a group of trade unionists from Slovakia just yesterday who were complaining bitterly about the problems they faced in making progress with some of the multinational companies in their country. I asked them specifically, as did my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry, North-East (Mr. Ainsworth), how they ensured that trade unions were recognised. They said that it only took five people to be in the union and it would be recognised. In this society we have destroyed all rights of recognition.

Mr. Butler: Hear, hear.

Mr. Miller: The hon. Gentleman says, "Hear, hear." We have destroyed all rights of recognition and the Government now claim that as the basis for making progress. How can removing rights at the workplace be the basis for progress?

We have heard about transport issues. In my constituency, large and successful businesses are desperately crying out for investment in the west coast main line. Two Budgets ago promises were made. It was

[Mr. Miller]

said that magical private sector money would rescue the west coast main line. Where is it? Not one penny piece of that money has emerged so far. How can businesses such as Shell, Vauxhall and Kemira, which desperately want to get to the market place by improving the rail infrastructure, be expected to make the sort of contribution that they could have made had that investment gone ahead?

My hon. Friend the Member for Delyn (Mr. Hanson) talked about the failure to invest in housing. In my constituency, 4,500 families are on the housing waiting list—an extraordinary number. An authority that as recently as 1986 could guarantee to any family—

Mr. Stephen Day (Cheadle): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I wish to be helpful to the hon. Gentleman, who has I think misled the House—I am sure not intentionally. Cheshire county council is Labour-controlled. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman would like to correct what he told the House.

Mr. Miller: I stick to my guns, and the record will prove that.

Investment in housing is important. Some 4,500 families are waiting on the housing register in my constituency. As recently as 1986, a couple with one child would have been housed within one month; it now takes four years. That is as a direct result of this Administration's failure to invest in the housing infrastructure. The money is there and only if it is released on a phased basis will we achieve progress in providing low-cost, affordable housing. Such investment will result in the sort of progress that we need to house those people and revitalise the building industry. That would have an enormous spin-off effect on a wide range of industries across the country.

Everyone who drives up the motorway or travels on the train through Bedfordshire will see the problems faced by industry—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

8.38 pm

Mr. Stephen Day (Cheadle): I shall take the opportunity, at the beginning of my speech, to give the hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Mr. Miller) the information to allow him to correct what he said. I am a Greater Manchester Member of Parliament, but my postal address is Cheshire and my understanding is that the Conservatives hold 22 seats, Labour 35 and the Liberal Democrats 14 on Cheshire county council. It is only right to put those facts before the House. I should like to think that such circumstances led to Conservative control. If they did, we would be in control of many authorities.

I welcome the Loyal Address. During the debate this evening, many Labour Members have done nothing but run Britain down. I think that my Whips will agree that, on occasion, I have rebelled when I did not believe that my Government had got it quite right. However, it should not be inferred that I, or any other Conservative Member who has occasionally disagreed with the Government, believe that the Conservative Government have been anything but good for the British people since 1979.

I do not recognise the picture that Labour Members have painted of Britain before 1979. I went to school and on to further education during the 1960s, and I remember Labour Britain well. It is an experience that I do not wish to repeat. I remember a Britain where industry created more jobs than there are now, but unfortunately—especially for those who ultimately lost their jobs—that industry produced goods that the rest of the world did not want to buy at a price that the rest of the world could not afford. That reality, and not Conservative Government, cost people their jobs.

Companies struggled under the economic regime imposed by a Labour Government and many industries were put under public ownership. I remember well companies such as British Steel and British Leyland that were cobbled together by a Labour Government. They were a disaster for their own long-term future and a disaster for all who worked in them. The companies were almost destroyed. It was a Conservative Government who privatised those industries and turned them into successes. They are the real benefits of Conservative Government for Britain since 1979.

I remember when the Labour party went to the International Monetary Fund. It would embarrass anyone with pride in Britain to see any Government of any political persuasion grovelling before the IMF, with the economy in a mess. I remember an inflation rate of 27 per cent. in Britain. I remember that at one point the highest rate of taxation reached 97.5p in the pound. That is a typical result of Labour attitudes to taxation and to the economy. Labour policies produce not growth but the devastation that was Britain in the 1970s. I do not believe that the British people wish to return to that situation. They will reflect upon that in the polling booths, and vote accordingly.

There were calls for local authorities to be allowed to use receipts from council house sales to invest—that is a magic word beloved of Labour Members. Labour Members do not seem to understand that the proceeds of council house sales must be offset against the massive debts incurred by local authorities. Local people face enormous cost burdens largely because of the mismanagement of Labour-controlled authorities. The debt burden is enormous, and the Labour party cannot ignore that if it claims to believe in financial rectitude and good management of the economy.

Labour has proved again tonight that it is unfit to run a market stall, let alone an economy. It does not understand what wealth creation is all about. People have the talents and the Government must release those talents so that the people can create wealth. The people do not need politicians to direct them. The last thing they need is a Labour Government trying to control the economy, telling people how to spend their money and telling businesses where to invest. The people will make the right decisions in that regard. This Loyal Address proves that the Conservative Government hold basic, clear principles that are right not only in theory, but have been proved right in practice ever since the Government were elected.

I am proud to be a Back Bencher in this Conservative Government. Much mockery was made of an earlier comment that this Parliament may yet run 18 months. However long it runs, I hope that, at the next election, the people will do what they have done in the past, in spite of the pollsters' predictions: return a Government who are capable of running the economy.

8.45 pm

Mr. Brian H. Donohoe (Cunninghame, South): The hon. Member for Cheadle (Mr. Day) said that he was a product of Labour and, judging from his speech tonight, he has not done too badly.

The Gracious Speech is paper thin as far as Scotland is concerned; it contains nothing of any meaning for Scotland. Two days after the Queen's Speech, the Secretary of State introduced a hare-brained scheme to engender some alternative to our well-thought-out proposals for a Scottish Assembly. The Government have no idea about the future of Scotland—the land in which I was born and which I shall always be proud to represent.

The Government cannot deal with the education problems in Scotland. Many children in Scotland, who receive little education and no training, find that there are no jobs in Scotland. Education without training and jobs is worthless. As a result, we have seen a rising culture of drug taking and crime in our society. The Government are responsible for those problems; no one could suggest that it is the fault of anyone else. I see those problems in my constituency and they exist throughout Scotland.

There is no point in trying to encourage the youngsters in our communities if we cannot provide them with real training. A company has recently commenced operations in my constituency and it has brought a number of jobs to the area. I visited that company a few weeks ago and I met the owner. He told me that he is not able to fill the positions in that factory because of a lack of training. He has plenty of desks and machines, but he does not have bodies to operate those machines.

That lad was conned by the Scottish Office and by Ayrshire Enterprise about the number of suitably trained people in the Ayrshire area. He has had to consider bussing people from the north and the east to the south of the county. He could employ 100 people tomorrow and meet his production requirements, but he cannot recruit suitable workers because of the lack of training in the local area. That problem should have been addressed before now.

We must also contend with the ill-thought-out reorganisation of local government in Scotland. The constraints that will be placed on the resources of the new authorities are now coming to light. The Government have not given the new authorities any assurances that their financial requirements will be met. Education and training needs have not been addressed. There will be immense problems in social work in respect of achieving any possible attachment to the needs of my constituents. That is another clear sign of an incompetent Government who have nothing to offer the people of Scotland.

We are also witnessing the breakdown of the national health service. I was born the year that the national health service came into being and, in the final years of the current Government, it is breaking down completely. Nothing is left of the dreams of those who created the national health service.

Mr. Jim Cunningham (Coventry, South-East): Does my hon. Friend agree that one of the problems in the national health service that the Government have not addressed—it could be argued that they have exacerbated it—concerns the long hours worked by nurses and doctors in the national health service and their lack of incentive to do a good job?

Mr. Donohoe: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. While nurses, and other staff, are restricted to pay rises of some 3 per cent. per annum, general managers in the trusts and the health boards of Scotland award themselves increases of up to 25 per cent. There is something fundamentally flawed in a system that allows that to continue. The issue clearly needs to be addressed, and it is not likely to happen under any circumstances where we have a Tory Government.

In my constituency, what I understood to be a national health service is being broken up and private hospitals are running almost all geriatric services. If the Tories thought that they could get away with it, they would privatise the birth of children. I am not so sure that that is not the next option that the Secretary of State for Health will consider.

My constituency also has problems with housing. The development corporation in the new town was enormously successful for 25 years. It created jobs and wealth, it attempted to address the lack of training in the area and it built particularly good housing. All that achievement has been lost because of the Government and their madcap ideas. They want to diversify the housing stock. They do not want the same as the public.

The tenants living in those houses want to be transferred to the local authority. That was proved by clear experience in other new towns in Scotland. A ballot revealed that 97 per cent. of people in East Kilbride believed that the only useful alternative to their continuing in the rented sector was to transfer to the local authority. *[Interruption.]* Does the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland, the hon. Member for Aberdeen, South (Mr. Robertson) want me to give way? Clearly, he does not understand his own brief, because he has never answered the points that I have raised with him in Scottish Questions.

Why should so many resources—some £350 million—be wasted on a housing association in Irvine when nobody seems to know whom it represents? Why should all that money be spent trying to entice people away from what they know is good for them to the unknown—away from secured tenancies to assured tenancies? My constituents will not be conned.

In the past 16 years, what have we gained from a Tory Government? We have experienced growth of some 1.7 per cent. How can we possibly compete in the world market when we are hitting such a growth figure? Earlier this evening, I had a discussion with representatives of ICI, which is a very successful company. It is not so successful in my constituency, where its employment figures have fallen from 13,000 jobs in Stevenston to some 600 today. That does not suggest that the country has encouraged ICI to continue as an employer in my constituency.

Politicians on both sides of the House do not understand what is happening in the commercial markets of the world. Commercial companies have become transnational. Individual companies do not concern themselves unduly with what politicians have to say. Instead of all the discussion about sleaze, and Conservative Members taking money for advising industry on how to go about its business, we should look

[Mr. Donohoe]

at industry to learn something about how we should conduct our business in politics. Clearly, Britain is old fashioned in that respect. We have to turn ourselves around and adopt an agenda that people on the streets understand and that will get them all back to work.

8.55 pm

Mr. Thomas Graham (Renfrew, West and Inverclyde): I have a new pair of glasses and, as they are bifocals, I am having some difficulty in using them.

I found the Queen's Speech extremely difficult to understand. It is quite extraordinary, to say the least, given the problems facing Britain and those facing my constituents. In the past fortnight, I have looked at my mailbag and I shall tell the House what was in it—not the Queen's Speech, but letters from people who are deeply worried about the effects of the Child Support Agency on their families. My constituents have undergone traumatic experiences and are still writing to me about their unsolved problems.

I also received a number of letters about transport. The Government's deregulation of the buses has caused enormous problems in rural areas. My constituents are finding it difficult to get to work in the morning and back in the evening because of the lack of bus services. Not everyone owns a motor car; therefore public transport is extremely important. Those are the issues about which I find letters in my mailbag.

Once again, there are tremendous problems with the national health service in my constituency and that of my hon. Friend the Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman). The waiting lists are unbelievable. There is a waiting list of between nine months and a year for a man with a heart problem. He should be seen this week and treated immediately so that his problem can be cured. Those are the issues that folk want to see in the Queen's Speech. They want my constituent to have an operation on his heart. They want the waiting list to be cut effectively, not a manipulation of the figures.

My folk are worried about young people. The Under-Secretary of State for Scotland, the hon. Member for Aberdeen, South (Mr. Robertson) is nodding his head, but education in Scotland is his portfolio. I know young folk who want to go to college but cannot get the wherewithal to do so. The local college does not receive Government support, so young people in my area are being denied the right to take themselves off the dole and to seek further education.

One young girl in my constituency who is an incredible asset to Scotland—she is a great actress—has been offered a place in a college in England, but she cannot get funding. So what will happen to her? Her family cannot afford to send her to college, but the Government can. They should pay for young kids to go to college. Those are the measures that we should see in the Queen's Speech.

I remember the last time I read a poem out of a certain book. I wish that the Chancellor were here tonight, as I am about to read another one. This is from "Hairy Knees and Heather Hills" by the famous Walter McCorrisken. Walter sums up the Government in this wee poem.

"A miser from downtown Rangoon,
Drank soup through a hole in a spoon.
Said he with a smile,
It's really worth while,
For the soup I save is a boon."

That epitomises the Government, how they operate, and the Chancellor's regime. The Government do not realise that they must spend money to get Britain out of its problems. Providing employment for young people takes money and investment in education and training. That is the way forward.

The Queen's Speech should have given hope for Britain, and it should have given young folk pride, knowing that they would leave school, college or university and go into training that would give them a job. I make no bones about it. Every Member of Parliament has a job. Some do it well and some do it badly, but that makes no difference because we all collect a salary. Too many young graduates and other decent young men and women who have worked hard to pass their college exams to make a contribution to society are denied that opportunity by the madness of this Government.

After 16 years, the Tory party is still putting out bumf, such as a circular that I saw this week. I am sure that all Conservative Members have a copy. If not, I will make sure that they receive one. That circular says that Government's key objective is a centralist strategy aimed at not risking inflation, and at ending the days of boom and bust. After 16 years, the Government have the audacity to produce something like that, while constituents of mine—young people who have only ever seen that lot in government—are, through no fault of their own, languishing on the dole The Queen's Speech offers them no hope and nothing for the future.

I shall quote another poem from Walter McCorrisken:

"Dear Sir,
Never bite your finger nails,
It makes your fingers lumpy,
Never bite your finger nails,
Yours sincerely, Stumpy."

That further reminds me of the Government, who are worried because they know that a general election is coming. They know also that the next Queen's Speech will be meaningful. They know that that Queen's Speech will offer young people the hope of carrying the flag and offer elderly folk in retirement a chance to enjoy a decent standard of living. If the Government do not look after the young, there will be nobody to look after the elderly.

The Government have abandoned their commitment to young people. Worse still, this week I received letters from elderly people asking why the Government could not put something in the Queen's Speech about abolishing value added tax on domestic fuel. Why could not the Queen's Speech have offered the elderly some hope this winter?

I remember the winter of discontent, but this winter many old folk will not wake in the morning. There will be a tap on the door that they will never hear. Eventually, the police or social worker will be told but, unfortunately, those elderly people will have a died because they did not have enough to heat their homes or to eat. They are forgotten individuals. That is the winter that those old people are facing.

The Queen's Speech did not talk about the young, the elderly or the future of Britain because the Government have abandoned them all in favour of the pathetic policies of a dyed-in-the-wool, heartless Government.

Hon. Members: More.

9.4 pm

Mrs. Ann Taylor (Dewsbury): I understand hon. Members' wanting to hear more from my hon. Friend the Member for Renfrew, West and Inverclyde (Mr. Graham). His speech was direct and came from the heart. They would do well to listen to his underlying message.

We have had a wide-ranging debate, touching on—

Mr. Robert G. Hughes (Harrow, West): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Taylor: I have only just started my preamble, but I shall.

Mr. Hughes: I am grateful to the hon. Lady. She played a leading part in changing the Standing Orders, particularly those relating to the declaration of hon. Members' interests. Perhaps this was an oversight, but I fail to understand why the hon. Lady—unlike her party's Chief Whip and deputy leader—has not declared an interest in one of the amendments tabled by Labour. The hon. Lady has a relevant interest but she has not declared it.

Mrs. Taylor: The hon. Gentleman should withdraw that remark because I have no interest relevant to the debate. Those names shown with the letter R against them have been so identified after the procedure was cleared with the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards. Labour Members are clear about the rules. If the hon. Gentleman has any questions, he should not raise them in the House but with the parliamentary commissioner. I assure the hon. Gentleman that his allegation is incorrect and I invite him to withdraw it.

Mr. Hughes: The hon. Lady says that, but she nevertheless has an interest that I regard as relevant, relating to that which she receives from the Association of Teachers and Lecturers and from Unison. While I am on the subject, I think that the sponsorship of the Labour party leader by the Transport and General Workers Union is also relevant.

Mrs. Taylor: This is a typical abuse by certain hon. Members, who are trying to mislead people about the amendment. I say to the House, and to the hon. Gentleman in particular, that the procedure that the Opposition followed in tabling the amendment, in relation to the registration of interests, has been cleared in detail with the parliamentary commissioner, who was appointed to take notice of those issues. It is a matter for him. If the hon. Gentleman does not understand that, he ought to go away and read the reports so that he understands the system that we introduced about a week ago.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order. Hon. Members should be clear that if they have a complaint in relation to registration, it should be raised with the parliamentary commissioner. Such a complaint is not for debate this evening. We will return to the Gracious Speech.

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I have given my ruling. I hope that the hon. Gentleman is raising a point of order on a different matter.

Mr. Marshall: Mr. Deputy Speaker—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Is it a different matter? No. I call Mrs. Taylor.

Mr. Marshall: I wanted your advice, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mrs. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for confirming the interpretation that I gave the House.

As I was trying to say before the hon. Gentleman so misleadingly interrupted—

Mr. Anthony Coombs (Wyre Forest) *rose—*

Mrs. Taylor: I shall not give way. I intend to make my speech, not to answer irrelevant interventions which you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, have already ruled out of order.

Mr. Day: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I hope it is a new point of order.

Mr. Day: I want to correct a point of order that I raised earlier. The House will recall that, earlier this evening, the hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Mr. Miller) claimed that Cheshire county council was Conservative-controlled. I rose to put the record straight, on the basis of the seats allocated to each party. The information that I imparted to the House was correct: there are 22 Conservatives, 35 Labour councillors and 14 Liberal Democrats.

It has since been brought to my attention, however, that the chairman of the authority is indeed a Conservative. I understand that that is the result of some deal struck between the Liberal Democrats and the Conservatives. I thought it only right to put the record straight, and if I gave any offence to the hon. Gentleman, I apologise.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I am most grateful.

Mr. Miller: Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's comments and I do not blame him for what he said, although it was not a strong point in favour of the Conservative party.

Mrs. Taylor: If we could now return to the debate, that would be of benefit to the House.

We have heard the hon. Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway), for example, whom we are glad to see back with us following his illness, speak about local government reorganisation. We have also heard speeches on housing and the family. I would hesitate before trying to follow the cultural contribution of my hon. Friend the Member for Renfrew, West and Inverclyde; suffice it to say that many of the problems that he related are known to the constituents of many other hon. Members. I think in particular of the many difficulties that my constituents have experienced with the Child Support Agency—my hon. Friend highlighted some of them.

[Mrs. Taylor]

I start by reminding the House of the comments made by the Lord President on Queen's Speech debates. He wrote recently that the Queen's Speech is always an important signpost to the political year. That is true. This year, the wording on the signpost is large and clear: "General election this way". What is more, as everyone now knows, the sign writer this year was the chairman of the Conservative party. For the first time, the briefing on the eve of the Queen's Speech was given not by the Leader of the House but by the chairman of the Conservative party, who cynically told journalists of his strategy—that the speech had been drawn up to put Labour on the spot and to challenge the Labour leader after his warm words to the CBI.

As we all know, few things happen in Parliament that are not either openly political or have heavy political overtones, but we have surely reached new depths of cynicism when the whole thrust of the Queen's Speech becomes an exercise in party political point scoring.

What Ministers should recognise—although after 17 years of assuming a divine right to rule I doubt they do—is that Parliament is not an annex of Tory central office, and that the law-making process of this House should not be a crude extension of the writing of a party manifesto.

This evening, one of the least confrontational Ministers, the Leader of the House, is to wind up our debate. We may at last, therefore, hear something constructive. The right hon. Gentleman acknowledged in an article in *The House Magazine* this week that certain Bills were included in the Queen's Speech by agreement between our two parties' Front-Bench spokesmen. He drew attention to the consultation that had taken place on the drafts of the Armed Forces Bill and the Reserve Forces Bill. He also mentioned the offer that I made at business questions last year to facilitate the speedy passage of the Bill ratifying the chemical weapons convention, so he will acknowledge that there are occasions when the House can work constructively when there is agreement in principle on a certain issue.

That brings me to the Asylum and Immigration Bill. The Leader of the House knows from my evidence to the Procedure Committee in June that I favour a greater use of Special Standing Committees. So, I believe, does he in some circumstances. We were told yesterday—we have been told it on other occasions—that the offer of a Special Standing Committee made by my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition on the first day of this debate could not be accepted because the Bill was controversial and Special Standing Committees could not to be used for that purpose. I disagree with that analysis; I do not think that that was ever the presumption.

During the passage of what became the Water Act 1989, which privatised the water industry, it was suggested that a Special Standing Committee should be established, despite our opposition to the privatisation. The first part of the Bill created the National Rivers Authority, in which, on principle, there was agreement. The suggestion of a Special Standing Committee was not accepted, but I believe that the legislation would have been better if it had been.

Even if the Prime Minister is right to believe that Special Standing Committees are used only for non-controversial Bills, we must ask what makes the Asylum and Immigration Bill controversial. On Wednesday, the Prime Minister said that it would

"ensure that we have a fair system of asylum—fair for those who need help, and fair for those who do not believe that this country should receive bogus asylum seekers either."

On the same occasion, the Leader of the Opposition said:

"We oppose bogus applications and fraud and we recognise the need for immigration controls".—[*Official Report*, 15 November 1995; Vol. 267, c. 17-30.]

There was apparent agreement between them.

It must also be agreed by hon. Members on both sides of the House that the Asylum and Immigration Appeals Act 1993 was flawed, and that the Government got it wrong then; otherwise, there would be no need for new measures now. The question is, what is required? Do we need administrative change to deal with the backlog of applications, or do we need more fundamental changes in the system? If there is agreement on the objective, as the Prime Minister has said, why should we not try to achieve that objective in productive ways?

If, however, the purpose of the Asylum and Immigration Bill is to act as a vehicle for extreme statements about race relations—such as those made by Andrew Lansley, a prospective Conservative parliamentary candidate who has talked openly of the political benefits of playing the race card, saying that immigration has the potential to hurt the Labour party—the Bill will not achieve the Prime Minister's stated objective of improving race relations.

Moreover, the Prime Minister and others ought to bear in mind the existence of real practical problems with the proposed legislation. Ministers should know that, not least because the Secretary of State for Education and Employment has pointed it out. She has said that she agrees in principle with deterring illegal working, adding:

"I do, however, have some concerns . . . Either way there could be racial discrimination . . . A balance needs to be found between the benefits achieved by such a scheme and the burden it would place on employers".

I suggest to the Leader of the House that, if the Secretary of State for Education and Employment has such fears, it is surely reasonable for others to have them as well.

Parliament has tried to get asylum rules and procedures right in the past, and has failed. Opposition Members proposed the establishment of a Special Standing Committee in 1992, and it was rejected. Perhaps, had the Government agreed to it, we would not now be discussing the need for new legislation. The House of Commons should be able to say that, if it is agreed that a problem exists, that problem should be susceptible of solution by the House.

Let me cite just one problem in regard to which the Government's inactivity makes us worry about their approach to such problems. That problem could have been tackled, but has not been. This example may expose some of the double-speak of the Tory party in the Queen's Speech.

In 1990, the Government promised to deal with a loophole in legislation that enabled organised criminals to perpetrate many kinds of fraud. I refer to what was called at the time the "Day of the Jackal" loophole, which exploited the ease of access to birth certificates in Britain.

In 1990, the Government produced a White Paper, "Registration—Proposals for Change", yet some of its recommendations have not yet been put into effect—most notably those intended to counter the loophole that allows the creation of false identities by organised criminal gangs, who can obtain birth certificates, and subsequently other documents, that can form the basis for fraud in a wide range of areas from social security to immigration.

This year, in a letter to my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker), the Prime Minister said that he had been unable to find parliamentary time to close the loophole, yet there had been no approach to the Opposition to ask for our co-operation with such a measure. Why not? Surely if Ministers genuinely wanted to make progress, instead of simply making loud complaints about the problem, there would have been an approach.

Hon. Members frequently complain about the public image and standing of Parliament. They often blame television and complain that Prime Minister's Question Time is the only representation of the House, yet when constructive suggestions are made, the Government turn their back on them, as they are doing now in connection with the Asylum and Immigration Bill. That refusal does the House no good whatever.

I do not believe that the Leader of the House was allowed to influence that decision, which is a shame because he is a wiser man than the Home Secretary, and had he had his way the House could have been shown in a better light.

I shall now talk about some of the areas for which the Leader of the House is specifically responsible. Incidentally, I thank him for announcing today the dates of the 10 constituency Fridays for this Session, and I also thank him in advance for his anticipated early announcement of recess dates.

When I consider the parliamentary time that we have available, and when I hear comments such as those of the right hon. Member for Worthing (Sir T. Higgins), I am reminded how many failings our present system has. The Queen's Speech and the Budget—two of the biggest parliamentary occasions—are within days of each other. It is right that the debates on them are long and take a great deal of parliamentary time—but we may be short of time later.

What the House needs is not the tinkering changes to procedure to which the Jopling report led, but a far more fundamental rethink of how our parliamentary system could be made to work more effectively through measures such as the publication of draft Bills, the use of pre-legislative Committees and the reorganisation of our timetable so as to make better use of the time available and to avoid the long three-month gap, which makes no sense in terms of the accountability of the House to the public.

I believe that, unless we start thinking about those issues, and unless we make such changes, not necessarily to give more sitting days but to spread them more carefully throughout the year, Parliament will not be able to do its job effectively. I am sorry that this year the Leader of the House has not been able to lead a campaign for further changes in our procedures. I understand that change is always difficult, and that the House is always very traditional, but I hope that more change can come.

The House has been traditional today because, as has been our habit in recent years, we began the last day of the debate on the Queen's Speech with a debate on economic policy. At times today we might have been forgiven for thinking that we were in the middle of a Budget debate already—although clearly, judging by the questions that my hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) was asked, it would have been a Budget introduced by a Labour Chancellor. It was my hon. Friend who was asked to provide all the answers. [HON. MEMBERS: "He did not provide any."] He provided many of the answers—unlike the Chancellor, who does not seem to know the difference between objectives and policies.

I always find it amusing that Conservative Members expect my hon. Friend to answer details about what will be in his first Budget in 18 months' time. Conservative Members tell us that the election might not be for 18 months, but I am not sure that the Chancellor will be able to tell us what he is going to do next week.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Taylor: I am normally willing—

Mr. Arnold *rose—*

Mrs. Taylor: Will the hon. Gentleman let me finish? I am normally willing to give way but, unfortunately, Conservative Members wasted time at the beginning of my speech so I shall not give way.

I have worked out why my hon. Friend the shadow Chancellor is always asked for so many details. Quite simply, there is so much interest in my hon. Friend's first Budget because there is so little confidence in this Queen's Speech. There is little confidence that the Queen's Speech has any relevance whatsoever to the needs of the country.

The Chancellor, by contrast, has the luxury of sealed lips, and he cannot disclose the details of next week's Budget. I suppose that we will just have to wait until Sunday to read the briefings that the chairman of the Conservative party will give out. Nothing the Chancellor said today gives us confidence that he is anything other than incredibly complacent about the economic prospects for the country.

Throughout the week of debate on the Queen's Speech, many themes have emerged. The main one is that the Queen's Speech does not attack the fundamental problems that face the country. My right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition asked last Wednesday where the plan for job creation was, and how the Government proposed to counter insecurity. Do Ministers realise that, in the five years to the end of 1994, almost 11 million British people—or two in five of the work force—experienced unemployment? That insecurity is real.

Do Ministers realise that the amount of money that individuals have to spend has fallen, as a *Financial Times* article last week showed? That is not a state of mind, as the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry would imply. Do Ministers realise that 70 per cent. of all home repossessions are caused by job losses? That is not a state of mind, and those who suggest that it is insult the thousands of families who have been desperately hit by Conservative policies during the past few years.

[Mrs. Taylor]

One issue that was not mentioned in the Queen's Speech, but which I wish to touch on briefly—not least because I have a constituency interest—is the inadequacy of regulation of the private utilities. There was a debate in the House this morning on the problems facing my constituents and others in West Yorkshire. The House heard during that debate that Yorkshire Water supplied tankers of water free of charge to soften training grounds for racehorses while it was threatening rota cuts in the rest of West Yorkshire.

Yorkshire Water told firms in Bradford that they should either relocate or boil 500,000 gallons of water a day during the crisis. It has shown sheer incompetence. That is the impression not just of Labour Members of Parliament, but of local industry. The company's incompetence shows that regulation of the private utilities is woefully inadequate, but all the Minister could say today was that if the situation did not improve, he might have to consider setting leakage targets. There are 600 tankers trundling through Yorkshire, but one in three is wasting its time, because, as soon as the water gets into the system, it starts leaking out. All the Minister could say was that if the situation did not get any better he might have to consider what to do. The Minister wanted to wash his hands of that situation—[*Laughter*] That would be more than the chairman of Yorkshire Water did—he claimed that he did not do such healthy things.

Many other problems are created by the Queen's Speech. I am sorry that the hon. Member for Leeds, North-West (Dr. Hampson) is not here. He talked about nursery education in Leeds and said that he welcomed the nursery voucher scheme because he thought that it would bring some nursery places. He said that the situation in relation to nursery places in Leeds was appalling. I have checked the figures since the hon. Gentleman spoke, which may be why he is not here.

In Leeds, 45 per cent. of all three and four-year-olds and 30 per cent. of rising-fives are in nursery schools, so 75 per cent. of nursery age children in Leeds are in nursery education. The dreadful, appalling con trick of nursery vouchers is that they threaten that Labour-controlled council's excellent provision of nursery places, from which many children have benefited over many years. The Government's cynical contract will not be accepted by parents, because parents do not want nursery vouchers: they want quality nursery education for their children, which the Government are failing to provide.

Throughout the Queen's Speech, Ministers and Conservative Members have clearly been practising for their time in opposition. They behave like an Opposition. They absolve themselves of all the problems that the country is facing. How often have we heard from Conservative Members during the past few days that something should be done about Government borrowing, interest rates, the quality of education and the level of crime? Those remarks were made by hon. Members who belong to a party that has been in office for 16 years.

Sir Terence Higgins: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Taylor: I do not have time.

The Chancellor had no evidence whatever to give today when he was under fire from my hon. Friend the shadow Chancellor. The sad fact is that Britain has fallen from 13th to 18th place in the GDP league table. I have looked—perhaps the hon. Member for Lancaster (Dame E. Kellett-Bowman) would like to look as well—at what the Conservative research department brief says about the league table that shows that Britain has fallen from 13th to 18th place. It says:

"Labour's table is misleading and inaccurate . . . Labour's league table is another example of their cynicism: they don't care how spurious their figures are."

The brief fails to mention that the source of the table is a document produced by the Government entitled "Competitiveness: Forging Ahead". The Chancellor chose to quote *The Wall Street Journal* as his only source of support. Perhaps he should come closer to home and look at last Thursday's *Financial Times*, which says:

"The pound sank to a record low on the foreign exchanges yesterday as figures showing a rise in unemployment and the biggest fall in living standards for nearly 14 years".

The Chancellor said nothing to deal with that. He showed only utter complacency.

The Queen's Speech shows total complacency and gives no hope for Britain. It is a discredited Queen's Speech from a discredited Government who have failed Britain. The sooner they go, the better.

9.34 pm

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Tony Newton): I shall follow the pattern of the speech of the hon. Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor) by starting in a quieter tone. I recall that, on the first occasion that I had this task of winding up the debate on the Address in 1992, a senior former colleague, whose name I will not reveal, but some may guess, who was aware of the fact that the Leader of the House conventionally says something about House of Commons matters, advised me with words to the effect of, "Forget all that Leader of the House stuff and just sock it to 'em." Being of a naturally conservative nature, however, I stuck to the convention on that occasion, as I propose to do for part of my speech tonight.

Indeed, at a time when the House is so often much criticised for the way in which its business is conducted, it is worth spending a few minutes on the significant improvements of the past year.

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): I thank my right hon. Friend for giving way to allow me to mention a House of Commons matter. He may be aware that, last week, I wrote to Sir Gordon Downey after the publication of an amendment to the Loyal Address in which a number of the signatories, who had been sponsored by a trade union, did not declare that sponsorship. His advice on declaring the interest on the Order Paper was that

"this is the appropriate course of action to take."

Would my right hon. Friend care to comment on the fact that a right hon. Gentleman—a member of the Transport and General Workers Union—sought not to do so when he put his name to an amendment today?

Mr. Newton: I note what my hon. Friend says. I also heard the exchanges between the hon. Member for Dewsbury and another of my hon. Friends about a quarter of an hour ago. While I note what my hon. Friend says, the proper thing for me to do is to say that, if there is thought to be a source of complaint, it would be proper

for it to be directed to the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards, whom we have put in place precisely to consider such complaints.

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): As we are on House of Commons matters, may I report to the Leader of the House that there is genuine confusion about the interpretation of the new rule? Does he not think, therefore, that it would be a good thing to expedite the setting up of the new Select Committee, to give the new commissioner clearer guidelines and instructions?

Mr. Newton: As the hon. Gentleman will know, I circulated a note setting out the position as clearly as was possible in the light of the report, the debate and the resolutions that the House had passed. I consistently acknowledged in the debate, as the report acknowledged, that there would be a need for further guidance and guidelines and that that would be the task of the Select Committee, working with the commissioner. I can assure the hon. Gentleman that the usual channels are beavering away with a view to getting the new Select Committee established and I hope that it will be possible to proceed before too much longer, partly for the very reason that he reasonably mentioned.

Before I return to one or two House of Commons matters that I wanted to mention, I must say that I was particularly sorry not to have been in the Chamber to hear the right hon. Member for Lagan Valley (Mr. Molyneaux), but with the miracles of modern technology, I was able to follow some of what he said from afar. I want to assure him that the Government warmly welcome the programme for peace and reconciliation in Northern Ireland and the border counties of Ireland. It is a tangible contribution to the peace process, and the right hon. Gentleman might like to know that all expenditure incurred under that programme will be subject to the same standards of accountability and the need to secure value for money as apply generally to public expenditure in the United Kingdom. I hope that that will be helpful to the right hon. Gentleman.

To return to the House of Commons part of my speech, looking back on the speech that I made on this occasion a year ago, I noticed some reasonably optimistically worded paragraphs in which I hoped—and I was proved right—that the hon. Member for Dewsbury would be similarly supportive. I had an optimistically worded passage about my hopes that we would find an agreed way forward on changes along the lines recommended by what has become known as Jopling.

The hon. Member for Dewsbury may see some irony in this, but against the background of our efforts at that time to suggest and subsequently to bring to the attention of our colleagues—that is perhaps the most tactful phrase that I can use—the desirability of 20-minute winding-up speeches in debates such as this, it is curious that we should find ourselves with more time than that on this occasion, for reasons that I do not wish to go into, but which we both understand.

Since that debate a year ago, we have not only achieved that agreement but conducted an experiment that I think is widely seen on both sides of the House as having been a very considerable success. It has brought about a reduction of the House's average sitting hours of something like an hour a day. It has made sittings beyond 11 pm a rarity and sittings beyond midnight a wholly exceptional event. Combined with longer notice of business, earlier notification of recesses and the introduction of non-sitting Fridays, it has genuinely helped hon. Members to plan in a more sensible way for their constituency and family commitments.

The arrangements for Wednesday mornings have increased the time and opportunities available for Back Benchers to raise subjects of their choice. The Government have been able to get their necessary business through, but without the Opposition feeling that they have been deprived of the proper opportunity, which I, of course, respect, to probe, discuss and, where they wish, oppose.

I do not think that this has been remarked on before, but I asked for some checking to be done today. One result of the changes has been that we have just experienced the first Session for 35 years in which no guillotine motion has been moved, with the solitary exception, I should perhaps say—I do not know whether this will wipe the smile off the face of the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar), but it probably will not—of 1978-79, when the absence of guillotines was the result of the Government being guillotined and a general election taking place.

The changes that have enabled all that to happen have been turned into permanent changes in our Standing Orders, which should enable us, with what I hope will be continued good will in the usual channels—I was encouraged by what the hon. Member for Dewsbury said—to consolidate those sensible developments. Certainly that will be my aim. I take this opportunity to thank warmly the hon. Member for Dewsbury for her kind words about me. Whether they will still apply by the time I have got to the end of my speech I am less sure. Whether they would have been approved by the hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay) I rather doubt, because last week at business questions he effectively suggested that I should resign for being too reasonable.

Meanwhile, other gains have been made by procedural changes. The introduction of new arrangements both here and in another place have markedly increased our ability to deal with non-controversial Bills arising from Law Commission reports, with the twin advantages of improving the statute book and reducing the frustration of the Law Commission at seeing so much of its excellent work apparently disappear into limbo. In the past two Sessions, 13 Law Commission reports have been implemented, which is a substantial increase on earlier periods. I should make it clear, as does the Gracious Speech, that my noble Friend the Lord Chancellor will bring forward further such measures in the Session now getting under way.

Another significant improvement is the changes brought forward by my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade, then the Secretary of State for Scotland, which have enhanced the role of the Scottish Grand Committee. In the past year, the Committee has met in Glasgow and Aberdeen as well as in Edinburgh and Westminster. There have been extra sessions of Scottish questions in the Committee, as well as statements by Ministers and debates initiated both by Government and by the various Opposition parties. As the House knows, the Government are considering how those new

[Mr. Newton]

procedures can be developed further, and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland will be making an announcement in due course.

Then, too, and certainly no less important, there is the matter to which my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall) and the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) referred. I refer to the changes that the House agreed just before the end of the previous Session, following the work of the Nolan report and the Select Committee on Standards in Public Life. Although inevitably obscured, perhaps rather unfortunately, by the controversy on one point, people are less well aware than those of us who were concerned with the work of that Committee would like them to be of the fact that it was largely on the basis of consensus, in an all-party Committee, and with the support of large and sometimes overwhelming majorities in the House, that we put in place the most significant strengthening of our rules in many decades.

I hope that I make the following claim rightly on behalf of the House as a whole. In short, over the past year, the House has done a great deal to adapt to new needs, new circumstances, new conditions and new moods, showing exactly the strength that has made it probably the most enduring institution of its kind in the world. Although I note, as I have had to note on one or two radio programmes, the pressure for faster or more radical change, I believe that the evolutionary development of this place is a fundamental part of its strength and the reason why it has lasted so well and so long.

Mr. Benn: In the light of the experience of the Privileges Committee, to which the Leader of the House refers, has he given any further thought to the advantages to Parliament's reputation of such Committees being open so that the debates can be heard, a point that I made a year ago and for which I paid a heavy price? I believe that the time has come when the openness of such Select Committees should be seriously considered.

Mr. Newton: Obviously enough, I and, no doubt, many others have given further thought to that point. I draw a distinction between the question whether evidence should be taken in public under certain circumstances and the question whether deliberation should take place in public. I think that, far from being enhanced, the role of the Committees would be destroyed were meetings to be wholly held in public.

Certainly the hon. Member for Dewsbury will agree that we teased out, eventually successfully, the vast majority of the subject matter, such as the appointment of the parliamentary commissioner, the code, the new Select Committee on Standards and Privileges, the ban on advocacy and a whole range of what was agreed by the House a fortnight ago. Had we sought to achieve that unanimity on the basis of having everything openly reported and available—every exchange and every modification—it would not have worked. We would have ended up with a totally different and far less satisfactory way in which to proceed.

I make this point even without being able to prove it by revealing the proceedings beyond what I have said just now. Anybody who had been able to listen to the exchanges, assuming that they could have been entirely confidential and that the presence of a listener would not have inhibited them, which of course it would have done, would have thought that it was an example of all the parties in Parliament at their best, working in the interests of Parliament as a whole. The results demonstrate that.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): My right hon. Friend talks about unanimity in the Committee. Sometimes when that happens, the House should be put on its guard. In the event, we had a three-hour debate and most of the people who spoke in that debate were either members of the Committee or related to the subject. Back Benchers or others who might have had a different point of view had no time to bring their points of view forward. When next a Select Committee has debates and produces recommendations, will my right hon. Friend give the House an undertaking that there will be proper time for people who have not been members of that Committee to put their points of view in a debate?

Mr. Newton: I always give consideration to such representations. I do not think that I can make an advance commitment without knowing what my hon. Friend might be talking about. Is he, for example, talking about a report that might come from the new Select Committee on Standards and Privileges? I assure him that I shall bear in mind what he has said, because I know that he reflects the views of other hon. Members as well.

I now touch on one other point which is more clearly for the Government as such, but which is very much directed towards improving the working of Parliament in relation to legislation. I know that the hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) is interested in this point. I refer to the publication of Bills in draft so that those who may be affected by them have a good opportunity to comment not only on the policy, but on the detail and practical effect of proposed legislation. That proved helpful in the Session before last, in the case, albeit a rather special one, of the Sunday Trading Bill, and with the Environment Agency provisions of the Environment Act 1995. In the previous Session—the hon. Member for Dewsbury kindly referred to this—we published draft Bills on the reserve forces, on defamation and on arbitration, all of which we hope to bring before the House this Session.

More recently we published drafts of the Hong Kong (Overseas Public Servants) Bill and the Chemical Weapons Bill, which the House will consider tomorrow. Inevitably, it will not be possible for every Bill to be published in draft, but I have no doubt that, where timing and other considerations make it practicable and appropriate, that practice can greatly contribute to the quality of the legislation that the House passes.

As the Government said in the second competitiveness White Paper, which has been waved about in a different context several times today:

> "Publication of draft Bills, in advance of introduction in Parliament, allows consultation to take place on clarity of structure and presentation, and on drafting detail, as well as on policy."

The White Paper made it clear that we hope to move further in that direction and to increase the number of Bills published in draft in advance. I can tell the House, and I think that it has not been said before, that, in the current Session, and in the spirit of the White Paper, we intend to publish draft Bills on adoption, building societies and merchant shipping.

Mr. Peter Shore (Bethnal Green and Stepney): The right hon. Gentleman has made a strong case for publishing draft Bills, to enable people to consider them and to contribute before they become final. Given the obvious controversy surrounding the Asylum and Immigration Bill, does he not think that it would be a suitable candidate for publishing in draft before the final Bill is presented?

Mr. Newton: Perhaps rather delphically, I used a phrase about "where timing and other considerations make it practicable and appropriate". The figures that my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary gave in his statement the other day, and no doubt used in his speech on Monday, make it clear that the rapid and almost dramatic escalation in the problem suggests that it is one that must be tackled more urgently than would be allowed for by the suggestion made by the right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore).

Sir David Mitchell (North-West Hampshire): Does my right hon. Friend see scope for applying the principle to Euro-regulations and directives?

Mr. Newton: As for legislation initiated in Europe, that question would not fall to me as Leader of the House in this Parliament. I have been concerned notably with social security legislation, and moves have already been made to publish secondary legislation in draft, for example, for consultation with the Social Security Advisory Committee. Where practicable, and where it would genuinely help to improve the legislative process, I would like consideration to be given to such publication in draft, in appropriate cases.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is one thing to refer Law Commission reports to a Special Standing Committee, as he mentioned earlier, but quite another to do as the hon. Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor) said, and refer such a controversial Bill as the Asylum and Immigration Bill to such a Committee?

Mr. Newton: The hon. Member for Dewsbury referred to that suggestion, which has been the subject of much argument in the House in the past few days and correspondence between my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition. I basically agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster (Dame E. Kellett-Bowman), but I do not want to add to the argument tonight, despite the blandishments of the hon. Member for Dewsbury.

The hon. Member for Dewsbury unhelpfully anticipated another point that I wanted to raise, which takes me back to the spirit of Jopling—in this case, the earlier notification of recess dates. The House may like to know that, subject to the progress of business, the House will rise at the conclusion of business on Wednesday 20 December until Tuesday 9 January. At Easter, again subject to the progress of business, the House will rise at the conclusion of business on Wednesday 3 April until Tuesday 16 April. That of course means that the recess this year will cover the week after Easter rather than the week before, as it did last Session. I hope that that is helpful to the House and that I may claim my brownie points. However, whatever else is obvious today, it is obvious that there is a good deal of debate to come on many issues before we get as far as the Christmas recess, let alone Easter, and it is to some of those arguments that I shall now refer.

I start by referring to the speech of the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown)—or rather, the annual re-run of the same speech, to which I always listen with interest, if only in hope, which has so far always proved vain, of hearing something new. That familiar but not especially friendly speech has two characteristics. First, it relentlessly runs the country down and ignores every achievement. The second characteristic is that, having said that everything is wrong, the hon. Gentleman says nothing whatever about what he would do about it. In both respects, he played true to form today.

We heard much about unemployment, which we all want to reduce and which we have reduced by 700,000, but not a word about the extent to which the country has effectively the best record in Europe in reducing unemployment and in putting the biggest proportion of its population into work.

We heard many references to people who are less well-off and vulnerable, but not a word about the tens of thousands of people being helped by disability living allowance, introduced by the present Government, the more than £1 billion extra in real terms put into helping low-income families since 1988 and another £1 billion put into helping the less well-off pensioners.

We heard much about the need for investment—which the Chancellor countered with some striking figures showing how much better our record was than many others—but not a word about the country's record in attracting inward investment, obtaining one third of all investment into the European Union from outside, which embraced 41 per cent. of that from Japan, 43 per cent. of that from the United States and 50 per cent. of that from Korea.

To cap it all, we heard—from a Labour Front-Bench spokesman—about the lurch to the right. The most that can be said about that is that at least it is something of which Labour Front-Bench Members have some first-hand experience—but for how long? I do not know, because we can see the faces on the Labour Benches below the Gangway when hon. Members speak from the Labour Front Bench. We can also see the faces on the Labour Back Benches when hon. Members speak from the Labour Front Bench.

I make no apology for repeating what my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer said this afternoon, when he quoted the striking words of the hon. Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott):

> "Gordon can say anything he likes if he thinks it is going to win the Election. But ordinary Labour party supporters in this country, particularly the poor and the unemployed when Labour is in power will be looking for other priorities from tax cuts."

[Interruption.] What, "Hear, hear" from below the Gangway? Does the hon. Member for Worsley (Mr. Lewis) want to intervene?

Mr. Terry Lewis (Worsley) *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Newton: That is only because the hon. Gentleman does not want to confirm what I am saying.

On the Opposition Benches, there is not a lurch to the left but a leap to the left, and an awful lot of people are left behind.

[Mr. Newton]

After his litany of gloom, what did we get from the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East? Frankly, we got even less than usual. However, the hon. Member for Dewsbury said that he was being asked for all the answers. I should not mind if we received any answers, let alone all of them.

In his speech last week, the Leader of the Opposition started off by describing the Queen's Speech, on which we are now debating the humble Address, as irrelevant to the needs of Britain and a pathetic mouse. Three paragraphs further on, he had—as the hon. Member for Dewsbury has tonight—expressed support for about half the programme or had said that he thought that Labour had thought of it. He continued to wriggle, to try to dissociate himself from his hon. Friends' opposition to the asylum Bill. It came down to the fact that he did not like the speech because it enhanced opportunity, choice and standards in education.

The Queen's Speech is not an irrelevant mouse; it is a vigorous programme in the interests of our country. I invite the House to support it tonight.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 271, Noes 298.

Division No. 2] **[10.00 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Cabom, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomery)*
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Cunningham, Roseanna
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Chris *(L'Boro & S'worth)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge Hl)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley North)*
Howells, Dr Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Sheffld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Kennedy, Jane *(L'pool Br'dg'n)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McCartney, Ian
McCartney, Robert
McCrea, The Reverend William
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
Madden, Max
Maddock, Diana
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
O'Brien, Mike *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Chris *(Is'ton S & F'sbury)*

Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Welsh, Andrew
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Ms Ann Coffey and
Mr. Dennis Turner.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Atkins, Rt Hon Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ru'cliff)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Congdon, David
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'shr)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Rt Hon Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Gryffs, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Rt Hon Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Sir Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lightbown, Sir David
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Monro, Rt Hon Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Riddick, Graham
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Sir Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Smyth, The Reverend Martin
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*

Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Derek Conway and
Mr. Michael Bates.

Question accordingly negatived.

Amendment proposed, at the end of the Question, to add,

But humbly regret that the Gracious Speech fails to set out adequate proposals to secure investment in people through education, to reform Britain's discredited system of government or to build for the country's long-term future through investment in housing and transport; and further regret that measures outlined in the Gracious Speech on housing and immigration risk adding to the divisions in society.—[*Mr. Ashdown.*]

Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 32 (Calling of amendments at end of debate), That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 32, Noes 297.

Division No. 3] **[10.16 pm**

AYES

Alton, David
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Barnes, Harry
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomery)*
Chidgey, David
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cunningham, Roseanna
Davies, Chris *(L'Boro & S'worth)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Harvey, Nick
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Lynne, Ms Liz
Maddock, Diana
Mahon, Alice
Marek, Dr John
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Salmond, Alex
Skinner, Dennis
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Tyler, Paul
Wallace, James
Welsh, Andrew
Wise, Audrey

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Archy Kirkwood and
Mr. Simon Hughes.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Atkins, Rt Hon Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ru'cliff)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Congdon, David
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'ire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Eggar, Rt Hon Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Rt Hon Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Sir Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lightbown, Sir David
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
McCrea, The Reverend William
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony

Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Monro, Rt Hon Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Sir Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Smyth, The Reverend Martin
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Derek Conway and
Mr. Michael Bates.

Question accordingly negatived.

Main Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, as follows:—

Most Gracious Sovereign,

We, Your Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Parliament assembled, beg leave to offer our humble thanks to Your Majesty for the Gracious Speech which Your Majesty has addressed to both Houses of Parliament.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That, at the sitting on Tuesday 5th December, the Speaker shall put forthwith the Questions necessary to dispose of proceedings on the Motion in the name of the Prime Minister relating to public expenditure, including the Question on any amendment thereto which she may have selected, and the said Questions may be decided after the expiry of the time for opposed business.—[*Mr. Willetts.*]

PETITION

Deeping Bypass

10.28 pm

Mr. Quentin Davies (Stamford and Spalding): I beg to present a petition signed by 6,000 inhabitants of the villages of Market Deeping and Deeping St. James in my constituency, which begs for the rapid construction of the Deeping bypass, which I have had occasion to mention in the House before. We have been waiting for the bypass since 1939, when the idea was mooted. It was in the 1989 Government road programme, but was removed from that programme in 1993 because of public expenditure cuts. We very much hope that it will be constructed in the new future, because it is vital not merely for the economy and the amenity of my constituents but also for their safety. Over the past two months there have been three serious accidents, with one fatality, in an area that would be bypassed if the bypass were constructed.

I hope that the voices of those 6,000 of my constituents, who represent more than three quarters of the adult population of the two villages concerned, will be heard in the right quarter in the way that they deserve.

To lie upon the Table.

Social Services (Lancashire)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Bates.]*

10.29 pm

Mr. Harold Elletson (Blackpool, North): I am grateful for the opportunity to discuss the provision of social services in Lancashire. There has been much debate recently about the implementation of the community care reforms, and about the way in which local authorities have met their responsibilities for the management of social services.

There has been widespread support on both sides of the House for the concept of care in the community, and there is no doubt that it was the right policy, and that the Government were right to implement it. Like most hon. Members, I fully support the concept of offering choice to service users, to enable them to live in their own homes wherever possible and to allow them a greater say in how they live their lives.

It is now just over two years since implementation of the reforms began, and clearly it has been a much greater success in some parts of the country than in others. Tonight I shall concentrate on the local situation in Lancashire, and examine the extent to which the county council has met the challenge of care in the community and fulfilled its new responsibilities. I have to say that it is a far from happy story, and that Lancashire's experience has been a catalogue of incompetence, mismanagement and, in consequence, utterly avoidable misery.

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Blackpool, South): Does my hon. Friend agree that it is probably owing to the total incompetence of the Lancashire county council Labour group that not only has no Lancashire Labour Member bothered to be here for the debate but that there is only one Labour Member in the Chamber at all—the hon. Member for Motherwell, North (Dr. Reid)—and even he is here by mistake?

Mr. Elletson: As usual, my hon. Friend makes an extremely good point, and I am sure that it was not lost on my other hon. Friends, or on the representatives of the press in the Gallery.

First, let me dispel the myth cynically propagated by the Labour leadership at county hall—that Lancashire's woes are the result of Government underfunding. As my hon. Friends, including the Minister, all know, Lancashire's Labour councillors are experts in black propaganda and in the techniques of twisting and manipulating statistics to distort the truth. They are also compulsive spenders, with a disgraceful record of wasting public money on bureaucracy.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): Lancashire Labour councillors may be compulsive spenders on things other than education, but on education they are compulsive underspenders.

Mr. Elletson: I agree absolutely with my hon. Friend. Perhaps we could discuss education in another Adjournment debate on another day, because that is an equally important and urgent topic.

There is nothing that Lancashire county councillors would like more than to blame their misfortunes on the Government—and, of course, in a local election year that is exactly what they have been trying to do. However, the truth is very different.

The total amount available to Lancashire county council to spend on social services has consistently increased since 1990-91, when total funding of social services was £92 million. In 1993-94, £147 million was available to the county council to spend on personal social services; in 1994-95, £169 million was available, and in 1995-96 there is £185 million available. The sum that Lancashire county council received last year to spend on social services represented an increase of £22.6 million on the previous year.

The truth is that there has been a continuous year-on-year increase in the resources available, yet Lancashire's mismanagement of the funding available has left it in an appalling predicament. In 1993-94 the county council recorded an underspend on the social services budget of £6.3 million and, despite the recommendation of the Conservative group on the council that the amount be carried forward, Labour refused to do that, and decided instead to build up the balances.

Last year, the council got itself into a position where it was faced with a possible overspend of £14 million, so it decided to threaten elderly and disabled people with the withdrawal of their home help services.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: It was to happen overnight.

Mr. Elletson: I agree with my hon. Friend. I am sure that all my hon. Friends remember that letters were sent from county hall which terrified some of Lancashire's most vulnerable citizens. This year, the draconian cuts will be implemented because the county council cannot manage the available resources. It cannot balance the books, and it is spending above the level of its personal social services standard spending assessment. Once again, the Labour-controlled council blames a reduction in Government funding.

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): Does my hon. Friend agree that the council's inept handling of its budget has meant that people who receive only one hour a week of home help have received letters from the county council to say that that one hour's help is to be removed? Does he agree that the county council has stated to the most vulnerable people in society that their money and help are to taken away from them, and does he further agree that those people will suffer because of that?

Mr. Elletson: I agree with my hon. Friend, and I know that his constituency postbag is as full as mine. My postbag is filled with letters from constituents who have to face reductions in social services such as respite care and home help. Many people, such as people with learning difficulties, now face an increase in their charges for non-residential services.

Many cases have been drawn to my attention by people who are at a complete loss as to what to do. It is difficult to single out one case among all those to draw to the Minister's attention tonight, but let me tell him about Geraldine Robinson. Geraldine's picture appeared on the front cover of a Lancashire county council leaflet advertising the care services that it proudly claims it provides to people in the community.

Geraldine is a young woman who suffers from cerebral palsy. She was fully assessed by Lancashire county council social services in March 1994, and a care package designed specifically for her was finalised in June that year, which provided her with a cost-effective, 24-hour care service package. It enabled her to live an independent life in the community, and it had been based on an assessment of her clinical needs—just as the Government intended. Yet in June of this year, Lancashire county council, which was the author, the House may remember, of the leaflet showing Geraldine's picture and claiming to be able to cater for her needs, told her that her care package would be cut from £700 to £300 a week—not reduced, not trimmed, but cut by more than a half.

Despite several attempts by Geraldine and her carers to question why this decision had been taken, no answer has yet been forthcoming. I can only conclude—as any reasonable person would—that Geraldine is another casualty of the council's inability to manage its resources and keep within its budget.

Mr. Colin Pickthall (West Lancashire): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Elletson: No, I will not give way to the hon. Gentleman, as I have given way three times already. Normally, there would have to be a reassessment before a care package was reduced, but that did not happen. The council said that its only alternative to reducing her care package would be to force Geraldine into residential care. Of course, she is extremely distressed about that. She has been trying to build a life for herself in the community, and she was encouraged by the county council to live independently, and even to move to a two-bedroomed property to allow more space for her carers.

Geraldine has overcome many personal tragedies, including the death of her fiancé in December 1993, but now the county council is turning on her the full pressure of its callous and insensitive bureaucracy. The social services department's actions in the past year have had a massive impact on Geraldine's life. She now has to undergo another comprehensive reassessment at a level the council is unwilling to identify, despite the fact that no significant major change in circumstances or Geraldine's needs or condition has occurred. That is not care in the community, or giving disabled and vulnerable people a greater say in their own lives. That is not enabling people to live in their own home. It is the incompetence of a county administration that has failed miserably to discharge its responsibilities to its most vulnerable citizens.

If the money is not to be spent on people such as Geraldine, where is it to go? I want to know what the priorities of Lancashire social services departments are. Let us look at the case of another young woman far less deserving and needy than Geraldine. She is a constituent of my right hon. Friend the Member for South Ribble (Mr. Atkins). Lancashire county council managed to find £2,000 a week for a course of remedial treatment so that she could go on a three-month riding course in Ireland and spend a considerable time in Australia—all, of course, in the company of social workers.

Mr. Robert Atkins (South Ribble): Is my hon. Friend aware that, at the same time, the county council was prepared to close a home called Meadowcroft in my constituency which provided superb care for young women who would not otherwise get the sort of care that they needed, in favour of keeping open a home in Liverpool—outside the county council area? The closure has caused great distress to many of my constituents and many of those associated with Meadowcroft, at the same time as wasting the sort of money that my hon. Friend has mentioned in the context of one case.

Mr. Elletson: I have heard of the case that my hon. Friend mentions. It is an equally disgraceful example of the misallocation of resources.

Perhaps the main priority of the social services department is to fund the ever-increasing numbers of administrators and bureaucrats in county hall. In the last financial year the social services department employed 203 extra members of staff. That was undoubtedly to deal with the appalling chaos that the department has created by its mismanagement of the assessment procedures. What is even more ironic—this whole sorry tale is a web of ironies—having taken on all the extra staff, the council now finds that it cannot pay them to do anything. I am sure that my hon. Friends will have noticed that today's *Lancashire Evening Post* tells us that social services workers are being told not to visit clients because the county council cannot afford their mileage.

The worst damage being done is to the people who could make a real success of care in the community—those in the private sector and the voluntary services. Lancashire county council has consistently favoured placement of clients in council-run residential homes over placement in independently run homes, even though the private sector can provide the same or a better quality of service at a lower price. Many of my colleagues have joined me in correspondence with the Lancashire Care Association, which represents more than 400 independent care providers across the county. Its members employ more than 15,000 staff and care for more than 10,000 people.

The Lancashire Care Association tells me that the county council social services department has a written policy that all domiciliary services should be offered in-house before being offered to the private sector. If that is true, it is absolutely disgraceful. I hope that the Minister will ensure that the social services inspectorate fully investigates that claim as early as possible.

Let us take a moment to consider the financial implications of Lancashire county council's policy. The cost of placements in, for example, part III social services homes, is £100 per week more than placements in the private sector. The cost of council-run domiciliary services ranges between £11.20 and £17 an hour, but all private sector services are priced between £5.75 and £6 per hour, which is a massive saving on in-house costs.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): Is that not a case for the district auditor?

Mr. Elletson: My hon. Friend has a good point. It is clear that substantial savings could be made if the council made better use of the private sector. Possibly as much as £10 million a year in the residential care sector and £4.5 million in the domiciliary care sector could be saved, yet the council appears to have no intention of using the private care sector. When the chairman of the social services committee, Councillor Mrs. Humble, took part in a programme on a local radio station and was asked by members of the Lancashire Care Association about the

[Mr. Elletson]

possibility of buying more private non-residential care services, she told them—wait for it, my hon. Friends will not believe it—that she was not prepared to put local authority staff jobs in jeopardy.

Does her concern for local authority bureaucrats justify such a prolific waste of taxpayer's money? Why does she not care about the jobs of workers in the private sector? What is wrong with them? Perhaps she should start thinking about the 15,000 employees of the various members of the Lancashire Care Association, who do a fantastic job, which day by day she makes more difficult.

Dr. John Reid (Motherwell, North): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Elletson: No, because I have given way a record five times in an Adjournment debate.

Lancashire social services department has issued its community care plan for 1997-97, which shows that costly in-house services will continue to be favoured. While that policy continues, the private sector struggles to remain solvent and service users' choices are severely restricted.

An integral part of the reforms was the requirement that a large percentage of the available funds would be spent on residential, day or domiciliary services, provided by the private and voluntary sector. That was to ensure that authorities could not build monopoly empires of their own and to encourage the growth of a healthy, energetic private sector, which was ready to meet the challenge of care in the community, with high-quality, cost-effective care packages.

The new system was designed to encourage local authorities to contract services out and to make more use of the independent sector. That clearly has not happened in Lancashire. Private carers are being forced out of business and service users are being driven into the clutches of Lancashire county council. That is the very opposite of everything for which we hoped from care in the community, and I hope that my hon. Friend will consider carefully the amounts that the county council is spending in the private sector and ask the social services inspectorate to consider whether that really meets the objectives of care in the community.

I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary for agreeing to reply to the debate. I know that he has been consistently bombarded with complaints about Lancashire county council and that he might feel that his hands are tied. Nevertheless, the situation in Lancashire is now so chaotic that it merits his special attention and a determined effort by the Government to intervene and protect service users and providers.

My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary and my hon. Friends may find some small amount of black humour in this final twist of irony. They may have heard that the leader of Lancashire county council, Councillor Louise Ellman, has been selected for a so-called safe Labour seat on Merseyside and hopes to join us here on these green Benches. I hear my hon. Friends asking who will replace her as the leader of the Labour group on Lancashire county council and I think I heard the hon. Member for Motherwell, North (Dr. Reid) mention a name.

Why, it is none other than the author of this great disaster. Step forward the woman who has presided over that colossal orgy of incompetence—none other than the chairman of the social services committee, Councillor Mrs. Joan Humble. I just hope that the people of Lancashire understand what a nightmare of bureaucracy, sloppy management and cynicism they will face if she ever gets control of the rest of Lancashire's services.

10.47 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. John Bowis): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North (Mr. Elletson) for introducing this short debate on Lancashire's social services and congratulate him on bringing with him the Lancashire light infantry from Ribble Valley, Blackpool, South, Fylde, South Ribble, Wyre and, indeed, from Lancaster. They are light on their feet, as well as infantry in his support.

In most parts of the country, community care is a success story. We have been moving on with our plans, through our community care development programme. Our Community Care (Direct Payments) Bill was introduced in another place last week. In April, we will be moving through our community care charters and, from April, the Carers (Recognition and Services) Act 1995 will come into force, giving carers a legal right to have their views and circumstances taken into account when the person being cared for receives a community care assessment.

The common thread running through all those developments is that they are designed to increase user and carer choice and control. They are all examples of way in which the Government are pushing forward the implementation of the community care reforms to get us closer to achieving fully the aims of "Caring for People".

We are committed to providing people with increased choice in the type of service that they receive and in the way in which the services are delivered.

Mr. Keith Mans (Wyre): I apologise for asking a question so early in my hon. Friend's speech. He well knows that, a couple of months after the start of care in the community, nearly three years ago, I told him about what was going on in Lancashire. I fully understand that, at the time, he felt that he had to wait a little longer to discover whether it was true. On the ground, we can now see the suffering of many constituents—my own and those of other hon. Members in Lancashire, as a result of three years of incompetent management. There must be a way for central Government to intervene. If there is not, it is a sad day for the people of Lancashire who, need the care to which they are entitled.

Mr. Bowis: I am grateful for that intervention. If my hon. Friend will bear with me, I will try to respond to the points that he and my other hon. Friends have made.

It is disturbing to hear of cases where the involvement of users and carers, and the possibility of choice, is being denied. It is right to involve user and carers, listen to what they say and take note of it, to give them choices wherever possible, and to ensure that they know what choices they have.

My hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North mentioned the case of Geraldine Robinson. I am grateful to him for letting me have information about her. He has explained that Geraldine Robinson and her parents are upset at the way in which Lancashire has carried out

assessments and reassessments and are concerned that her care package may be reduced. Local authorities have the responsibility for assessing people's needs and deciding what services are appropriate to meet those needs. We have advised local authorities to carry out reviews of assessment systematically and regularly. We have not said how often reviews should take place or exactly how they should be done because the appropriate frequency and level of review will vary from case to case, depending on individual circumstances.

I understand that Miss Robinson's father lodged a complaint with the social services department about the way that it was carrying out its reviews. As a result, it was agreed that an assessment interview should be carried out by someone who had had no previous contact with Miss Robinson. I am told that that interview took place on Tuesday of last week and that Lancashire has not to date made any proposal to alter her care package as a result of that assessment. Clearly, Lancashire should conduct its reviews in a way which not only meets its service requirements but which is sensitive to Miss Robinson's situation and views. I intend to ask my officials to look into the current position on this case, and I shall come back to my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North on that.

Mr. Pickthall *rose—*

Mr. Bowis: I think that the tradition is to give way in Adjournment debates only to those who have previously agreed it with the Member who has obtained the debate and the responding Minister. I have given way to everyone who falls into that category.

Dr. Reid: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. How can we possibly have a debate when only one side of the argument is heard?

Mr. Robert Atkins (South Ribble): It is an Adjournment debate.

Dr. Reid: A debate, by definition, involves two sides of an argument. How can it be in order to have a debate where the convention is that only side of the argument is heard?

Madam Deputy Speaker: This is an Adjournment debate. By tradition, it involves the Member who raises the subject and the Minister who answers. Any other speaker is by courtesy of both.

Mr. Bowis: It is not unreasonable to expect adults who are able to make contributions for non-residential services to do so, but local authorities have discretion to make charges for non-residential services. They decide whether to make them, what level they should be at and on any exemptions or discounts for different categories of users. Any charges must be reasonable and affordable.

If people with learning difficulties in Lancashire are being charged, that is absolutely and entirely at the discretion and decision of the elected leaders of Lancashire county council and it has nothing to do with the Government. Nothing from the Government requires that such charges must be made. I hope that that message will go back to those people.

Extending choice means extending the range of services and improving their cost-effectiveness so that more and better services can be delivered. There is a flourishing independent sector for residential care and nursing homes and a growing range of day and domiciliary services provided by the independent sector. As my hon. Friend says, they offer the opportunity for local authorities to secure quality services at a competitive cost. All over the country, this opportunity is being seized but not, apparently, in Lancashire. I wonder why.

As my hon. Friend said, the Lancashire Homes Association has estimated that the county council could save £10.8 million a year if it made full use of the independent sector, such is the level of inefficiency in its own homes. Potential savings from the full use of the independent sector have been put at £14 million annually. That is money that could be invested in more care for more people. Some months ago, I went to the county council in Preston and put those figures to the leader of the council and the chairman of social services. To this day, they have not disputed or denied them. Instead of using all the means at its disposal to get more care for more people, the county council still, as we hear, gives first call to its in-house domiciliary and residential services.

Local authorities asked for and were given the responsibility for community care, for assessing the needs of individuals and for deciding on the appropriate services to meet those needs. They must now deliver, and local people will watch the way in which they are doing.

My hon. Friend has posed the question, reinforced by my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre, about what can be done. A lot can be done by publicising the decisions that are being taken—or not being taken. As a result of the concerns expressed in this debate today and generally, I intend to ask the chief inspector of social services to provide me with a full report on the position in Lancashire so that I can then decide whether further action by central Government is appropriate.

The primary responsibility for community care implementation lies with local authorities. They must answer to their local populations for their decisions and the results that those decisions have on the elderly and vulnerable people for whom they are supposed to care. The people of Lancashire will want to ask the elected leaders of their county council about the delivery of community care in their area. They will want to ask about choice, about value for money and about the way in which the authority is seeking to involve them, or not, to listen, or not, and to meet their needs, or not.

Mr. Hawkins: Will my hon. Friend ensure that in the inquiry, which all Conservative Members here are delighted he has announced tonight, evidence is taken from the senior and experienced general practitioners in our constituencies? They are aware of how often good, sensible decisions about the best place and the best way in which to care for the elderly and vulnerable are being contradicted by social workers who do not know what they are doing and who do not care.

Mr. Bowis: I shall look at that possibility. I hope that, in any case, my hon. Friend will ensure that the information that can come from the experience of general practitioners—I have heard some of it directly when I have been in Blackpool—is given to me so that it can be passed on to the chief inspector and his team.

The people of Lancashire will want to know why money is wasted on state provision when better and cheaper services are available from independent homes

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and agencies. They will want to know why Lancashire's councillors prefer to support the state sector so that less money is available for home helps, respite care and other services to support vulnerable and needy people. They will want to know what Lancashire has done with the £92 million that the taxpayers have given it for social services this year; the amount has been doubled since 1990-91. I, my hon. Friends here tonight and, much more importantly, the people of Lancashire want to know the answer to that question, and they have a right to be told.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at two minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 23 November 1995

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

WAYS AND MEANS

SESSIONAL RETURNS

Ordered,

Returns for Session 1994-95 of—

(1) Business of the House;

(2) Closure of Debate and Allocation of Time;

(3) Private Bills and Private Business;

(4) Public Bills;

(5) Sittings of the House;

(6) Special Procedure Orders;

(7) Standing Committees; and

(8) Select Committees

in the same terms as the Orders made on 14th December 1994; and

(9) Delegated Legislation and Deregulation Proposals, &c., showing:—

(A) the numbers of instruments subject to the different forms of parliamentary procedure and those for which no parliamentary procedure is prescribed by statute (1) laid before the House; and (2) considered by the Joint Committee and Select Committee on Statutory Instruments respectively pursuant to their orders of reference, setting out the grounds on which Instruments may be drawn to the special attention of the House under Standing Order No. 124 (Statutory Instruments (Joint Committee)) and specifying the number of Instruments so reported under each of these grounds;

(B) the numbers of Statutory Instruments and other documents ordered to be treated as Statutory Instruments, other than draft deregulation orders, considered by the House and by Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c., respectively, showing—

(i) with respect to those considered by the House, the number considered before 10th January 1995, indicating the numbers subject to affirmative and negative procedure; the number which did not stand referred to Standing Committees under the Sessional Order [19th December 1994], and the number considered after 10th January 1995 to which the Sessional Order did not apply; and

(ii) with respect to those considered by Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c., the number referred to Standing Committees before 10th January 1995, indicating the numbers subject to affirmative and negative procedure; the number which stood referred to Standing Committees under the Sessional Order [19th December], and the number referred to Standing Committees after 10th January 1995 to which the Sessional Order did not apply;

(C) the number of Statutory Instruments and other documents ordered to be treated as Statutory Instruments approved &c. by the House, indicating the number upon which the Question for approval was put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 101 (Standing committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.); and the number of Instruments and other documents reported by Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c., indicating the number upon which no subsequent proceedings took place; and

(D) the number of deregulation proposals and draft orders, showing for deregulation proposals the number in respect of which the Deregulation Committee recommended that a draft order in the same terms should be laid before the House, that the proposals should be amended, and that the order-making power should not be used, respectively; and for draft orders the number in respect of which the Deregulation Committee recommended that the draft order should be approved, and whether or not the recommendation was agreed upon Division, and those which the Committee recommended should not be approved, respectively, and in each case, the decision of the House.—*[The First Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means.]*

Oral Answers to Questions

TREASURY

Small Businesses

1. **Mr. Duncan Smith:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what priority he gives to start-ups of small businesses as an economic indicator. [690]

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Mrs. Angela Knight): The major banks estimate that business starts are running at around 400,000 a year. Start-up figures are one of a number of important economic indicators.

Mr. Duncan Smith: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for those statistics. Does she agree that a key factor in encouraging business start-ups is a benign tax structure which lowers the burden on businesses in their initial stages? Will my hon. Friend and her Department examine the issue of the three-year point at which a number of companies find it difficult to continue in business? Does she agree that regulation—the sort of thing that would be imposed via the social chapter and the minimum wage—is the wrong way to go?

Mrs. Knight: My hon. Friend makes an excellent point. I assure him that we are doing what we can to support small businesses through proposals such as venture capital trusts, the loan guarantee scheme and the enterprise investment scheme. We shall continue to oppose the social chapter and the minimum working wage as we want businesses to survive and not die as would occur under Labour's proposals.

Ms Primarolo: Does not the Minister recognise that she must also take account of the companies that are not succeeding? Is she aware of the staggering increase in the number of company failures in the past two quarters? Does she realise that that is linked to the extra income tax burden of 7p in the pound imposed by her Government as a result of their economic failure?

Mrs. Knight: The hon. Lady had better look at her figures again. *[Interruption.]* Wait for it. It is estimated that the survival rate of businesses is improving and not worsening, as the hon. Lady implied in her question. I assure her that the best way to ensure the survival of businesses and industry in this country is to have low taxation, low inflation and interest rates as low as possible. We have that at the moment and the situation is much better than it was when the Labour party was in power.

Mr. Riddick: Does my hon. Friend agree that consumer confidence is an important factor in the success of small businesses? Does she also agree that there is a very strong economic case for reducing taxation next

week by between £5 billion and £10 billion so as to give a boost to consumer confidence and to the moral case for allowing people to keep more of the money that they earn?

Mrs. Knight: I thank my hon. Friend for his Budget representation; he must wait until next week for any further comment. However, I assure him that the survival and well-being of businesses is a very high priority for the Government. We have pledged to assist business by ensuring that the economy continues to grow and that interest rates and inflation remain as low as possible.

Betting Industry

2. **Mr. William O'Brien:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he last met representatives of the bookmakers and betting industry to discuss relative problems in the industry; and if he will make a statement. [691]

The Paymaster General (Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory): I have met representatives of the British Horseracing Board, the Horserace Betting Levy Board, the Bookmakers' committee, the British Greyhound Racing Board, the British Betting Office Association and the Betting Office Licensees Association over the past few weeks. I have listened to their concerns and I shall take their representations into account in advising my right hon. and learned Friend The Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Mr. O'Brien: Has the Minister seen the report published by the Henley centre advising on the impact of the national lottery on the off-course betting industry? Many of my constituents who work in the betting industry are fearful of their jobs as there is no longer a level playing field. Almost 20,000 jobs could be lost because of the impact of the national lottery, while Camelot's after-tax profit is now £1 million per week. When will the Minister do something to protect jobs in the betting industry?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Yes, I read that report and I am aware of the industry's view of the effect of the national lottery in particular on turnover, profitability and employment in the betting and horseracing industry. Those points will be taken into account, together with other considerations, by my right hon. and learned Friend on Tuesday.

Mr. Spring: May I thank my hon. Friend and the Treasury for the substantial help that has been given to the horseracing industry and to employment creation in the past few years, representing as I do Newmarket, the world headquarters of horseracing? However, bearing in mind the severe impact of the national lottery on the betting industry, will he consider liberalising the regime for betting shops when he has discussions with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for National Heritage?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: My hon. Friend had an Adjournment debate on the subject earlier this month. I passed on his concerns about duty rates and the point that he has just mentioned about the need, as he sees it, for further deregulation and liberalisation of betting and particularly the request by the bookmaking industry to be able to accept bets on the national lottery. I shall ensure that those points are relayed to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for National Heritage.

Gardening Leave

4. **Mr. Cousins:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he proposes to end his practice of offering gardening leave to the staff of the Treasury. [693]

Mrs. Angela Knight: It remains the Treasury's policy to provide opportunities for temporary work for staff between postings wherever possible to avoid the need for what is colloquially referred to as gardening leave.

Mr. Cousins: Do the Government accept that it cannot be right to tell employees in Britain that their security and rights at work must be subjected to the full rigour of market forces while, at the same time, giving senior staff at the Treasury the extraordinary perk of a right to take up to six weeks a year on top of all other holiday entitlements to dig their gardens?

Mrs. Knight: I recognise why the hon. Gentleman is interested in the subject: he lists composting as one of his interests in "Dod". I assure him that at the moment only eight out of more than 1,000 Treasury staff are on gardening leave. We are certainly doing our best to review our policies whenever possible to use people better.

Mr. Matthew Banks: Never mind gardening leave for senior Treasury officials, does my hon. Friend agree that if the Labour party ever form a Government, the whole country will be on gardening leave?

Mrs. Knight: My hon. Friend has put his spade in it much better than anyone else so far in the debate.

Balance of Trade

5. **Mr. Barry Jones:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the balance of trade. [694]

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. William Waldegrave): The balance of visible trade in the first half of 1995 was a deficit of £5.1 billion: lower than the deficits recorded in either half of 1994, and as low a deficit as at any time since the first half of 1987. Of course, invisible receipts now account for more than half the United Kingdom's overseas earnings.

Mr. Jones: Would not the best boost for Britain's balance of trade be a general election?

Mr. Waldegrave: No. As a great campaigner on behalf of his constituents in the steel industry, for example, the hon. Gentleman will know that since 1983 we have had surpluses in our iron and steel exports every single year thanks to the work of his constituents and our reorganisation of the iron and steel industry.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Does my right hon. Friend agree that our visible trade figures with the far east are impressive and demonstrate the growth of our trade with those countries? Will he also consider other emerging markets such as Russia and its former republics and the fact that Korea is the second largest exporter to Azerbaijan? Will he redouble our efforts to export into those emerging markets, otherwise they will be taken by the far east and Pacific rim countries?

Mr. Waldegrave: My hon. Friend refers to the good performance of our exports in the far east. If we count invisible earnings, we have a surplus with the fast

growing economies of the far east. He makes a good point about the emerging economies of the former Soviet Union. Some British companies have a position in Azerbaijan, for example, and that is to be welcomed.

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The Minister cannot get away with that. Why have the Government allowed Britain to be hobbled by a trade deficit? Is not the Government's failure to deal with that the reason why British people have suffered a 7p in the pound tax rise from this Chancellor? Before the cameras come on, why does he not tell us? Perhaps he will whisper it. Do the Government admit that the country has fallen from 13th to 18th place in the international prosperity league?

Mr. Waldegrave: I welcome the hon. Gentleman to his post and congratulate him on getting both the week's soundbites into his first question, which is most impressive. The truth is that over the whole of the last year and in the first half of this year, our exports grew to record levels, outpacing the growth in imports. That performance was seldom matched by Labour any year that it was in office.

Employment Growth

6. **Mr. Kevin Hughes:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the United Kingdom's employment growth since 1979; and what have been the equivalent figures for other EU countries. [695]

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Kenneth Clarke): Between 1979 and 1990, which were comparable years in the United Kingdom business cycle, civilian employment in the UK grew somewhat faster than the average for other European Union countries.

Mr. Hughes: Is it true that since 1979 there has been only a 0.3 per cent. increase and that the European average is 5 per cent? Is it true also that we are 22nd out of the 24 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development countries? Is that the best that the Government can do after 16 years, or is their ambition to be bottom of every league table?

Mr. Clarke: I do not recognise any of the points that the hon. Gentleman makes. We are talking here about employment and unemployment. I gave the figures peak to peak—5.7 per cent. growth in the UK and 4.9 per cent. in the rest of Europe. Trough to trough, they are roughly comparable. A higher proportion of our work force is in employment than in any other major economy. In this recovery, our unemployment is going down and more full-time jobs are being created because we have a more flexible labour market than the rest of Europe, which is in danger of having a jobless recovery.

Mr. John Townend: My right hon. and learned Friend will appreciate that I represent a constituency in which tourism is most important, and I also have an interest in a family hotel. Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that since 1979 the hotel and hospitality industry has played a major part in creating jobs? Does he further agree that if there were a minimum wage at anything like the level requested by the unions and by many Opposition Members, it would undermine the viability of many businesses in the tourist industry and result in thousands of jobs being lost?

Mr. Clarke: Tourism is a key source of employment in this country. Only 10 years ago, the Opposition jeered at the very mention of the industry, saying that it did not create real jobs. In fact, it creates hundreds of thousands of jobs in this country. My hon. Friend is right to say that tourism is one industry that would be damaged by minimum wage legislation and the social chapter. The rest of Europe has job markets that are over-regulated, over cost and inflexible. Labour wants to bring that regime to this country, and jobs would be destroyed if it were ever allowed to do so.

Mr. Skinner: Why does not the Chancellor of the Exchequer start explaining to the British people the real effects of unemployment? When the Tories got into power in 1979, 1.25 million people were out of work. After 31 fiddles of the job figures, more than 4 million people do not have a job now. [HON. MEMBERS: "Question."] Half a million women who are unemployed do not register. Half a million young people—

Madam Speaker: Order. It is about time that I heard a question from the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Skinner: He will get one soon enough.

Madam Speaker: Order. I expect one right away. The hon. Gentleman has made his point.

Mr. Skinner: When will the Chancellor and the Government start telling the truth about the figures? More than 4 million casualties do not have a job, which is three times more than in 1979. The wheels have come off the economy.

Mr. Clarke: That is a bit of tired old mythology. In 1979 there was rapidly rising unemployment and the employment of a lot of people was completely insecure because they worked in overmanned, loss-making nationalised industries and were on the brink of losing their jobs. The figures on which I rely are in labour force surveys made to International Labour Organisation standards. They show that in this recovery, we have already created more than half a million real jobs—the majority of them full time. The hon. Gentleman is peddling mythology and particularly dangerous remedies for unemployment. His policies would take us back to higher unemployment.

Mr. Deva: Will my right hon. and learned Friend confirm that this so-called endogenous growth theory is but another fancy name for state interference? If that crackpot theory were ever put into practice it would mean putting a civil servant in every boardroom in the country to manage relations.

Mr. Clarke: Of late we have not heard so much about the post-classical endogenous growth theory from the Labour party. No doubt the ratings of the shadow Chancellor with his leader would drop from 101 per cent. to 95 per cent. were he to return to that theory. Perhaps he would even be described as indispensable or unassailable—I think that is the word—in the defensive briefings emerging from the Leader of the Opposition. Crackpot theories are no substitute for policy. There is a serious endogenous growth theory, but it is not the one proposed by the shadow Chancellor, who used it as a pseudonym for state interference. He must find a policy soon otherwise he will be seen as a threat to the recovery, the new jobs and other matters that we are talking about this afternoon.

Mr. Gordon Brown: Will the Chancellor return to the question? Will he confirm that we are 20th out of 24 in

the OECD league for employment creation since 1979? Instead of being complacent, will he apologise for the fact that more than 1 million more people are out of work now than in 1979 when the Government came to power? Will he also confirm that a 10p starting rate for income tax is not only fairer and more moral, but will do more to create jobs than the abolition of capital gains or inheritance tax, which can benefit only a few?

Mr. Clarke: In 1979 there would have been fewer people unofficially out of work if they had not been on strike and not working at all. We were in the middle of a deep, diving recession, which cost many people their jobs and was due to Labour policies, which the Conservative Government then reversed. There is currently growth in employment, falling unemployment and we have introduced a flexible labour market—the hon. Gentleman knows that those factors are admired by the OECD and are being followed by the G7 countries and the European Union. Other western economies had better follow in a hurry if they want to be as good at creating jobs as we are in this country.

As for the 10p theory, the hon. Gentleman must not try to reduce policy to farce. I shall not counter him with 5p—we are not having a silly auction; we are seriously ambitious for a low tax economy in this country. I shall not criticise him too much—we back him as much as his leader does. We are anxious to protect him against the shadow Foreign Secretary and anyone else who wants to take him on. We want to keep the shadow Home Secretary and the shadow Chancellor as we like them both, and we shall do our best to keep them in their current positions.

Tourist Industry

7. **Mr. David Atkinson:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what response he has made to recent representations he has received from the tourist industry on the level of VAT. [696]

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I have received a number of representations in support of a reduced rate of VAT for tourism services, but there is no compelling evidence that the level of VAT in the UK places tourism at a disadvantage.

Mr. Atkinson: Does my hon. Friend agree that the British tourist industry is rightly seeking fairer competition between the tourist industries of EU member states and a level playing field on the rate of VAT imposed on those industries? Can he confirm that it is his policy to seek the eventual harmonisation of VAT throughout the European Union? If so, when does he expect it to be achieved?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I do not think that harmonisation can be achieved—each member state sets its own rate of VAT. I hope that member states will always do so. As for VAT on hotels and tourist services, some European countries levy a reduced rate and some levy a standard rate which is often higher than that in the United Kingdom. There is no clear link between those differences and the relative growth in tourism services. In addition, we favour a simple system of VAT and further reduced rates would complicate it. The tourism industry is important and it benefits from the general success of the British economy, but the case for VAT concessions is not established.

Mr. Bayley: Does the Minister recall that under the last Labour Government there was a balance of trade surplus in tourism? Now, there is a massive balance of trade deficit. Will he admit that one of the main reasons for that deficit is that, under the Conservative Government, the VAT rate has been increased from 8 per cent. to 17.5 per cent?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: If the hon. Gentleman studies the most recent figures from the British Tourist Authority and other organisations, he will find that over the past two years our tourist industry has performed extremely well, and better than many of its European competitors. The rate of VAT is not the determining influence. We have transformed the British economy and with that the outlook for tourism and hotel services.

Mr. Wilkinson: May I agree with my hon. Friend that the rate of VAT is not the determining factor and support him in retaining national VAT flexibility? Will he consider, however, the transport infrastructure for London, the capital being the strongest magnet for tourists from overseas? We urgently need crossrail.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Yes, I note what my hon. Friend says about the need for other supporting services, including transport services. These services are taken into account in setting budgetary and expenditure plans for the coming year.

Investment Growth

8. **Mr. Clapham:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what were the figures for investment growth (a) in 1975, (b) in 1985 and (c) at present. [698]

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Whole economy investment fell by 2 per cent. in 1975. It grew by over 4 per cent. in 1985 and by over 3 per cent. in 1994.

Mr. Clapham: I hear what the Chancellor says. The right hon. and learned Gentleman will be aware, however, that the main ingredient of growth and prosperity is investment. The evidence shows that Britain has fallen in the prosperity league from 13th position to 18th over 16 years of Conservative government. Is that not abject economic failure?

Mr. Clarke: The hon. Gentleman asked a helpful question. He cited a Labour year in which investment fell and two Conservative years when it increased. He then made ridiculous use of the prosperity league and the table that he found in the White Paper on competitiveness. We were discussing only recently the performance of the British economy, which is now strong. It is expected to grow faster than any other economy in the G7, being equal first with Germany next year.

Investment prospects are very good. Manufacturing investment has increased by 12 per cent. on a year ago. The attempt to fiddle about with obscure historical comparisons obscures the fact that we now have the healthiest economic recovery in Europe. We shall maintain that recovery with our policies.

Mr. Yeo: Has my right hon. and learned Friend noticed that chart 3.5 in the White Paper on competitiveness, which is the source document for most Opposition Front-Bench spokesmen nowadays, shows that foreign direct investment into the United Kingdom over the past 12 years has been double that into the United States, three times that into France, six times that into Germany and 20 times that into Japan?

Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that international investors are the most objective of all investors? They make a hard-headed judgment about which country offers the best prospects. On that basis, the resounding verdict is that the United Kingdom is more successful than any other western nation.

Mr. Clarke: For its size, the United Kingdom has a greater proportion of overseas investment than any other major country. It is also by far the leading attractor of inward investment. That investment is made by business men, who use their own money and shareholders' money when choosing where best to locate a manufacturing plant in the single market of the European Union. The overwhelming preference of overseas investors is to come to the United Kingdom. That is because of our flexible labour market and business-friendly policies, and because we have created the best environment in western Europe from which to sell goods and services.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: Does the Chancellor of the Exchequer accept that while we all welcome inward investment it is a matter of concern that an increasing proportion of investment is coming from outside? Why does the right hon. and learned Gentleman think that British-based investors are prepared to invest more abroad than in this country? Perhaps he will respond to the comment made to me by the German chamber of trade in London that the United Kingdom is a good country in which to invest and the only people who fail to realise that are British investors.

Mr. Clarke: The CBI investment outlook is extremely good. I am not sure that what the hon. Gentleman said—namely, that British investors are investing more abroad than they are here—stands up, because that is not the case. Investment here is coming from Britain. It is coming very strongly from the rest of the European Union—most notably some large German acquisitions and investments in this country. It is coming very strongly from the United States and Japan. They are all making the same judgment: this is a healthy economic environment in which to invest. One of the attractions is that we do not have the social chapter. We also do not have the minimum wage, the old-fashioned trade union legislation—all the things that the Labour party threatens to bring back.

Mr. Jenkin: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that genuine, productive job-creating investment follows only once one has established a stable macro-economic and competitive environment? Is not perhaps one of the unsung achievements of the Government over the past three years that we have established an increasingly low interest economy in which it is competitive to invest?

Mr. Clarke: I agree entirely with my hon. Friend. We hear a great deal from the Opposition about a strategy for investment, which I have heard about for the past three years but which so far has never had any detail attached to it at all. People do not want Government strategies. They want a market that is likely to grow, a reasonable prospect of profitability, low inflation, interest rates that will not go back to the peaks to which they used to go—the stable economic environment that our macro-economic policy is giving them. That is what matters. That is why manufacturing investment is now growing so strongly.

Mr. Andrew Smith: In place of the Chancellor's complacency, will he now tell us why investment growth at this stage of the economic cycle is slower in this recovery than in any recovery this century? Will he tell us why on investment we are 21st in the world economic league? Will he answer the question that he failed to answer this afternoon, just as he could not answer it when my hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) put it to him yesterday: why have we fallen from 13th to 18th place in the world prosperity league?

Mr. Clarke: I thought that that was last week's soundbite. We really should move on. I am fed up with the so-called "world prosperity league", which is a complete misuse of one table in our competitiveness White Paper. If the hon. Gentleman wants to produce some more world league tables on investment, I will look at them and see where they have come from. Presumably he has added Tuvalu to the list. The fact is that at the moment we have an extremely strong recovery. We have growth in the economy, and growth in consumer demand. We have a competitive position overseas, low inflation and we have investment.

Manufacturing investment is up 12 per cent. on 12 months ago. In plant and machinery, it is up 18 per cent. compared with 18 months ago, and the CBI survey shows that the outlook is very good indeed.

Sir Peter Tapsell: In view of the keen interest that Opposition Front-Bench spokesmen have taken recently in the international competitiveness tables, will my right hon. and learned Friend try to explain to them that the countries that have advanced most rapidly up those tables—particularly the gross domestic product table that was quoted to us yesterday—are precisely those that do not have a capital gains tax or an inheritance tax, such as Singapore, Taiwan and Hong Kong?

Mr. Clarke: We have already talked about the theories, on which the Opposition have touched, but so far I have not heard any Labour spokesman praise the economic policies of Hong Kong, Taiwan and Singapore, which are three of the countries that we are told have overtaken us. I have heard them many times praise, for example, Sweden and Finland, which we have overtaken. If one looks at the comparative position inside western Europe at the moment, one will see that we are the fastest growing major economy, the one that is winning jobs. The others have market policies that the Labour party espouses.

Inheritance Tax

10. **Mr. Corbett:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what research he has done or commissioned on the effects of changes to inheritance tax. [699]

13. **Mr. Worthington:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on inheritance tax. [703]

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Michael Jack): The effect of changing any tax is continually kept under review.

Mr. Corbett: Which does the Minister think the fairest: giving £1.6 billion to 16,500 people by abolishing inheritance tax, or investing it in training and jobs, which 12 in every 100 people in my constituency are looking for?

Mr. Jack: What I recognise is that the wealth-creating process also addresses the question of creating jobs. I notice that, in *The Independent on Sunday* last week, the shadow Chancellor said that he is not against wealth. What the hon. Gentleman has said now clearly shows that the Labour party is against wealth. He is divided from his own Front Bench. All I know is that Labour will tax one to hell and then tax one all the way to heaven.

Mr. Hawkins: Does my hon. Friend agree that we have just heard the authentic high-tax voice of the Labour party? We understand that our policy to ensure that wealth cascades down the generations is popular and, as soon as the Opposition realise that, they will change their tack, as they have done on every other economic policy and, in future, will support us on that as they have done on other issues.

Mr. Jack: My hon. Friend is entirely right. The hard-working people of Britain deserve the opportunity to pass on to their successors, their children and their families, the fruits of their labour. In Britain, 1.3 million people with houses valued at above £154,000 are under threat as a result of inheritance tax. That is why we have a long-term policy to remove it. The Opposition put those people at threat. Let that be noted.

Mr. Wigley: Does the Minister accept that there is no mass clamour for the reduction of inheritance tax, or any other tax for that matter, but there is mass concern about hospitals closing their doors to patients, about students who cannot obtain grants to go to university and about disabled people who cannot obtain community care? In the forthcoming Budget, we need to maintain the level of public expenditure so as to look after those services, rather than to pander to the electorate before a general election.

Mr. Jack: The hon. Gentleman shows his fundamental misunderstanding of the process of wealth creation, because that process, and the passing on of wealth between generations, help to create what we have today, which is record spending on the health service and record numbers of patients being treated. The hon. Gentleman should wake up to the reality of the modern world.

Sir Patrick Cormack: Will my hon. Friend give an assurance that the Government will never offer the British people a single ticket to a one-generation society?

Mr. Jack: I can assure my hon. Friend that the Government are dedicated to the creation of wealth and the passing on of that wealth between generations, and all the benefits that that brings.

Mr. Darling: Is it not the case that not only have the Government increased income tax by the equivalent of 7p in the pound, but the Financial Secretary has now committed the Government to abolishing inheritance tax? Does he accept that, of the combined benefit of abolishing capital gains tax and inheritance tax, amounting to more than £4.5 billion, half would go to only 5,000 people in Britain? Which is fairer—abolishing inheritance tax or cutting the starting rate of income tax to 10p in the pound?

Mr. Jack: I had better tell the hon. Gentleman that, apart from the fact that, again, his sums do not add up, it was the Labour party in 1974 that began the process of exempting people from inheritance tax. Today, only 3.1 per cent. of estates pay it. That tax has now had its time and we have a long-term commitment to abolishing it.

Deregulation

11. **Dr. Twinn:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what priority he gives to deregulation; and if he will make a statement. [700]

Mr. Waldegrave: We give a very high priority to deregulation, particularly in order to relieve burdens on small business.

Dr. Twinn: I thank my right hon. Friend for his support for deregulation. Does he agree that that process is only just starting, and that we need more and more deregulation, and fewer and fewer regulations? Does he share my surprise that the Leader of the Opposition can be so woefully ignorant about the workings of the European Union that he can think that the social chapter can be implemented on a pick and choose basis, and that Britain would not be shafted with many more regulations if he signs up to that?

Mr. Waldegrave: It is exactly because of the regulatory effect on business, particularly small businesses, that we opposed the social chapter. It was surprising that the Leader of the Opposition, in his speech to the CBI, did not appear to know that the principal measures under the social chapter are taken by qualified majority voting.

Mr. MacShane: If the Minister is in favour of deregulation, why have he and his colleagues introduced 21 new taxes since 1992, and why, next week, when the Finance Bill is before the House, will it amount to between 450 and 500 pages of the most convoluted tax system bearing down on small businesses and middle and low wage earners?

Mr. Waldegrave: The Government intend to return to a low-tax economy when it is safe for us to do so. As for the burden on small businesses, the Department of Trade and Industry has been in the lead in that regard. For example, as well as introducing many other measures, it has exempted very small businesses from the audit procedure. The hon. Gentleman is, however, right to suggest that there is always more to do.

Building Societies

12. **Mr. Duncan:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received from building societies wishing to become buyers and sellers of houses and not wishing to become banks; and if he will make a statement. [702]

Mrs. Angela Knight: Neither my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer nor I have received any representations from building societies wishing to become buyers and sellers of houses.

Mr. Duncan: I am grateful for that answer.

Surely what the housing market needs is activity without house price inflation. Does my hon. Friend accept that building societies are mistaken in wanting to become

banks? They have all the resources and expertise in the market; would they not do better to become buyers and sellers of houses, in order to break the logjam? They could treat houses much as garages treat cars and institutions treat stocks and shares.

Mrs. Knight: My hon. Friend has made some interesting points. I assure him that the Building Societies Act 1986 allows societies to engage in the activity that he describes. I shall, however, convey what he has said to the Building Societies Association when I next meet its representatives.

Mr. Pike: Do the Minister and the Government feel any regret about the changing role of the building society, which is losing contact with its customers and members and is more concerned about the shareholders? We all used to believe that the building societies were on our side, but now they are concerned only about profit, and about becoming banks.

Mrs. Knight: The hon. Gentleman must realise that a great many people have benefited from the decisions made by building societies in regard to conversion and flotation. What societies need to do is assure their members of the importance of staying mutual. I urge them to do so, and hope that the hon. Gentleman will do the same.

Mr. Ian Bruce: Does my hon. Friend agree that there has never been a better time than now, in recent years, for people to enter the housing market, and that it is the Government's policy of keeping down inflation and interest rates that makes it such a good idea for people to go out and buy their own homes?

Mrs. Knight: My hon. Friend has made a good point. The average mortgage now costs about £180 per month, and rising prosperity and low inflation and interest rates have made this a very good time at which to buy a house. It is interesting to note that, 20 years ago, inflation stood at more than 26 per cent. That is the sort of problem that people experienced under a Labour Government.

Fuel Duty

14. **Mr. Jim Cunningham:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much revenue the Treasury has received since 1993 as a result of (a) the restrictions in respect of fuel duty rebates and (b) increases in fuel duty. [705]

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The freeze in fuel duty rebate announced by my right hon. and learned Friend in the 1993 Budget is likely to have raised about £90 million of revenue over the two subsequent years. The increases in fuel duties announced in that Budget and in last year's Budget will have raised around £4 billion over the same period.

Mr. Cunningham: How have those tax increases helped the motor car and passenger transport industries—or is this another of the 21 Tory taxes?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The hon. Gentleman should acknowledge that the fuel duty rebate paid to bus companies is worth about £225 million a year. If we add the similar amount paid in subsidy by local authorities, we find that about £500 million is paid to bus companies and their passengers, helping the companies with the good work that they do.

Mr. John Greenway: Do not increases in fuel duty impact harshly and unfairly on those who live and work in rural areas? While the Government's duty increases may be defensible on environmental grounds, does my hon. Friend agree that the 50 per cent. hike in fuel duty recommended by Opposition parties would be deeply damaging to the rural community?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I fully understand and accept my hon. Friend's final observation—and, as I represent a rural constituency, I also appreciate his first point.

Taxation Policy

16. **Mr. Jacques Arnold:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what priority he gives to the interests of the family in formulating taxation policy. [707]

Mr. Jack: Our main priority is to reduce the overall burden of tax so that everyone, including those with families, can keep more of what they earn.

Mr. Arnold: While it is quite right to say that there has been a significant reduction in the burden of tax on the single taxpayer, does my hon. Friend agree that that is not yet the case for the married taxpayer and his family? Now that we have scope to get off the backs of taxpayers, may I encourage my hon. Friend to speak to the Chancellor of the Exchequer about redressing the balance so that it is in favour of the family?

Mr. Jack: I thank my hon. Friend for his Budget representation. I remind him that the real take-home pay for a single-earner couple with two children on average earnings has gone up by £80 a week since 1979, that married couples will pay almost £5 a week less in tax than most single people on similar incomes, and that, in supporting the family, the Government pay about £10 billion a year. I note what my hon. Friend has had to say.

Mr. Chisholm: Is the Minister not ashamed that a staggering one family in five is now without an adult in work? Would not the best measures to help the family be the kind of investment and welfare-into-work measures proposed by the Labour party, which include a 10p starting rate of tax, rather than the Government's proposals further to enrich a minuscule number of the very wealthy by abolishing inheritance tax and capital gains tax?

Mr. Jack: I have listened to what the hon. Gentleman says. If he listens to his Front-Bench spokesmen, he will hear about their fantasy league economic approach, about the sums that do not add up. Such policies produce only fantasy jobs. We have cut unemployment by some 700,000 and, as my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor said only a few moments ago, investment in industry is up 12 per cent. on a year ago. That is what creates real jobs.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Sir. Alan Haselhurst:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 23 November. [720]

The Prime Minister: This morning, I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Sir Alan Haselhurst: Is it still the target of my right hon. Friend's Government to reduce the standard rate of income tax to 20p? In that context, did he notice that the shadow Chancellor wasted no time yesterday in his 40-minute speech talking about his 10p target? Which target does my right hon. Friend think that the nation will find more credible?

The Prime Minister: I can confirm the 20p target. There are a number of ways to reach it: reducing the basic rate, widening the 20p band or both, of course. I look forward, as soon as it is affordable, to making some progress in that direction. I found it rather odd that the shadow Chancellor did not talk about his 10p tax rate. It rather confirms my view that it is more of a gimmick than a proper policy option. I notice that the shadow Chancellor has 101 per cent. support from the Leader of the Opposition. The 1 per cent. I am sure is correct; the 100 per cent. I am not so sure of.

Mr. Blair: How can the Prime Minister seriously maintain his statement on Tuesday that the 21 tax rises that he has introduced since the last election—the equivalent of 7p on the basic rate of tax—were to protect the vulnerable when it is middle and lower-income families who have suffered most, not least from the imposition of VAT on fuel? Would he now care to explain or withdraw that remark?

The Prime Minister: Yes, of course I shall happily explain to the right hon. Gentleman. If he cares to examine the figures, he will see that, since I became Prime Minister, take-home pay after inflation has risen by £600 a year at today's prices. Real disposable income is £400 a year per head higher at today's prices. In addition, mortgage payments have fallen by £140 a month. That does not suggest to me the sort of tax hike affecting people's net disposable income that the right hon. Gentleman portrays. Can he confirm that those take-home figures are right?

Mr. Blair: Perhaps the Prime Minister would like to confirm the tax rises equivalent to a figure of 7p on the basic rate of income tax. Those are the tax rises that he introduced after he promised the British people that he would cut tax year on year. He said that he would never introduce VAT, but he did so. Is not one thing clear? Despite all the promises before the election, after his 7p extra on the basic rate, taxes will be higher at the next election than at the last election, and the British people will remember the Conservatives as the party of broken promises and unfair taxes.

The Prime Minister: I shall tell the right hon. Gentleman of three things that are clear: people have much higher net disposable income than they did at the start of this Government; interest rates have halved since their peak, cutting mortgages dramatically; and there is no one in the country who does not know that taxes would be far higher under any Labour Government than they are under this Government, and as they have been under each and every Labour Government that has ever been inflicted on the country.

Mr. Sumberg: Is my right hon. Friend aware of the notice this morning from the Department of Transport that it has abandoned the M62 relief road, which would have devastated my constituency? Can I tell my right hon. Friend that we are all delighted at the news that that disastrous proposal has now been condemned to transport history?

The Prime Minister: I know that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport will be grateful to have my hon. Friend's support for that decision. I know that my hon. Friend has been a formidable campaigner for that interest.

Sir David Steel: Following the belated and hesitant reaction of the international community to events in Nigeria, will the Prime Minister put greater force behind his Government's policy of promoting good governance? In view of the great number of asylum seekers coming from Zaire, will he raise that matter with colleagues in the European Union so that we may secure a timely and united response to despotic regimes?

The Prime Minister: I am not sure that I quite agree with the right hon. Gentleman in the way that he characterises the Commonwealth's response to Nigeria. I think that the response was very swift, and it was apt. There is no doubt about the nature of that regime and there is no doubt about the Commonwealth's response. Certainly, we shall look at the other points that the right hon. Gentleman raises.

Sir Roger Moate: With regard to the road programme, has my right hon. Friend heard of NOMRAM, which means "no more roads after mine", and which is a very popular position? Will my right hon. Friend ensure that, if there are to be any reductions in conventional funding, they will be more than replaced by a dynamic private finance initiative for the construction of many projects throughout the land, which are urgently needed both for jobs and for environmental reasons?

The Prime Minister: There is no doubt about the importance, both in the short term and the long term, of the private finance initiative in the case not only of roads, but of other elements of capital expenditure. I set out in a speech on Monday the extent to which the private finance initiative has already made progress.

Q2. **Mr. Michael J. Martin:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 23 November. [721]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Martin: Does the Prime Minister agree that those who are unfortunate enough to suffer from Alzheimer's, strokes and other long-term diseases should be able to get the best care that the national health service can offer? Does he agree that the provision of that care should never be a lottery or dependent on the part of the country that a patient comes from, but should be there for each and every person? If it is the case that the Government have put tax up by 7p in real terms, that money should go to help those patients and their carers.

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman neglects to mention that we have put up spending on the national health service by 70 per cent., even taking account of inflation, since the Government came into office. The result has been a dramatic improvement in the number of

people treated, and a dramatic reduction in the time that they have to wait for treatment. Half of patients have no wait at all; of the rest, half are admitted within six weeks, and three quarters within three months. Nothing like that record has ever been seen before the arrival of this Government in office and the extra funding that the Government have provided.

Q3. **Dr. Goodson-Wickes:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 23 November. [722]

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave some moments ago.

Dr. Goodson-Wickes: Will my right hon. Friend confirm his commitment to reducing Government expenditure to below 40 per cent. of the gross domestic product? Does he agree that the country's competitiveness into the next century depends on low spending linked to low taxation, and that that message is totally lost on the Opposition, whose spending plans simply do not add up?

The Prime Minister: Unfortunately, the Opposition's spending plans do add up. They add up to a great deal of extra money and extra taxation. For the Opposition to talk about taxation levels when they have voted against every tax reduction that we have introduced over the past 16 years, when they have stood consistently for higher taxes and higher spending and have never forgone any item of expenditure that might conceivably have been popular in any part of the country, is hypocrisy on a grand scale. The reality is that we need to cut spending to below 40 per cent. of national income as soon as possible and we need to cut spending and taxes so that the fact that this country is the enterprise centre of Europe becomes increasingly recognised, not just here and in Europe but beyond Europe. Spending more and taxing less, which the shadow Chancellor claims is possible, is not possible. Those plans do not add up.

Q4. **Mr. Alan W. Williams:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 23 November. [724]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Williams: It is almost five years since the Prime Minister took office. When he looks back, what does he see as his proudest achievement? Is it that we have had the lowest economic growth of any post-war five-year period, is it the 20 per cent. devaluation or tax rises amounting to 7p on the standard rate, or is his proudest achievement simply the fact that he has survived for so long in office?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman has his own suggestions and I am sure that he will not mind if I offer him some alternatives. When I became Prime Minister, inflation was 9.5 per cent., but we now have underlying inflation of 2.9 per cent. *[Interruption.]* Base rates were 14 per cent., they are now 6 per cent. and output is 6 per cent. higher—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. The House must come to order.

The Prime Minister: If hon. Members care to look at the international projections about what lies ahead for the country, they will see what the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development has to say about our performance. They will see that we are top of the growth league and they will see inward investment flooding into the country. The deputy leader of the Labour party claims that he does not see inward investment flooding in. I suggest that he visits the constituencies of the Leader of the Opposition and of the shadow Foreign Secretary and constituencies up and down the country to see the extent to which other countries have recognised the success of this country over recent years.

Mr. Atkins: Is my right hon. Friend aware of the shambles that is Labour local government in Preston? Given that the chief executive has been sacked in highly dubious circumstances, the chief constable has issued writs on the councillors and the leader of the council, Valerie Wise, has even lost the confidence of her ward committee, will my right hon. Friend set up an investigation into the further abuse of powers by a Labour council, demonstrating yet again what Labour would be like in office?

The Prime Minister: I was not aware of the details set out by my right hon. Friend but, sadly, that is not a unique case of Labour local government by any means. We have seen what has happened in Monklands and in a large number of other Labour local authorities. If the Labour party were one bit as concerned about good government at local level as it claims to be about good government at national level, it would clean out the nest of Labour local government, which has long needed drastic action.

Q5. **Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 23 November. [725]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Banks: Does the Prime Minister agree with the words of the Minister of State for the Armed Forces, the hon. Member for Crawley (Mr. Soames), that Princess Diana is in an advanced state of paranoia?

The Prime Minister: I have no intention of being drawn into making any comments in the aftermath of last Monday.

Q6. **Mr. Amess:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 23 November. [727]

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Amess: Will my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister join me in condemning those people who made a violent attack—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. The House will come to order.

Mr. Amess: Will my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister join me in condemning those people who made a violent attack on the chairman of the Conservative party last week and those people who, the week before,

tried to stop my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary speaking at Canterbury university? Does my right hon. Friend have any idea whether those people are members of new Labour, of old Labour or of fascist Labour?

The Prime Minister: I condemn anyone who resorts to violence or intimidation to force their own way in democratic politics. They do nothing whatever for their cause. They merely show that their argument does not stand up to rational debate. They deserve condemnation from every corner.

Mr. Mackinlay: Will the Prime Minister tolerate the Minister of State for the Armed Forces continuing to act as the Prince of Wales's butler? Can we have an assurance that the Minister of State will not act on behalf of— *[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. The hon. Member for Dover (Mr. Shaw) will remain silent while questions are being asked.

Mr. Mackinlay: Can we have an undertaking that the Minister of State for the Armed Forces will not speak on constitutional matters which are the sole preserve of the Prime Minister? Will the Prime Minister sack the Minister of State for speaking out of turn against the Princess of Wales?

The Prime Minister: I do not expect any more comments, Madam Speaker.

Business of the House

3.31 pm

Mr. Jeff Rooker (Birmingham, Perry Barr): Will the Leader of the House please give us the business for next week?

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Tony Newton): The business for next week will now be as follows:

MONDAY 27 NOVEMBER—Until about 8 o'clock, Second Reading of the Education (Student Loans) Bill.

Motion on the Contracting Out (Administration of the Teachers' Superannuation Scheme) Order.

TUESDAY 28 NOVEMBER—As I announced last Thursday, my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer will open his Budget statement, debate on which will then run through Wednesday 29 November, Thursday 30 November and Monday 4 December, and will be brought to a conclusion on Tuesday 5 December. The intervening Friday is a non-sitting day.

WEDNESDAY 6 DECEMBER—Until about 7 o'clock, Second Reading of the Audit (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill.

Remaining stages of the Chemical Weapons Bill.

THURSDAY 7 DECEMBER—There will be debates on motions for the Adjournment of the House. Subjects to be announced.

FRIDAY 8 DECEMBER—There will be debates on motions for the Adjournment of the House. Subjects to be announced.

The House will also wish to know that European Standing Committee B will meet at 10.30 am on Wednesday 29 November to consider European Community document Nos. 8273/95 and 9284/95 relating to equal opportunities for men and women.

[Tuesday 28 November: Budget Statement

The following document is relevant: the unnumbered Explanatory Memorandum submitted by Her Majesty's Treasury on 26 July 1995 relating to the Council Recommendation to the United Kingdom with a view to bringing an end to the situation of an excessive deficit in the United Kingdom, prepared in regard to Article 104c(7) of the Treaty establishing the European Community.

Wednesday 29 November:

European Standing Committee B—Relevant European Community documents: 8273/95 and 9284/95, Equal opportunities for men and women. Relevant European Legislation Committee reports: HC 70-xxvi (1994-95) and HC 51-i (1995-96).]

For those who were not hanging on my every word last night or did not pay sufficient attention, the House might like to be reminded that I said that, subject to the progress of business, the House will rise at the conclusion of business on Wednesday 20 December until Tuesday 9 January. For Easter, again subject to the progress of business, the House will rise at the conclusion of business on Wednesday 3 April until Tuesday 16 April.

Mr. Rooker: May I thank the Leader of the House for the repetition of the early notice of the dates of the recesses for Christmas and Easter? Will he confirm that Wednesday 20 December will be a full working day, with Wednesday morning Adjournment debates and Scottish questions in the afternoon?

While on the subject of Scottish business, I and others who were present yesterday heard the Secretary of State for Scotland in Scottish questions say that he would make an announcement about the future government of Scotland on St. Andrew's day. May we have a commitment that the Secretary of State for Scotland will make a full statement in the House on any changes, so that Members have a chance to debate them before they are announced in Glasgow?

Will the Leader of the House arrange for an early statement next week by the Secretary of State for Social Security, so that he may give an interim response to the fifth report of the Select Committee on Social Security, which was published today? That report discloses that there are over 10 million national insurance numbers more than there are people aged over 16, that the integrity of the national insurance system is at stake and that it allows organised criminals to perpetrate fraud.

Bearing in mind the fact that there is also known organised fraud in operating immigration policy, which is being discussed in respect of the proposed Bill on asylum, will the House be told next week why Her Majesty's Government's proposal in 1990 to close the "Day of the Jackal" loophole allowing access to birth certificates has not yet been closed? Five years ago, a commitment to do so was made in a White Paper. In May, the Prime Minister told me and others that there was insufficient parliamentary time for the change. In this Session, there is clearly time for such a Bill, with which we would agree. The Leader of the House was asked about it last night. Has he made any inquiries about it?

I have two further brief points. Bearing in mind the Budget statement next Tuesday, will the local government settlement be announced on Thursday? Clearly, the Budget statement will have a massive impact on local government expenditure. It is important that those facing cuts in education and social services—provided for the public—know about the Budget's implications as quickly as possible.

Given that at present there is a good deal of traffic on the World Service network from Argentina, will the Leader of the House assure hon. Members that next week there will be a Foreign Office statement that it is not proposing to cut World Service funds? It would be highly short-sighted and not in the interests of the United Kingdom to lose a voice that creates a very favourable climate for British business around the world. There is a rumour that the Foreign Office plans to cut the final year of the three-year settlement on funds made in 1994. That would be totally unacceptable to the House.

Mr. Newton: I shall take those questions in order. First, I certainly expect 20 December to be a normal day, although, obviously, I cannot at the moment predict the business. I anticipate, however, that we shall have the normal Wednesday debate just before recess, in which I am here for three hours to do my best to answer any hon. Member who cares to bowl a fast ball at me.

Secondly, it is certainly my right hon. Friend the Scottish Secretary's intention to make a statement to Parliament on Scottish proposals before announcing them anywhere else.

[Mr. Newton]

Thirdly, on social security, the hon. Gentleman will understand that there are conventions about the amount of time that the Government take to respond to Select Committee reports. Indeed, there is usually criticism in the House if an instant response is made. I shall bring his point to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security, and, indeed, consider the other points that he raised, which I have not yet had a chance to look into since last night.

I anticipate a statement on the local government settlement next Thursday. I seem to be being unusually helpful to the hon. Gentleman today. It must be the charming way in which he puts his questions. However, I cannot be quite so helpful on his last question. He will understand that I am not in a position to anticipate what may be in or follow from the statement of my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer next week. But I should make the point that my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary will be answering questions on the following day, Wednesday 29 November.

Sir Anthony Grant (South-West Cambridgeshire): Does my right hon. Friend share my disgust at the growing and pernicious habit of cheque-book journalism, which is perverting the course of justice in this country? If the Government are not able to find time to do something about such a practice, will they look sympathetically on a private Member's Bill to put a stop to it?

Mr. Newton: I of course share my hon. Friend's feelings about some of the suggestions that have been made in relation to the Rosemary West case. Of course the Government, in various aspects, will be considering any lessons that may be drawn from that case.

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): May I, too, acknowledge how helpful it is to have the Christmas and Easter recess dates announced so far in advance? It is enormously helpful for future planning. Will the Leader of the House clarify an earlier answer that he gave about the business on 20 December? I understand a full day's business to include certainly the Scottish questions slot planned for that day. May I press the right hon. Gentleman further on the statement that the Secretary of State for Scotland may or may not be making on 30 November? It is important that hon. Members have a chance to cross-examine the Secretary of State, particularly on any proposals that he may have for the Scottish Grand Committee, because the succession of meetings for the Scottish Grand Committee that will flow for the rest of the year may be dramatically affected by any changes that he may make. Finally, can we anticipate an uprating social security statement next week?

Mr. Newton: In the spirit of—actually usual—helpfulness that I am adopting this afternoon, I anticipate that there will be a social security uprating statement on the day after the Budget, Wednesday 29 November. The pattern will therefore be the Budget on Tuesday, social security on Wednesday and local government on Thursday.

In relation to the Scottish Secretary's statement, I do not think that I can add to what I have already said. I have made it clear that I expect that the House will have an opportunity to hear a statement on the matter.

I did not think that I was obscure in any way in what I said about 20 December. I said that I expected it to be a normal business day. I cannot predict what will come after Question Time, but I certainly anticipate that the Wednesday morning debate to which I referred will be followed by questions, which will be followed by I know not what, for I know not how long.

Sir Dudley Smith (Warwick and Leamington): Has my right hon. Friend seen early-day motion 65 concerning my constituent, Mrs. Teresita Bentley of Leamington Spa, who faces deportation because of the loss of her battle for custody of her two-year-old child Catherine, in the face of opposition from her estranged and unhelpful husband?

[*That this House believes that Mrs. Teresita Bentley of Leamington Spa, a well-educated, professional woman from the Philippines, should not be deported from this country, following her High Court failure to secure custody of her two-year-old daughter, Catherine, and that such an enforced separation would deny her permanent right of access to her child via her English husband, in a callous and insensitive way, not in keeping with the United Kingdom's reputation for justice and fair play in humanitarian issues.*]

In the circumstances, will my right hon. Friend bear it in mind that this is a sad case, in that Mrs. Bentley may not see her child for many years should she be deported? The case has profound humanitarian implications. I do not expect the Leader of the House to grant a debate on that subject, but could he encourage Home Office Ministers to make a statement about the case next week or, at the very least, to arrange a question on the subject?

Mr. Newton: I understand that my hon. Friend has in fact written to my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary on behalf of Mrs. Bentley, for reasons that he outlined in his question. I understand also that those representations are being carefully considered. That seems to be the appropriate response at this time.

Mr. Harry Barnes (North-East Derbyshire): There is not a great deal of Government legislation in the coming programme, and the private Member's Bill ballot took place today. Will the Leader of the House ensure that a second Standing Committee is set up to debate private Members' Bills, to avoid the situation that arose in the previous Session when a Bill—the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill—which was solemnly supported in the House could not progress because of the procedural devices that were used to stop it? Private Members' Bills should have the opportunity to advance if sufficient Members support them.

Mr. Newton: The House passed the relevant Sessional Order yesterday in respect of time for private Members' Bills and, as the hon. Gentleman said, the ballot took place today. I remind him that, as has been the case for several years, the Sessional Order provides for more time than the Standing Orders themselves. Beyond that, however, I have no plans to change the way in which private Members' business is conducted.

Sir John Stanley (Tonbridge and Malling): Is my right hon. Friend aware that, in successive meetings between Kent local authorities and Ministers at the Department of Transport, Ministers gave undertakings that the new noise insulation regulations relating to railways would be debated and that those undertakings were recorded in the

official departmental minutes, copies of which I have sent to him? Is he further aware of the motion tabled by me and a number of my hon. Friends in opposition to those regulations and of a similar motion tabled by the Leader of the Opposition? Against that background, will my right hon. Friend take early steps to fulfil the undertakings given by Ministers that the regulations will be debated?

Mr. Newton: I shall of course consider what my right hon. Friend said.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): As to the statement by the Scottish Secretary, I do not agree with the Labour Front Bench: I think that all the parties in Scotland would be quite capable of making statements to the Scottish people before the issue was debated in this place.

The House must realise that expectations about the Secretary of State's statement have been raised considerably by the Prime Minister's intervention. I understand that its theme is the sensitivity of this place to Scottish requirements, but how can that be when the Tory Whips Office floods the Order Paper during Scottish questions? Does the Leader of the House approve of the fact that six out of the first 10 questions asked during Scottish questions yesterday came from English Tory Members of Parliament, whose only interest in Scottish affairs is to act as cheerleaders for beleaguered Scottish Office Front Benchers?

Mr. Newton: On the latter point, I simply remind the hon. Gentleman that whether he likes it or not—I must confess that I do like it—this is a United Kingdom and hon. Members from any part of it are entitled to take an interest in the affairs of every part of it.

As to the first part of the hon. Gentleman's question, he will have sensed that there is little agreement from any part of the House—let alone the Opposition Front Bench—with his assertion that matters affecting the House should not be presented first to the House. His view is not shared by many other hon. Members.

Mr. Bob Dunn (Dartford): Will the Leader of the House please arrange to have an urgent, early debate on the implications of signing the social chapter, given that that would lead to the reintroduction of the closed shop, the minimum wage, union-only labour and workers' councils? Those implications are not appreciated by many in this place or by many outside it.

Mr. Newton: Indeed, and I would add that recent evidence suggests that the implications of signing the social chapter are not even appreciated by the leader of the Labour party.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Will the Leader of the House arrange for the Secretary of State for Social Security to make a statement on early-day motion 74?

[*That this House, mindful of the current review by the Industrial Injuries Advisory Council of the criterion used since 13th September 1993 in the diagnosis of coalminers, believes that the requirement for X-ray evidence of attendant pneumoconiosis should be dropped, the FEV1 test replaced by a sensitive medical examination, the qualifying period reduced to 10 from 20 years in the appropriate employment and that the diagnosis in posthumous cases be decided on the evidence of the post mortem report.*]

A copy is being handed to the Leader of the House now. Some months ago, members of the miners' group—in which I now declare my interest—called for a change in the conditions that apply to payments for those with chronic bronchitis and emphysema. We also asked the Government to modify the FEV test, to reduce the qualifying period from 20 to 10 years, and to drop the X-ray evidence requirement. We have made those demands, but we are still awaiting a reply. Will the Leader of the House ask the Minister to get a move on?

Mr. Newton: I shall certainly draw my right hon. Friend's attention to the hon. Gentleman's characteristically robust remarks. A little bird tells me that the current review by the independent Industrial Injuries Advisory Council will cover all the criteria used in deciding claims for benefit for chronic bronchitis and emphysema sufferers. The Government will give full and careful consideration to any recommendations that the council may make.

Mr. Douglas French (Gloucester): Is my right hon. Friend aware that the trial of my constituent, Mrs. Rosemary West, has given rise to grave public concern about many issues? He has already indicated his intention to examine the issue of cheque-book journalism. Will he provide an early opportunity to debate some other issues, such as the need to put in place a much more comprehensive, national system for sharing information about missing persons?

Mr. Newton: I have already said that the various Departments concerned, and no doubt other organisations, will look very carefully at any lessons that may be learned from events in my hon. Friend's constituency. The Government will consider whether any additional guidance is necessary in areas within our responsibility.

As to my earlier comments about cheque-book journalism, I should have acknowledged that not only will the Government consider the need for new legislation, but the Press Complaints Commission—for which there may also be implications—has decided to examine whether it might do more in that regard.

Mr. Dennis Canavan (Falkirk, West): May we have an early statement about the duties and responsibilities of Ministers? Does the Leader of the House agree that it would be absolutely outrageous for a Cabinet Minister to use or abuse his position in order to discriminate unfairly in favour of his constituency to the detriment of a neighbouring constituency? Therefore, could there be an investigation into the conduct of the Secretary of State for Scotland who, in collusion with his crony, the chairman of Forth Valley health board, seems hell-bent on centralising more and more national health service facilities in his constituency to the disadvantage of people living in the Falkirk area?

Mr. Newton: It would be a matter for you, Madam Speaker, rather than for me, but some of the phrasing of what the hon. Gentleman has just said leaves a certain amount to be desired, as he certainly would not have wished to use those terms outside the House. Having said that, I shall of course draw his remarks to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): Does my right hon. Friend accept that the People's Republic of China is an important export market for the United

[Mr. Nicholas Winterton]

Kingdom, just as the United Kingdom is a good market for goods from the People's Republic of China? Is he aware that the People's Republic is currently greatly limiting its imports, with on-going consequences for the companies in Britain that look to the People's Republic as a market for their manufactured goods? I refer particularly to an important company in my constituency, Rieter Scragg Ltd., which exports textile drawtexturing machinery. Will he arrange for the appropriate Minister to come to the House and explain what action can be taken to create a better environment for free trade between our two countries?

Mr. Newton: My hon. Friend well knows the strength of the United Kingdom Government's support for free trade. On the specific point that he raised, I shall bring his remarks to the attention of my right hon. Friends, but as I have said, my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary will be answering questions on Wednesday 29 November and my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade will be answering questions on Wednesday 6 December.

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): As the Leader of the House has announced two debates for two weeks today and tomorrow on the Adjournment of the House, will he urgently consider allocating one of those days to the debate on the future of the monarchy?

Mr. Newton: I propose to say exactly what my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said several times 20 minutes ago; that appears to be an attempt to invite me to comment indirectly when my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister declined to comment directly. I shall comment neither directly nor indirectly.

Mr. Piers Merchant (Beckenham): In the light of the excellent points raised by my hon. Friends the Members for South-West Cambridgeshire (Sir A. Grant) and for Gloucester (Mr. French), although I appreciate that cheque-book journalism is being studied as part of that consultation, will my right hon. Friend consider giving the House the opportunity to debate the matter at length, so that we can hear examples of the pernicious effects of cheque-book journalism in the West case and many others? I make that request as a former journalist who finds the practice absolutely abhorrent.

Mr. Newton: As I have already said, I understand the concerns that led several hon. Members to raise the matter with me today. However, the proper time to consider whether a debate is needed, on either general or specific matters, would be when the various bodies and organisations to which I referred have had an opportunity to consider the lessons and what they might do.

Mr. Eddie Loyden (Liverpool, Garston): Will the Leader of the House ask the Secretary of State for Transport to investigate the decision by the Mersey Dock and Harbour Company to end responsibility for the employment of dock workers? He will know that the Rochdale report, produced in the 1960s, recommended that there should be fewer such employers in the port transport industry. The decision will mean that once again there will be a large number of employers of casual dock labour, reviving the casual nature of the port transport industry.

Mr. Newton: Helpful as ever, I have arranged for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport to answer questions next Monday.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): I read some of the proceedings of the trial of Rosemary West, but I found it so disgusting and abhorrent that I could not continue. I understand why the Government should be worried about cheque-book journalism and the fact that witnesses have been approached, but what about the jurors? They spent week after week listening to the most disgusting and foul proceedings. Is it not time for a debate on counselling for jurors? I am worried that they have suffered a trauma that will affect them for the rest of their lives. May we have a debate on the role of jurors and counselling?

Mr. Newton: I shall bear the hon. Gentleman's remarks in mind. I have no doubt that it was distressing for people to sit through those proceedings. I have gained the impression, although I do not have a statement to this effect before me, that counselling has been considered and that some has been arranged.

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): Will my right hon. Friend arrange an early debate on early-day motion 77?

[*That this House condemns Islington Council for being placed bottom in the GCSE league tables and calls for a radical change in its education policies as well as recognition of past errors by the Labour leadership; and calls upon all Islington parents to bring pressure on their council to adopt Conservative education policies that will meet the needs of all local parents.*]

Does my right hon. Friend agree that education should provide an escalator of opportunity for all children, which is not happening in Islington? Does not that demonstrate that old Labour or new Labour—call it what one will—does not produce the education standards that children have a right to demand? Does that explain why some parents seek to opt out of sending their children to schools run by Islington's local education authority?

Mr. Newton: Whatever we call Labour, I am sure that all parents in Islington—including the Leader of the Opposition, to whom my hon. Friend was presumably referring—will want to know why the authority is performing so badly and is not doing a good job for pupils educated in the borough.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (Colchester, North): Rather than have just a statement on the Social Security Select Committee report published today, it would be helpful to have a full debate. That would give hon. Members an opportunity to demonstrate not only that the report welcomes the Government's initiative against fraud but that Labour's policies are non-existent and that it is simply following in our footsteps.

Mr. Newton: I am glad that my hon. Friend serves as a member of the Social Security Select Committee, and I am grateful for his comments. As he rightly said, the Committee welcomes the priority given by the Government to tackling fraud.

Mr. Denis MacShane (Rotherham): Will the Leader of the House find time for an early debate on a non-partisan, non-party subject about which the whole nation has been talking this week? It is absurd that everybody is talking about a certain matter outside the House, but that the House

cannot discuss it. I am not concerned with the personalities involved or with the remarks made, but the constitutional implications of a 19th-century arrangement for the head of state may not be appropriate for the 21st century. If the Leader of the House and the Prime Minister want the agenda for that matter to be set by the tabloid press and television executives, they will continue their say nothing, see nothing, hear nothing attitude in the House. The nation would like the House to debate the monarchy that we want in the 21st century.

Mr. Newton: I will not add to that which my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and I have already said.

Mr. Alan Duncan (Rutland and Melton): Will my right hon. Friend consider a debate soon on the office costs allowance? Given that the leader of the Labour party has been unable to answer even one of four letters sent to him personally by my right hon. Friend the Member for Peterborough (Dr. Mawhinney), the right hon. Gentleman appears to have a problem staffing his office. May we have an urgent debate, to find a way of remedying that grave discourtesy?

Mr. Newton: If a letter has been sent to the right hon. Gentleman in his capacity as the Leader of the Opposition, that would relate to the Short money rather than to the office costs allowance, which the House debated in the previous Session when it made arrangements covering the whole of this Parliament. I am sure that the Leader of the Opposition will respond when my hon. Friend's remarks are reported to him. I would not wish to reopen that issue in the lifetime of this Parliament.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): I refer the Leader of the House to early-day motion 1:

[*That this House supports Bristol Coroner Paul Forrest's call of 14th November 1995 for a ban on bull bars at the inquest on Helen Baggs aged 10 of Melksham who was killed by a Land Rover fitted with bull bars; believes that many deaths and serious injuries would have been avoided if the Government and the European Commission had swiftly acted to ban bull bar fashion accessories that concentrate and multiply the force of collisions at the level of a child's head.*]

When may the House debate that and the decision yesterday by CGA Direct Line Insurance not to insure in future any vehicle fitted with bull bars? Can we end the silly row between the Government and the European Commission over who should take the decision to introduce a ban on bull bars? We should act before more children are killed, now that hard-headed businesses say that vehicles fitted with bull bars are too dangerous to insure.

Mr. Newton: I commented on that matter to the hon. Gentleman last week, but that is not to say that I object to him raising it again. If he intends to raise that subject every week, I had better prepare different answers, so that I do not repeat myself. At present, I am not in that position. No doubt the hon. Gentleman is also making representations to Commissioner Kinnock, with whom his links are possibly closer than mine. Given that the Government discourage manufacturers from providing bull bars and vehicle owners from using them, I think that the insurance company decision to which the hon. Gentleman referred seems reasonably sensible and welcome.

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): For the avoidance of doubt, may I say to my right hon. Friend that if there is no cut in the funding to the BBC World Service, it would be nice to have an opportunity next week to say thank you?

Mr. Newton: Whether people want to throw bouquets or brickbats next week, they should have the opportunity to do so when my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary appears at the Dispatch Box to answer questions on 29 November.

Mr. Andrew Miller (Ellesmere Port and Neston): In the light of recent publicity about the use of transgenic animals in human genetic research, and particularly in the light of the actions of some insurance companies, will the Leader of the House find time next week for an urgent and full debate on the recent report of the Select Committee on Science and Technology, which was unanimously agreed by that Committee?

Mr. Newton: The hon. Gentleman will be aware that we have made what we hope will be improved arrangements in the present Session—with the so-called Jopling resolutions—to allow greater opportunity for debating Select Committee reports. No doubt the hon. Gentleman will wish to draw those remarks not only to my attention but to the attention of the Chairman of the Liaison Committee.

Dr. Robert Spink (Castle Point): Will my right hon. Friend find time next week to debate a subject of concern to many of my vulnerable constituents—the delivery of community care by social services in Essex? I understand that events may have overtaken my question, but if we have time to debate the matter next week, can we draw attention to the excellent, dedicated service and care provided by those in the front line in social services in Essex?

Mr. Newton: Yes—I am very much of that view. Although my constituency does not immediately border on my hon. Friend's, I am well aware that there has been much concern about the way in which some aspects of community care have been working in Essex. I hope that those matters can be fully considered. Nothing takes away from the fact that those providing such services work hard to provide dedicated care for many people.

Mr. Mike Gapes (Ilford, South): I add my voice to those of the hon. Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley) and my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) in asking for a debate next week on the subject of the funding of the World Service. Does the Leader of the House agree that it is our finest national asset and does far more to influence other countries in favour of Britain and British interests than anything else—certainly, more than the Government or the royal family are doing at present?

Mr. Newton: As an occasional listener to the World Service—I used to be a more regular listener when I drove home every night—I know that we all value the service that it provides. That is one reason why I am usually willing to be interviewed on it about subjects such as the Queen's Speech; it conducts such interviews very nicely.

Mr. Matthew Banks (Southport): Will my right hon. Friend try to find time for a debate, perhaps up to 7 o'clock, when we could discuss the nonsensical suggestions of the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond), who spoke earlier? We could then tell him

[Mr. Matthew Banks]

that many Conservative Members who regularly attend Scottish questions have a clear and obvious link with Scotland. In any case, Scotland is an integral part of this Parliament and will remain so. Until 10 o'clock, we might have a debate on the importance of spending constraints in the public sector to achieve lower taxation—we could thus contrast Government policies with those of Opposition Members, who come up with many gimmicks rather than carefully costed policies.

Mr. Newton: I have much sympathy with the first part of my hon. Friend's remarks. On the latter part of his remarks, I merely observe that the House will have no fewer than five days to discuss the sort of matters to which he referred and I am not sure that I want to promise to return to them yet again on 20 December.

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): As you know, Madam Speaker, I was one of the casualties of Scottish Question Time yesterday. The problem was not so much English Tories, but the fact that hon. Members on both sides of the Chamber did not heed your admonition for short questions and short answers—none more so than the king nat himself. On the subject of next week's business, when are we to have a statement from the Secretary of State for Scotland on the local government settlement, so that I can ask questions about the underfunding of the south Ayrshire and east Ayrshire authorities?

Mr. Newton: Long question; short answer. That one is still a bit ahead.

BILL PRESENTED

ARMED FORCES

Mr. Secretary Portillo, supported by Mr. Secretary Howard, Mr. Secretary Lang, Mr. Attorney-General and Mr. Nicholas Soames, presented a Bill to continue the Army Act 1955, the Air Force Act 1955 and the Naval Discipline Act 1957; to amend those Acts and other enactments relating to the armed forces; to make further provision in relation to proceedings before service courts; to provide for the fingerprinting of offenders convicted in service proceedings; to amend the Courts-Martial (Appeals) Act 1968; to make further provision in relation to complaints to industrial tribunals by members of the armed forces; to provide for further exemptions from the Firearms Act 1968; to make further provision in relation to Greenwich Hospital; to amend the Visiting Forces Act 1952; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time tomorrow and to be printed. [Bill 5.]

Orders of the Day

Chemical Weapons Bill

The President of the Board of Trade and Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Mr. Ian Lang): I have it in Command from the Queen to acquaint the House that Her Majesty having been informed of the purport of the Chemical Weapons Bill has consented to place her Prerogative, so far as it is affected by the Bill, at the disposal of Parliament for the purposes of the Bill.

Order for Second Reading read.

4.5 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Mr. Phillip Oppenheim): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

The Bill will enable the United Kingdom to implement the requirements of the chemical weapons convention. I think that it will be warmly welcomed by right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the House.

The provisions of the Bill will enable the UK to fulfil all its convention obligations. We have done our best to respond to comments and concerns expressed during a quite lengthy consultation period.

The convention was signed in 1993 after 20 years of difficult and tortuous negotiation. It is unique in the history of arms control. It is the first treaty to provide for a verifiable worldwide ban on an entire class of weapons of mass destruction. I am pleased to say that the UK has played an active part in support of the treaty throughout the negotiations. The treaty holds the promise of ridding the world of chemical weapons. The Government take it extremely seriously and support it fully. In total, 159 states have signed the convention. We hope that many others will sign in the near future.

The convention enters force six months after 65 countries have ratified it. So far, 42 have done so. It is estimated that the convention is unlikely to enter into force until the second half of next year. Two key signatories—the United States and the Russian Federation—have yet to ratify. As they hold 90 per cent. of the world's stockpile of chemical weapons, we hope sincerely that rapid UK ratification will help to encourage these two states to ratify the convention.

I shall outline briefly the requirements of the convention. First—

Mr. Nigel Forman (Carshalton and Wallington): Will my hon. Friend be telling the House later why two large powers with a formidable capacity in this context seem reluctant to sign and ratify as quickly as they should?

Mr. Oppenheim: To be honest, I was not intending to do so. My hon. Friend might care to raise that issue if he is called to speak.

The convention prohibits the acquisition, development, production, stockpiling, transfer and use of chemical weapons. It requires their destruction. It bans military preparations and—

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): It so happens that I am a member of the central Asian group, which has recently seen the Prime Minister of Kazakhstan, who happens to

be in London. Would it not be sensible to have a discussion with the Kazakh leadership? The Kazakhs are involved with chemical weapons, as they are with nuclear weapons. Would it not be sensible, while their Prime Minister is in London, to have a frank discussion about this urgent matter? The hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Forman) has raised a vital issue.

Mr. Oppenheim: I can assure the hon. Gentleman that our doors are open to the Kazakhs if they wish to have discussions. The hon. Gentleman has raised a fair point. It is the Russian Federation, however, that is the main keeper of chemical weapons in that area. The hon. Gentleman is right to say, of course, that there are weapons of mass destruction in Kazakhstan.

The convention bans military preparations for the use of chemical weapons and requires the destruction of all existing stocks of chemical weapons as well as the destruction of production facilities.

The chemical weapons convention provides a powerful verification regime. It is unprecedented in its scope and extent. Its effective operation will provide the assurance that the threat from chemical weapons has, as far as possible, been removed.

Two of the provisions of the convention are particularly important. First, declarations are required periodically from companies and other bodies using chemicals of concern. The requirements relating to the chemicals are graded according to the threat that they pose. Secondly, but perhaps most important, inspections will be undertaken by an international inspectorate based in The Hague. There will be two types of inspection: routine inspections to check the accuracy of declarations and "challenge inspections", which will be undertaken at short notice at any site where there are grounds to suspect that it is in breach of the convention. "Challenge inspections" can be required by any state that is party to the convention.

Mr. Dalyell: I ask for clarification on the Minister's first point—the commercial use and the so-called dual-purpose problem, which Dr. Julian Perry Robinson and others have explained to the officials, and doubtless those officials understand very well. Is the industry satisfied, or is it still worried?

Mr. Oppenheim: We consulted the industry pretty widely, and it was involved during the negotiation of the convention, so it has been involved in consultations over a long period. My understanding is that it is now as satisfied as it can be with the provisions. If the hon. Gentleman is talking primarily about using some of the very dangerous chemicals for legitimate research purposes, he will find, if he bears with me, that the provisions for that are reasonable; but if he disagrees at the end of my speech, I will come back to it when I reply at the end of the debate.

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Oppenheim: Will the hon. Gentleman just allow me to make a little progress? If he is still dissatisfied with my performance, I will allow him to come in later.

I shall talk briefly about the new international body that will be set up in The Hague: the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons. The main function of its staff will be inspection and verification. A preparatory commission is already working in The Hague on the detailed arrangements for the implementation. The United Kingdom is playing an active part in that work and will continue to do so.

Just as important as the international inspection authority is the UK national authority, because each state that is party to the convention is required to designate a "national authority" as a focal point for the implementation of the convention in that state. We intend that the Department of Trade and Industry will be the national authority for the United Kingdom. The DTI will be responsible for collecting information from industry and others affected by the convention, processing it and presenting it to the OPCW. It will help inspected sites to deal with the inspection process and will monitor compliance with the convention.

I wish to talk about the consultation process, which has been extensive. The DTI issued a discussion document in January, and the Bill was issued in July for consultation. We believe that, in an area such as this, extensive consultation with industry, with academia and research bodies is absolutely essential and we have taken on board many of the comments that have been made, so far as we can within the limits of the convention. Industry has been involved throughout the implementation of the convention and during its negotiation. My understanding—I have no indication to the contrary—is that industry and academia fully support the convention. They, as much as we, want to remove the threat of chemical weapons, and they have been extremely helpful in helping us to put in place the tool to do it. They deserve our thanks for that.

A number of concerns have arisen as a result of the consultation process. I shall deal briefly with the way in which we tried to deal with those concerns. There is no question but that the controls required by the convention will affect industry. There is no getting away from that. The Government have kept in close touch with representatives, particularly of the chemical industry, during the negotiation of the convention, and we continue to work with industry to ensure that, in complying with the convention, burdens on business and legitimate research establishments—universities, and so on—are kept to the minimum.

Compliance costs assessments originally suggested that the costs to industry would be as high as £8 million. However, since then the Department of Trade and Industry has done a great deal of work in trying to simplify the complicated forms originally put forward as a result of the convention and we believe that that will significantly reduce the work load and make it far easier for people to complete the forms without in any way compromising the convention itself. We are working further on that and we expect that that will result in further cost savings. I pay tribute to the civil servants who have worked on that. They have done an exemplary job in trying to simplify what were originally incredibly difficult and complicated forms.

Mr. Dalyell: I am sure that the Minister's tribute to the civil service is justified. With regard to the legitimate research establishments, does the Minister intend to say anything about the future of Porton Down? I would like to deploy a case that Porton Down should be retained, above all in order to monitor the innovative developments in the chemical field, not least in their military applications.

Mr. Oppenheim: The hon. Gentleman is right. Porton Down will play an extremely valuable role in aiding and assisting the DTI and advising it on some of the chemicals. We envisage Porton Down having an active role in that. I hope that I can reassure the hon. Gentleman on that point.

A second point raised, particularly by industry, was the difficult issue of commercial confidentiality. That has already been dealt with through strict rules laid down in the convention and the legislation insists that those rules are strictly maintained. The Bill makes provision for giving statutory protection to information collected as a result of either the Act or the convention.

One final issue raised some concern during consultation. I hope that I can clear the air by making it crystal clear that I intend that the DTI national authority should issue an annual report about its activities and the operation of the convention. That will help to make its work more transparent and enhance proper parliamentary scrutiny. It is my intention that it should issue an annual report.

Clauses 1 to 3 prohibit chemical weapons. They implement the prohibition on chemical weapons contained in article I of the convention.

Clauses 4 to 10 set out procedures for the identification and, if necessary, the seizure and destruction of chemical weapons. Because chemicals that may be used in the production of chemical weapons may also have peaceful uses, the clauses set out the procedure through which it can be established whether the object is a chemical weapon.

Clause 4 enables the Secretary of State to obtain information about suspicious objects through the issue of notices. Where it is believed that the object is a chemical weapon, clause 5 enables and authorised person to enter premises to remove or immobilise it. If, after a period, it is still believed that the object is a chemical weapon, clauses 6 and 7 provide for the destruction of the object. Limited provision is made for compensation in clause 8. Clause 9 creates offences relating to the destruction of chemical weapons, such as giving false information. Clause 10 contains definitions relating to the destruction itself.

Clauses 11 to 18 set out procedures for the destruction of any facility which may be identified as a chemical weapons production facility. They implement the obligation in article V of the convention not to construct any new chemical weapons production facilities and set out procedures for their destruction or alteration. Clause 11 prohibits anyone from making a facility for producing chemical weapons. Clause 12 enables the Secretary of State to obtain information about suspicious facilities.

Where a facility is believed to be a chemicals weapons production facility according to the definition contained in the convention, clauses 13 to 15 enable the Secretary of State to require it to be destroyed through the issue of a notice on the relevant person. If the notice is not complied with or no relevant person can be found, the Secretary of State may himself arrange for the destruction of the facility.

Clause 16 enables any person to apply to the court for compensation in certain circumstances if they have suffered a loss as a result of the destruction of the facility. Clause 17 creates offences and clause 18 contains definitions relating to the destruction process.

Clauses 19 and 20 provide for the chemicals contained in schedule 1 to the convention to be controlled through the issue of licences. That arrangement will enable the United Kingdom to implement the controls required in part VI of the verification annexe to the convention, which include limiting the overall quantity in the United Kingdom of the most dangerous chemicals to one tonne.

Mr. Dalyell: A brief from the Royal Society of Chemistry, which I think that the Department has received, raises the urgent question of research. The society argues that clauses 19 and 20

"would implement the Schedule-1 regime by requiring anyone who would use, produce or possess a Schedule-1 chemical for a permitted purpose (such as pharmacological research) first to obtain a licence from the Government, no matter how small the quantity. Substances that are supertoxic sometimes make super-precise research tools, being valued and used because of it. Here, then, is an instance where the Bill could place significant constraints"—

this is the point that I want to make—

"on scientific research, even though research is not an activity expressly covered by the Convention."

I think that that must be answered, although I do not know whether the Royal Society of Chemistry is right.

Mr. Oppenheim: I am in the rather strange, if not perverse, position of being a Minister responsible for deregulation in my Department, while arguing for a higher level of regulation than the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell).

I shall do my best to explain. I did receive a fax from the Royal Society of Chemistry—by accident, as it happens: it came through on the wrong fax machine—which raised the issue. I appreciate the society's concern, which I think has some legitimacy. We are happy to talk to the society; but let me explain, as best I can, why we have adopted this course.

The convention makes it crystal clear that when it comes to the most dangerous chemicals—incredibly toxic chemicals—we are limited to one tonne in the United Kingdom, regardless of whether the chemicals are used by Government, industry or academia. We think that the best way of ensuring that we remain within the bounds of the convention that we have signed is to introduce a licensing regime for those most toxic chemicals. I see no honest alternative, although I understand the hon. Gentleman's concern and that of the Royal Society of Chemistry. That is the best answer that I can give the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Adam Ingram (East Kilbride): I am sure that the Minister did not want to give the impression that the Royal Society of Chemistry had withheld a document from him. The document that he said came through on the wrong fax machine was probably made widely available to those with an interest in the subject. I am sure that the Minister did not intend to cast such a slur on the society.

Mr. Oppenheim: Although we have had extensive consultations with the society—which I must say were extremely valuable and helpful—to the best of my knowledge no one in the Department received the fax. It would have been nice to see a copy, although we knew the nature of the society's concerns. Perhaps a fax was sent, and went astray in the same way as mine. Let me make it clear, however, that we have had very good relations with the society, which has been extremely

helpful both in the drafting of the legislation and during the negotiation phase. We shall always listen to any legitimate concerns that it may have.

Clause 21 of the Bill enables the Secretary of State to obtain information when he suspects that an offence under the Act has been or is about to be committed. The convention requires the UK to make declarations to the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons of its activities in regard to certain chemicals. Clauses 22 and 23 enable the Secretary of State to obtain the necessary information so that those declarations can be made.

Mr. Mike Gapes (Ilford, South): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Oppenheim: I would prefer to continue until the end of my speech. If the hon. Gentleman has a specific query, he can attempt to catch Madam Speaker's eye; alternatively, I will let him intervene in my winding-up speech. I have already given way many times, and I think that I shall have to push on now.

The convention establishes a system of inspections as part of the regime of verifying the prohibition on chemical weapons. The inspections will be undertaken by teams of international inspectors. Clauses 24 to 28 make provision for those inspections to be undertaken in the UK. Clause 25 enables the Secretary of State to authorise inspection teams to exercise those rights; clause 26 creates various offences relating to inspections. Clause 27 confers on the inspection team the privileges and immunities that are required by the convention. Clause 28 enables the Secretary of State to reimburse in relation to the inspected site any expenses that have been incurred during the inspection. Clauses 29 to 31 contain provisions relating to offences, such as powers to enable investigation where an offence is suspected.

Clause 32 provides statutory protection for information that is provided under the Act or the convention. That will be of particular interest to businesses that are concerned about the protection of confidential business information. Clauses 33 to 38 contain a variety of provisions, including provisions that service personnel who commit any of the more serious offences connected to this matter should be tried in a civil court rather than by court martial. A power to amend the Act consequent upon any amendment to the convention is also contained in these clauses. Clause 36 provides that the Bill binds the Crown, subject to certain qualifications. That is in line with the Government's policy on Crown application.

I know that a number of hon. Members want to speak in the debate. If there are any further concerns, I shall do my best to address them in my winding-up speech. It is uncharacteristic for me to be heard in such relative silence during a performance at the Dispatch Box. I wonder if that is a sign of the new consensus. I commend the Bill to the House.

4.25 pm

Mr. Adam Ingram (East Kilbride): I make it clear from the outset that the Labour party welcomes the Bill. In many ways it is almost the end of a long road for those who have been campaigning for international control and regulation of chemical weapons. The journey is not yet over because, as the Minister says, 65 nations are still required to sign the convention before it can come into force.

As the Minister said, 42 of the original 159 signatories have ratified the convention to date, and 12 others are completing the necessary legislative process. He also said that it is anticipated that the 65th instrument of ratification will be deposited before the middle of next year or thereabouts, and that the convention will come into force 180 days after the 65 signatory states have ratified the convention and deposited their instruments of ratification with the UN Secretary-General.

I share the Minister's sincere and genuine wish to see the United State and the Russian Federation sign at an early date because they are important in ensuring that other nation states comply with the convention. However, the convention is important not just to the US and to the Russian Federation but to the United Kingdom, which has historically played a positive role in the development and promotion of such international treaties. Therefore, it is obviously important that we become one of the 65 signatory states.

As the Chemical Industries Association said in its briefing for the debate, if the UK fails to be one of the 65 signatory states, that will have a serious effect upon the trade relations of the many UK companies that trade in chemicals. Chemicals are the UK's No. 1 manufacturing export earner, generating a trade surplus in 1994 of some £4.5 billion. In the light of Tuesday's disastrous trade deficit figures, further damage to our manufacturing base will be unacceptable, probably even to the Government and, I suppose, to the Minister, who was heard in silence. There are sound reasons for helping the Bill reach the statute book, but I shall come to some modifications that are still required.

Another important reason why the chemical weapons convention should receive full ratification is that that would have a positive effect and would stimulate the control and elimination of biological weapons. The biological weapons convention of 1972 lacks the necessary verification and compliance procedures to make it effective. When the chemical weapons convention is in force, it will provide a working example to the ad hoc group that is engaged in drafting a possible compliance and verification regime in that area. Ratification of the convention would also have positive implications for other forms of arms control and non-proliferation agreements. For those reasons, the Opposition welcome the Bill. I am sure that the Bill is welcomed by all parties and all hon. Members for the same reasons.

The Scottish National party is always going on about environmental issues—I am perhaps being slightly parochial—and complains about Scotland being a nuclear dustbin. However, I note that the Scottish nationalists have not bothered to turn up for this debate on a major concern not just within the United Kingdom, but internationally. I hope that the SNP supports the Bill, even if it has not done so by its presence. The Opposition support the Bill and I am sure that it will receive the full support of all hon. Members.

The Minister pointed out that the Government signed the convention at the earliest possible date, on 13 January 1993. Nearly three years have elapsed before the introduction of the required legislation. Clearly, the Government were doing something, but they were not taking decisive action. The Foreign Office and the Ministry of Defence were strongly in favour of

[Mr. Adam Ingram]

introducing the Bill, but for some reason the Department of Trade and Industry has been dragging its feet and has resisted early implementation.

The Foreign Office nearly won the battle in 1993 to put the measure on the statute book at an early date. The Gracious Speech for that year stated:

"My Government will work for the effective implementation of the Chemical Weapons Convention".—[*Official Report*, 18 November 1993; Vol. 233, c. 7.]

Yet no legislation was forthcoming.

In 1994, the Department of Trade and Industry managed to downgrade the commitment, but at least a broad reference remained in the Gracious Speech, which stated:

"Preventing the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction remains an important priority."—[*Official Report*, 16 November 1994; Vol. 250, c. 4.]

However, that priority did not go as far as bringing forward legislation on chemical weapons.

Only in late January 1995 did anything appear—a DTI document entitled "Industry and the Chemical Weapons Convention", which sought the views of users and producers of chemicals. On 19 July, as the Minister said, the Government published the draft Bill, together with a further consultation paper. I do not object to the consultative process, but there was a significant gap between January 1993 and July 1995. Despite that interesting gap, the draft Bill was not well received and, as a result, underwent significant modification on the basis of representations received from industry and experts.

As a result of the representations made, the Bill has grown from 27 to 38 clauses. Even now, some people still question whether the Bill truly conforms with all aspects of the convention. The Minister will also be aware that the delay in publishing the Bill resulted in criticism from the Foreign Affairs Select Committee.

Mr. Oppenheim: The hon. Gentleman said that there is some doubt as to whether the Bill fulfils every aspect of the convention. Could he be more specific about which points cause concern and let us know?

Mr. Ingram: I shall deal with that question later, and I am sure that other hon. Members will deal with some of those issues.

I have heard that part of the reason for the delay was the insistence of the previous President of the Board of Trade, the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine). His antipathy to any form of regulation of industry, even in weapons control, determined the delay in the publication of the Bill.

The Minister said that it was unusual for him to introduce the Bill because he was known as a deregulator, yet here he is arguing for regulation. Perhaps the Minister has given us the key to why the Department of Trade and Industry delayed the measure, and that is why I believe there is some substance to the argument that the former President of the Board of Trade refused to allow the Bill to come forward while he was in charge of the Department. In refusing, he ignored the international community; he ignored the experts on arms control and chemical weapons; and he ignored the wishes of the British people, who want to see those weapons of mass destruction disposed of once and for all, and removed from the international stage. He even appeared to ignore the wishes of his ministerial colleagues in the Foreign Office and in the Ministry of Defence. In doing so, he has embarrassed the United Kingdom at international level because we shall ratify the convention long after many of our European partners.

The European Parliament passed a resolution on 17 November which specifically expressed deep concern that the United Kingdom had not yet ratified the convention. There is something wrong when this country, which was one of the earliest signatories and has long had a reputation of campaigning on this front, was so late introducing the Bill. It gives new meaning to the concept of just-in-time management. If the Government had fallen and we were in an election period now, it is possible that we would not have been one of the 65 nation states. That would have been a serious problem for British trading relations.

The Bill has been delayed long enough and the Opposition do not want to cause it any further unnecessary delay. It is important, however, that what we produce from our deliberations is the best possible legislation, and I hope that the Government will be positively responsive to those who are urging that the Bill needs more transparency and accountability measures.

Before moving on to those points in detail, I should like to deal with Department of Trade and Industry as the national authority responsible for the monitoring and implementation of the convention. One of the key elements of the convention document is the need for each signatory state to establish a national authority. That is contained within section VII.4 of the convention. It could be argued that what was required was a stand-alone agency reporting to Parliament through the Department of Trade and Industry. Such an agency would, of itself, have immediately improved the transparency and accountability of the monitoring process.

Will the Minister tell the House whether the Government have considered at any time the establishment of a separate agency and, if not, why not? Will the Minister explain why the words "national authority" do not appear in the Bill? It is probably too late in the day to seek substantial amendment to establish such an agency.

Mr. Oppenheim: We believe that the Department of Trade and Industry is the best organisation to carry this out. If the hon. Gentleman thinks this through seriously, he will see that there are significant national security implications, which would cause problems if the body were to be totally independent. The best assurance of the effectiveness of the body is that, ultimately, it will be responsible to Parliament and Parliament will be the final arbiter. That is the best guarantee of the independence of the body. I think that we have made the best decision, bearing in mind the security implications that must be considered by anyone in government. If the hon. Gentleman thinks that we are wrong, that is fine. We think that we are right. We want to go ahead with the Bill. The hon. Gentleman can give a commitment that if his party is elected, it will change things.

I want to make one further gentle point to the hon. Gentleman. The consultation document was issued last January—almost a year ago. The draft legislation was

issued in July. I have no record of any senior Opposition Member or Front-Bench spokesman writing to us, contacting us or coming to us saying that there should be a totally independent body rather than the Department of Trade and Industry. We all want to get the Bill through as quickly as possible. I should have thought that, if this were a serious concern, the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues would have taken advantage of the lengthy consultation period.

Mr. Ingram: The Minister has extended my point a wee bit. I did not use the phrase "totally independent body". I used the phrase "stand-alone body". I have no objection to it being a next steps agency. That could have been set up quite easily. It would then have had a management structure and reporting mechanisms, which would have been helpful to the monitoring in a whole range of ways. Please do not put words into my mouth; I did not argue for an independent body. As I have said, it is probably too late in the day for us to seek the establishment of such a national authority.

If the process that the Government set in force does not work or does not seem to be in the best interests of national security or in the national or public interest, an incoming Labour Government would consider the best method of monitoring. Any Government would do that. If something does not work, it needs to be fixed.

I am not criticising the civil servants, but we shall end up with seven anonymous members of staff working in the Department of Trade and Industry. That hardly adds up to a genuine attempt by the Government to implement the full spirit of the convention's articles.

Leaving aside that criticism, there are other ways of ensuring that what the Department of Trade and Industry does as a United Kingdom national authority is properly monitored. The Department will be charged with ensuring full compliance of this legislation within the United Kingdom. It will have the responsibility of guarding against any wrongdoing on the part of producers and users of specified chemicals, but that raises the question of who guards the guards. How will we ensure that the public interest is properly protected?

One of the main changes that people have campaigned for since the first and second draft of the Bill were published is a commitment from the Government to produce an annual report. Why wait until the last moment, when we are dealing with the Bill in Parliament, to make that commitment? After all the time that we have had to consider the legislation, why has the Minister waited until tonight to announce that there will be an annual report? He has not specified what the annual report will contain. Will he give us some details?

The public and Parliament should be told for each reporting period the number of companies providing information, the number of chemicals of concern, the details of the chemicals involved, the quantities of chemicals involved and the compliance of companies, that is, how good or otherwise is the information provided by them. The report should detail the number of prosecutions for violations, the number of routine inspections of premises, the number of challenge inspections and an audit of the outcome of inspection of premises. Rather than simply saying that he will produce an annual report, the Minister should specify exactly what the report will contain.

Mr. Robert Key (Salisbury): Give him a chance.

Mr. Ingram: The Government have had almost three years. That is chance enough to consider the issues. The points that I have raised have been argued not only by the Opposition but by those who have given advice to the Department.

Mr. Gapes: My hon. Friend talks about who guards the guards. I draw his attention to clauses 22 and 23, on which I would have questioned the Minister if I had had the opportunity. Is it not true that those clauses include some draconian powers, including the power to impose imprisonment for two years, serious fines and various other punishments? While those powers may be necessary, it is important that we avoid abuses, such as those that are being investigated by the Scott inquiry, and the use of public interest immunity certificates in ways that could affect innocent people in academic research establishments or industry doing nothing wrong. They could be put into a difficult position by some civil servant or Minister who does not want proper accountability. Can we have an assurance from the Minister on that? Will my hon. Friend comment on the issue?

Mr. Ingram: That is a good point. I was going to comment on that. My hon. Friend has made his own point very well. No Opposition Member would dissent from his analysis of those two clauses. My hon. Friend will recall that the Minister asked me earlier to suggest changes if we thought that anything in the Bill needed to be changed. We are already suggesting changes. We shall see in the Minister's reply whether he is responsive to those suggestions.

Further to my point about greater accountability and transparency in relation to the annual report, I contend that procedures should be put in place to allow Parliament the opportunity to scrutinise the work of the DTI as the national authority. Once it has ratified the convention, the United Kingdom will be required to produce a confidential annual report to the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons in The Hague. I see no reason why the document should not be screened for commercial confidentiality and then presented for consideration to an appropriate scrutiny Committee of the House, such as the Trade and Industry Select Committee. That could be done at the same time as publication of the annual report, to which the Minister referred earlier. Such scrutiny by the House would not place national security at risk. It would show that the United Kingdom was acting in the best way possible to ensure that the convention was properly applied and monitored within the confines of our territory.

Another way of improving transparency would be to set up an advisory body outside the DTI to offer advice on the implementation of the legislation. Such a body would provide a better point of contact for industry, academics and concerned members of the public than civil servants buried away in the deep recesses of the DTI. Such a body already exists for pesticide control. The Advisory Committee on Pesticides is an independent body, the remit of which is to advise Ministers on a range of topics related to pesticide use within the framework of the Food and Environment Protection Act 1985.

In its fifth report in the 1994-95 Session of Parliament, the Agriculture Select Committee commented favourably on the working of the Advisory Committee on Pesticides. If it is deemed necessary to have such a committee to

[Mr. Ingram]

oversee pesticide use, there is an even greater case for setting up a similar committee to oversee the production and use of potentially dangerous chemicals.

As I understand it, advisory bodies exist to work alongside the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment at Porton Down. Will the Minister give consideration to building on the role of those advisory bodies and setting up a similar advisory structure to interface with the DTI as the national authority?

I should like to examine the role of the CBDE a little further. As my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) says, the work of Porton Down is vital to the nation. We have been involved in chemical defence since 1916. For the past four years, the CBDE at Porton has published an excellent annual report about its anti-chemical protection work. Article X.4 of the convention requires that each state party provide information about the nature of its protective work against chemical warfare. The article says:

"For the purposes of increasing the transparency of national programmes related to protective purposes, each State Party shall provide annually to the Technical Secretariat information on its programme".

I should like the Minister to elaborate on the envisaged relationship between the CBDE and the Department of Trade and Industry on the implementation of the legislation. As others have said, the establishment at Porton Down is a national asset. It should be used effectively. Will the Minister describe the nature of the advice that the Government will seek from that valuable source in monitoring the DTI's role?

I draw the Minister's attention to the recent annual report of Porton Down. It refers to issues of concern in hazard assessment relating to chemicals and disclosures by scientists in the former Soviet Union—Dr. Mirzayanov and Dr. Uglev. The first disclosure related to a Soviet nerve agent declared as VX. They said that the former Soviet Union had developed and weaponised in binary form a close analogue of VX, code-numbered compound 33. The compound had the same empirical formula as VX, but differed in the substituents around the central phosphorus atom. Historical data on the compound suggest that its properties are broadly comparable to those of VX. The precursors required for its production should fall within the generic structures in the schedules of controlled chemicals in the annexe to the chemical weapons convention.

The second and third disclosures were more disturbing. They related to the development of two novel organophosphorus nerve agents. One was described as being five to eight times more effective than VX as a battlefield agent. The other, an analogue of the second, was said to have been developed as a binary weapon which could be made from industrially available precursors not listed in the chemical weapons convention schedules. I should be grateful if the Minister would confirm that the anxiety raised in the Porton Down annual report has been taken into account and say whether those chemicals are included in the schedule of the Bill that we are considering tonight.

The matter to which I have referred is just one aspect of a detailed report. It highlights the importance of the work undertaken at Porton Down. It also makes the case for comprehensive annual reports rather than merely something to assuage the criticisms of the Government because of the Minister's non-response to the request for an annual report.

On another point of detail, the Bill gives the Secretary of State significant powers to make regulations to enable his Department to ensure that it complies with the convention. We need to examine how the regulation process will work in practice. Fears have been raised with me by the scientific community about the issue of licences for the use of certain chemicals. Whole families of chemicals—thousands of different compounds—are covered by schedule 1. It is extremely likely that many of them will be regularly used in small quantities in research laboratories. That point has been raised in interventions. Will individual researchers have to apply for a licence each time they use a listed substance? I am not presenting an argument for or against, but I think that it is important that we reach an understanding on how people in research will be expected to respond to the legislation. Will it be the case instead that a research establishment or company will be able to obtain a blanket licence to cover all occasions on which certain chemicals are used? Clarification would be helpful.

There is another concern. How will the appeal procedure work if an organisation or individual fails to obtain a licence for the use or development of a particular chemical substance? A clarification of that issue today would set at rest some of the doubts prevailing.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ilford, South (Mr. Gapes) mentioned clause 23, which states:

"The Secretary of State may make regulations requiring persons of any description specified in the regulations to inform him that they are of such a description."

Although that is a wonderful piece of parliamentary draftsmanship, it needs clarification. Will the Minister explain how it will work in practice? How will individuals and especially small companies, in the research sector primarily, become aware of the legislation? That point is particularly important since the Government have given no sign that they are intending to set up an outside body to act as a contact point between themselves and individuals.

Like my hon. Friends, I am concerned that those all-embracing regulations that the Bill empowers the Secretary of State to make will be introduced via a negative statutory instrument, as specified in clause 23. Surely, given the extent of the powers that will be vested in the Secretary of State as a result of that clause, it would be more appropriate if the relevant regulations were subject to affirmative procedure.

I have touched on the need for greater transparency and accountability in the UK implementation of the convention. Another concern is export controls. The Bill bans the transfer of chemical weapons or substances that will be used to manufacture chemical weapons. The result of that is that exporters of substances of potential use in warfare need to show that such substances will not be used for war purposes. I shall paint a scenario that is not unrealistic.

A major UK chemical manufacturer has gone out into the market place and obtained a large order abroad for his goods. Fulfilling that order will be good news for the company and the balance of payments. The substances concerned can be used for the manufacture of chemical weapons, but there is no real proof that they will be. The

DTI could be under very strong pressure not to press the issue further by undertaking stringent checks on the end use of the substances. The Foreign Office may know very little about it.

That scenario is not unrealistic. The Scott inquiry has already shown that such tensions can and do arise. In theory, the UK chemical weapons national authority would ensure that such events never occurred, but the powers of the national authority are vested in the DTI, the very body that has the responsibility to promote exports.

I have already pointed out that relations between the Foreign Office and the DTI can be far from good, as the delay and confusion in bringing forward the Bill has shown. Such poor relations were clearly shown in the Scott inquiry as well, as was pointed out in Monday's edition of *The Independent* in an article which dealt with a letter from a previous Secretary of State for Trade and Industry. The article went on to say:

"A rift had developed between the Foreign Office, which wanted to maintain an embargo not just on arms but also machine tools, which could be adapted for use in the manufacture of arms, and the DTI, which feared that the machine tool ban would wreck British trade relations with Iraq."

If we substitute "chemicals with warfare potential" for "machine tools", my point is clearly made.

Will the Minister furnish the House with a detailed description of the links between the DTI, the Foreign Office and Customs and Excise with regard to the way in which they will deal with the export of chemicals as a result of the Bill? Who will have the final say in resolving such conflicts—the DTI, the DTI's national authority, the Foreign Office, the Ministry of Defence or some other Government agency?

We must ensure that the circumstances which led to the Scott inquiry are not repeated when potentially dangerous chemicals are concerned. Clear guidelines need to be drawn up to ensure that the chemical weapons convention is not subverted by decision or default.

We do not want to obstruct the UK ratification of the chemical weapons convention. We deplore the delay that has occurred so far because of Government inaction and hesitancy. Nor, however, do we want to wave the Bill through if improvements can be made—even at this late stage. The experience of the chemical weapons convention will be drawn on when other forms of arms control are introduced in future—not least with regard to biological weapons.

We firmly believe that the Bill can be significantly improved by increasing the accountability and transparency of the UK national authority. That would have beneficial consequences for international relations and arms control. That point of view is of course supported by the Royal Society of Chemistry and other experts.

I shall listen carefully to the Minister's winding-up speech. I hope that he will address the points that I have raised regarding the need for a free-standing advisory body, and deal with the details raised, not only by myself but by my hon. Friends in interventions, on the appeal mechanism, on licence applications, and on other matters. I shall also listen with interest to how the Minister intends to avoid a repeat of the Iraqi machine tools scandal in which his Government are so inextricably linked. We await the report with interest.

4.55 pm

Mr. Michael Jopling (Westmorland and Lonsdale): I guess that it is probably too much to hope that the Bill will get very much publicity or arouse much interest, but to me the Bill is one of the most vital of this Session. I am sorry that the Under-Secretary is not listening at the minute to what I want to say—now I think that I have his attention. The only comment that I would make about the Bill is that it is better late than never.

I am a member of the Foreign Affairs Select Committee, as is the hon. Member for East Kilbride (Mr. Ingram). He and I were both signatories to the recommendations of that Committee, which said that the Bill should have been introduced in the last Session. That was my view and it still is. I would have much preferred the Foreign Office to sponsor the Bill rather than the Department of Trade and Industry, and I much regret the delays—which I know have been due to the DTI—in spite of the chivvying that the Select Committee gave the Foreign Office. We always knew that it would be a DTI Bill. Britain should have been at the very forefront of ratifying the convention and bringing such a Bill forward.

I hope that the predictions are true that we will be among the first 65 nations to ratify the convention. If we are not, it would mean, as the Select Committee said:

"few, if any, United Kingdom nationals would be employed as Inspectors or in the Technical Secretariat, at any rate in the first instance".

It is hugely important that whatever is done with regard to the verification is done by the best possible and best-informed officials; therefore, I cannot but stress the urgency of doing everything possible for the world community to control as best we can the existence and the spread of chemical and biological weaponry.

Chemical and biological weapons are hideous enough when used by military forces, when troops are usually trained in dealing with their hazards. What concerns me even more is the possibility of even more hideous implications if those dreadful weapons get into the hands of terrorists. Strikes could be made against totally unprepared and innocent civilians. There are many thousands of civilians in Iraq and Iran who have learned to their cost and pain the horrible implications of those weapons. Those weapons have rightly been described as poor men's nuclear weapons, and so they are.

We have at last been presented with the Chemical Weapons Bill. I suppose that it could be described as the world community's best effort so far to control chemical weapons. In my view, it should be given our absolutely unequivocal support. I say again, however, that the main problems with the Bill will be in verifying the existence of these weapons and the components that go into manufacturing them.

I have heard it said in the Pentagon, in Washington, that the total control of chemical weapons is impossible to achieve. I believe that that is true. We should recognise, however, that this is the world community's best effort so far to control such devices, and we must be satisfied that it is the best possible compromise to date.

I hope that the Minister will tell us that there will be no complacency about our having got this far. It is essential that efforts continue to be made to tighten those aspects where proper control cannot be achieved, as the Pentagon has said. We must close those loopholes as

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quickly as possible. It is vital that intrusive challenge inspections are carried out and are not hindered around the world in order to do our best to have as few of those loopholes as possible.

I am concerned about those delays, and I hope that the Minister will tell us what their effect and that of the consultation will be on industry. I should tell the House that I am a director of a company in the chemical industry. I have never been told that it has been involved in nuclear weapons, but I suspect that what I am now going to say will not be very welcome to the chemical industry as a whole. I hope that in preparing this legislation and in undertaking consultation no short cuts have been taken at all—I do not care who is hurt by that—in getting the best possible level of verification and control of these weapons.

As I said, I regard the menace and the threat from chemical weapons in the hands of terrorists as one of the most crucial and worrying things that confronts us in the world today. Therefore, I would be absolutely opposed to short cuts being taken and to our creating more loopholes in the verification than we need have done. I hope that when the Minister comes to respond he will tell us that no short cuts have been taken and that we are confronted with a control system that has the fewest possible loopholes. If that is not the case, we proceed at our peril.

5.3 pm

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): As one who has been interested in chemical weapons issues for three decades, I welcome the Bill, and in particular the degree to which the Department of Trade and Industry has consulted on and reflected the views of those of us who were worried that, above all, it did not have sufficient powers. My judgment is that the Bill can discharge Britain's obligations under the convention, perhaps with the comparatively small exception of the important component of transparency.

What is missing is perhaps a small item, but it is part of a bigger issue—a statutory annual report. I welcome what we could call the change of heart decision to have an annual report, but I must ask the Minister whether it is to be statutory. The Minister and his officials, as well as Members of Parliament, appreciate that it is an important part of the argument. I hope that he will say in his winding-up speech whether it is to be statutory.

How, in fact, is the House of Commons going to hold the authorities to account? If there is an annual report, the truth is that those who might be critical can give it to their expert friends. That in itself is a good discipline. I emphasise, however, that the annual report's nature, statutory or otherwise, is absolutely crucial.

There remains an industry problem, and that is why I intervened during the Minister's speech. The dual uses of chemicals—military and non-military—are intertwined. We should hear more in Committee about the problems of commercial secrecy because it is a rather delicate issue. It is vital that the treaty should keep abreast of scientific and technological change and innovation. One example is the new Russian development of Novichoks, an agent of GP.

I want to be clear about Porton Down. I know that the hon. Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key), who may speak later, represents Porton. I hope that he will agree that the issue of Porton is very important to the nation and has implications beyond his constituency and that he will therefore excuse me for referring to it. Intertwined with the future of chemical warfare disarmament is the future of the Porton Down establishment, which is a most valuable national asset, as my hon. Friend the Member for East Kilbride (Mr. Ingram) said.

Britain got rid of its chemical weapons in the 1950s so Porton today is, frankly, protective. It exists to ensure that Britain's defences against chemical and biological weapons keep up with new threats and new opportunities, including ones that stem from scientific discovery and technological development. By that same token, Porton has much to contribute to the well-being of the chemical weapons convention. The Bill does not reflect that as clearly as it could.

For example, unless the DTI, which is charged with implementing the convention in the United Kingdom, can count on Porton's assistance, it is likely to be ignorant of how new science and technology are or ought to be affecting its work. It will be in no position to push the treaty's international authority into any adaptation made necessary by technical change—amending the lists of the controlled chemicals and introducing novel inspection techniques—which will certainly be necessary. Yet where is the assurance that Porton, which today is one element of a next steps agency, will in future be able to provide such crucial help to protect this whole enterprise from obsolescence? It is in the recollection of the Department of Health that I went on a delegation with some colleagues to discuss the future of Porton last year; I realise that this is a multi-Department problem.

Porton, frankly, does not have a very good image. I am bound to say in parentheses that it is part of my particular history. I got into trouble in a celebrated privilege case back in 1967 for having talked too freely to Mr. Lawrence Marks of *The Observer*—not that I thought that I was doing anything wrong; I did not realise that the Select Committee report which had been printed had not gone through the sidelining process. I also add parenthetically that I learnt later from the late Sir Harry Legge-Bourke that, in fact, officials at the Ministry of Defence to whom I had been an extreme nuisance on other matters, such as Aldabra atoll and variable geometry aircraft, thought that technically I was in the wrong; there was, therefore, an opportunity to suggest to certain hon. Members that they might raise it as a privilege case. Those events occurred a long time ago. I mention them because I might be considered an automatic critic of Porton Down: on the contrary, I think that it is rather important to the nation.

If one were speculating about the most likely venue for clandestine chemical weapons work in the United Kingdom, Porton Down could hardly fail to be near the top of the list. Its association with implementing the convention might seem to call the work of the implementers into disrepute. That is why we must introduce a transparency mechanism that would display the real beneficial and indispensable nature of Porton Down's involvement.

For that reason also, we must give serious thought to adding certain requirements to the Bill. There must be an obligation on the Secretary of State—possibly aided by an advisory board, as my hon. Friend the Member for East Kilbride suggested—to lay before Parliament each year a

report on the operation of the convention in the United Kingdom, including an account of efforts made to stay abreast of all relevant areas of technical change.

Paragraph 4 of article X of the treaty requires that there be an annual report on programmes related to protected purposes, but I cannot find any such requirement in the Bill. Where are the powers that would enable the Secretary of State to provide that report? It may be easy for the Minister to assure us on that point during his winding-up speech. Like my hon. Friends, I do not want Britain to incur penalties for late accession to the convention. Therefore, I shall be as helpful as I can during the Committee stage, provided that Ministers participate fully in the process.

I have two other concerns. First, when discussing the future of Porton Down, it is necessary to reach some conclusion about international problems—particularly the situation in Iraq. Madam Deputy Speaker, if I stray too far on that subject I am sure that you will remind me that I am to raise the issue of sanctions against Libya and Iraq on the Adjournment on Wednesday night. That is probably the more appropriate time to discuss such matters.

Tonight, I simply refer to the fact that various media circles have recently reported allegations that chemical weapons or materials are present on the vessels that sank during the military operations in January and February 1991 in the Shatt al-Arab and along Iraq's gulf coastline. The Iraqis insist that their vessels which sank at that time carried no chemical weapons or materials. They are ready to co-operate with the United Nations if it wishes to salvage the sunken vessels in order to ascertain their contents, and they are willing to provide the facilities required for such an operation.

I visited Baghdad two years ago—not everyone approved of my trip—and I believe that sanctions should be lifted. But that is by the by. Whatever views we have about Iraq, we must appreciate the importance of a monitoring system—and our monitoring system is Porton Down.

I am also concerned about the unanswered question in the brief from the Royal Society of Chemistry. We have not addressed the impact of the legislation on scientific research. I interrupted the Minister to discuss clauses 19 and 20, but it is not immediately clear from the available data whether research chemists, bio-chemists and associated scientists will suffer seriously as a result of the regime. The requirement to obtain a Government permit before embarking on a particular laboratory synthesis or other study will be strange to many scientists.

The Bill leaves the question of appeals against disallowed licenses to the secondary legislation—or, more particularly, to an order made by statutory instrument, which is subject only to annulment by Parliament. The list of chemicals in schedule 1 to the Bill is not as short as it looks. The list contains only 12 entries, but five of them are generic, not specific, so as to prevent would-be violaters from designing molecules around the chemicals ban. Those five families encompass many thousands of different chemicals.

It is important for Britain to sign the convention as soon as possible. If we are not quick about it—I think that we should probably sign the convention before Christmas—our scientists, who are among the best qualified on the planet, may be excluded from jobs in this area. That would be a great pity for Britain and for other countries too, because I suspect that we are as good as, if not better than, anyone else in this field. Secondly, we must be very clear about the Bill's on-going impact on industry.

I accept that the dual-purpose problem may evolve in unexpected forms. Therefore, it is important to ensure the establishment of a proper monitoring system. I do not pretend for a moment that the House of Commons is qualified to conduct that monitoring; but hon. Members have a duty to ensure that a statutory annual report is produced which may then be passed on to those who know far more about the matter.

I pay tribute to the advice that I have received over the years from Dr. Julian Perry Robinson, who has assisted many hon. Members, regardless of their political persuasion. I also thank Dr. Stephen Benn of the Royal Society of Chemistry. It is very important that all the relevant information is available to those working in the field. They may or may not be potential critics, but at least we shall all know what is going on.

5.16 pm

Mr. Robert Key (Salisbury): I begin by declaring several interests to the House. First, I am very pleased to see that my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, the Member for Amber Valley (Mr. Oppenheim), is in charge of the Chemical Weapons Bill. I had the great pleasure of teaching him his A-levels some years ago. I got on my bike and left the Front Bench, but I am delighted to see him there today and I congratulate him on his achievement in putting the Bill together. I hope that it will enjoy a speedy passage through the House.

Secondly, I reiterate what is already recorded in the Register of Members' Interest: I am connected with a company called Hortichem, which helps our lettuces to grow better and ensures that our top fruit is better than the French varieties. The company is involved entirely with horticultural chemicals and I have done my best to ascertain that it has nothing whatever to do with the schedules that appear at the back of the Bill. However, I declare my interest to the House just in case.

Thirdly, I have enormous pride in declaring my interest as the Member of Parliament representing Porton Down and both establishments there. Today we are discussing only the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment, which employs 620 wonderful people. They form part of this country's important scientific base and they have helped to put us at the forefront of the field internationally. We should also mention the support staff, without whom the facility could not operate. They are crucial members of my constituency community and I am proud to represent them.

When I became the Member of Parliament for Salisbury in 1983 my predecessor, Sir Michael Hamilton, destroyed his files, leaving me only two: one on Stonehenge, and one on Porton Down and the reorganisation that the Porton Down communities had endured over the past 30 years.

I welcome the support that the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) gave to Porton Down. He asked what would safeguard Porton Down, and I can best answer that question by reminding him of the 620 employees at Porton Down who are indispensable to the future well-being of our nation's defence and to that of

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the international community. During the past 12 years, they have taken the trouble to educate their Member of Parliament pretty thoroughly about operations at Porton Down. I thank the Ministry of Defence and the Department of Health for allowing me the degree of access to that facility that I have enjoyed over the years.

The Bill was introduced jointly by the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Ministry of Defence. My right hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Jopling) was absolutely right. The Bill has much wider significance than might at first appear, and I share his view that it is one of the most important Bills before the House this Session.

The staff at the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment at Porton Down welcome the Chemical Weapons Convention as an important part in the web of measures which includes export controls and chemical defence equipment designed to deter the use of chemical weapons worldwide.

The mission of the CBDE has already been described by a number of Members, but the context within which the Bill is now before the House is not so widely appreciated. The threat of chemical and biological weapons is not a specific issue involving a number of chemical substances in the schedule to a particular Bill; it is a spectrum ranging from the classic warfare agents that we have heard about, such as first world war mustard gases, nerve agents and cyanide, through agricultural and pharmaceutical chemicals to bioregulators, toxins and biological agents such as bacteria, rickettsia and viruses—the designer molecules about which we have been hearing. So Porton Down has a huge amount of work, not only looking forward, but also looking backwards, as the hon. Member for East Kilbride (Mr. Ingram) well knows.

It was no accident that the Gulf war benefited considerably from the work of the CBDE. The Defence Select Committee recently produced a report on Gulf war syndrome. In all the froth that flows from such reports, perhaps we lost sight of the fact that we totally endorsed the Ministry of Defence in providing NAPS—nerve agent pre-treatment sets—tablets and inoculations and that any quarrel we had concerned the methodology and after-care involved. That work was carried out at the CBDE. The scientists there were right to do what they did, and without that work we would have been worse placed.

It is a supreme irony that however well equipped and trained a nation's troops are and wherever in the world they are fighting, they can be wiped out by a whiff of a chemical or biological agent. That is why chemical defence is so important; it is all part of deterrence.

The work at Porton Down is probably as important as any other part of the nation's deterrence, including its nuclear capability, and the Government recognise that. I refer the House to the comments of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence in his excellent speech to the Tri-Service conference earlier this month:

"Our concept of security in 2010 will undoubtedly be broader than that which dominated our thinking and posture for the 45 years which followed the end of World War II. As Sir Michael Howard memorably described it, we are emerging from the rigidities of the Cold War. We will see, and have to respond to, a much more diverse range of challenges: terrorism; weapons proliferation, including weapons of mass destruction; competition over natural resources; religious and ethnic disputes; drugs; organised crime; and refugees."

We also saw quite recently in Japan the terror that the threat of chemical weapons can create on a major city's underground transport system. I have every confidence that our nation will have planned for such a civil event should it happen in Britain. I suspect that that is not the case in some other countries. Such issues now mean that the Secretary of State for Defence has wider responsibilities. Perhaps we should also hear from the Home Office during the passage of the Bill.

A number of Members have referred to what the CBDE has or has not done. It is important to remember that its connection with the Bill goes back a long way. The CBDE has been working closely with the Ministry of Defence proliferation and arms control secretariat and in co-operation with the Foreign and Commonwealth office to support the preparatory commission for the Organisation of the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, the international body established to implement the convention. The CBDE has sent technical representatives from Porton Down to the experts group and specialist task forces in The Hague working on establishing the structure of the OPCW and developing the technical and administrative requirements in preparation for the convention's entry into force. In other words, my constituents have been at the base of the entire international effort. It is indeed the world's best effort and many of my constituents have helped to make it possible.

My right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister appears to have come under fire from the Opposition Front Bench. That is rather unfair. Page 7 of the annual report of the CBDE for 1994-95, to which a number of Members have referred, makes it pretty clear that the CBDE has encountered some difficulty in moving forward sufficiently fast. It states:

"CBDE has now completed collation of the information needed for the UK declaration of former chemical weapons related activities required by the CWC. Preparation of declarations of present activities has commenced. These activities include details of the United Kingdom Single Small Scale Facility sited at CBDE where small quantities of chemical weapons agents to be used for permitted purposes may be prepared and details of destruction of old CW munitions which are occasionally found at various UK sites as well as on the Range at CBDE."

The CBDE has made a major effort to prepare for the legislation and it is not accurate to blame my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister, a former Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, for the delay. It means simply that we have been doing our homework better than other nations might have done and that was correct.

It is important that MOD units around the country and their facilities are fully prepared for the challenge inspections that are planned under the legislation. Accordingly, the CBDE has taken part in the United Kingdom series of practice challenge inspections. It has also provided lecturers to assist in the Dutch-sponsored pilot training courses for inspectors and national authority personnel from all over the world.

The CBDE has developed, produced and had certified a toxic material transport container which will make an important practical contribution to the safe transport of samples taken by OPCW inspectors. In the aftermath of the Sarin attack in Tokyo, I recall seeing on television people carrying extraordinary jars of substances. I am delighted that the CBDE has taken matters further.

Airlines have strict rules governing the transport of hazardous materials and the new container has been designed to provide compliance with all existing

packaging criteria. It has now been granted a certificate of packaging issued on behalf of the Department of Transport, the Civil Aviation Authority and the Health and Safety Executive. A container with small samples was taken from London Heathrow to Washington Dulles on 15 February this year in co-operation with the US Army Edgewood research development and engineering center.

A number of Opposition Members referred to Iraq and of course the international effort there depended almost entirely on the work at Porton Down. I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Linlithgow for recognising the importance of that work.

As for the continuing question of hazard assessment, I should underline to my hon. Friend the Minister how important it is that we do not stop now. We are at the start of a process that will continue into the future.

Reference has been made to the Soviet disclosures of the nerve agent VX. The hon. Member for East Kilbride was absolutely right to refer to that and other disclosures. If I may pre-empt my hon. Friend the Minister, the answer to his question is quite simple. It is exactly why the CBDE argues that it must continue to research those products. That means looking backwards as well as forwards.

It is ironic that the chemical substances originally used and stockpiled in large numbers in the first world war—and still stockpiled in large numbers, particularly in Russia—were produced because they had a stable existence and a long storage life. Now that we can make designer products very quickly, the most popular chemicals are the very ones that were previously rejected. The CBDE is going back in time to look at things rejected in the 1950s and 1960s, to make sure that we have not missed a single trick in Britain's effort to ensure a slowing, if not cessation, of a wicked trade.

I read the compliance cost assessment produced by my hon. Friend's Department, for which I am grateful to him, but was alarmed by the cost to British industry. I was relieved when I read the details and realised that we are talking about a small number of firms and small commitments by them. Nevertheless, compliance is a burden on British industry and my hon. Friend the Minister should not for one moment blush at being a deregulation Minister who finds himself imposing regulations. Perhaps the firms have been operating under the wrong regulations and that while we have been too obsessed with implementing ridiculous regulations from Brussels all these years, our eye has not been on the ball. Let us abolish a few more regulations from Brussels and make sure that we enforce by regulation things that matter. I urge my hon. Friend not to be embarrassed. He was never embarrassed even when I was teaching him A-level economics, so I do not imagine that he is embarrassed now. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale said, we must get it absolutely right and not waste any effort in ensuring security and safety.

One point that worries me about the compliance cost assessment appears in paragraph 20, which deals with the small business litmus test and mentions thresholds below which declarations and inspections are not required. I seek an explanation and an assurance because it seems strange that whereas medium and large firms will, rightly, have to go to a great deal of trouble, small firms will not have to bother. I find that extraordinary and ask my hon. Friend to re-examine that aspect. I suspect that we shall need to be reassured.

The same point applies to academia. As a former member of the Medical Research Council, I yield to none in my admiration for British science. I entirely understand the arguments made by the academic community, but it should recognise that it is also a target for terrorism as much as anything else and is a source of potential materials for terrorism. The scientific community should wish for the tightest security possible and records of substances, and I am sure that it will. I wish the Bill well and assure my hon. Friend the Minister that it has my strong support.

5.32 pm

Mr. Nick Harvey (North Devon): I am grateful for the opportunity to take part in the debate because, like the hon. Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key), I think that this is one of the most important pieces of legislation that will come before Parliament this Session. I welcome the Bill but share the view of hon. Members who said that it is rather belated. It is none the less welcome that the Government recognise the contribution that the treaty can make to global security. Its ratification is essential. No right hon. or hon. Member can doubt the Bill's validity and we must progress it as quickly as we can. If we fail to pass this primary legislation promptly and by the time the treaty is in force there would be unfortunate consequences throughout the country, as the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) said. There is much of merit in the Bill and I join other hon. Members on both sides of the House in urging that we get on with the job.

There are problems with the Bill as it stands which may cause difficulties in its practical implementation. It would be a shame not to use the limited opportunities at our disposal to address those concerns. Right hon. and hon. Members spoke of how the Bill will impinge on the activities of the scientific community. Clauses 19 and 20 require anyone using, producing or possessing schedule 1 chemicals to obtain a licence first, and I would like to hear how that would work in practice. I presume that the Department of Trade and Industry, as the national authority, will issue licences—but who will decide what is or is not acceptable research? Will there be any form of appeal against licence refusal? Who will advise the DTI? Those questions have no obvious answers in the Bill, but perhaps the Government have replies ready. Many Bills in recent years have given various Secretaries of State sweeping powers. In this instance, hon. Members have not been circulated with the customary tomes of explanatory notes saying how the Bill's powers will be used in practice.

I welcome the fact that the national authority will be given sufficient powers to monitor the data reporting scheme for schedule 2 and 3 chemicals. That system will work well given full co-operation by the industry. There are further powers to implement a full-blown national compliance monitoring system if that is deemed necessary. That would apply to all areas of chemical-related activity, whether or not they are governmental. That measure seems somewhat draconian but presumably it will be used sparingly. The system will rely on close co-operation, which is just as well given that the Bill envisages only seven additional departmental staff in the DTI—presumably in the newly established secretariat. One assumes that other DTI staff will be redeployed on that task.

[Mr. Nick Harvey]

The hon. Member for Ilford, South (Mr. Gapes) rightly referred to as draconian, if they were used inappropriately, some of the powers in clauses 22 and 23. Clause 23 seems to give the Secretary of State the power to make regulations that will require persons to identify themselves to him if it is likely that the Secretary of State will need information from them. That is like the police requiring criminals to make themselves known. If the Secretary of State is unable to identify the persons in question and their activities, there will be a problem. We cannot be sure that persons will know about the legislation and the requirement to make themselves known.

We should be wary of establishing a system that might result in too cosy a relationship between the industry and the DTI as the national authority, if that brought any risk of endangering our international credibility. It is not clear from the Bill how the DTI's strategies for prevention, accountability, parliamentary involvement and statutory independence will work. The solution must be measures to ensure transparency and accountability. I welcome the Minister's announcement today that there will be an annual report, but share the concern of the hon. Member for Linlithgow that it should be statutory. I would like that requirement in the Bill. We accept the sincerity of the Minister's assurances, but there will come a time when he is long gone and forgotten from his current post. It would be preferable to see in the Bill a procedure for ensuring that annual reporting continues indefinitely. The Australian solution for fulfilling the terms of the treaty is to prescribe that an annual report be laid before each House of Parliament.

Transparency in protecting against chemical weapons is specifically covered by the convention. Although one recognises the necessity for continuing research in anti-chemical protection such as clothing alarms and antidotes, such research may conceal illegal weapons activity, so each country must present its annual report to the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons. Britain's present research, as the hon. Member for Salisbury explained, is undertaken at Porton Down, which already produces an annual report. Will that report continue in its current form? What will be the relationship between Porton Down's report, that which will be made annually to the OPCW and the report to which the Minister referred at the start of his speech? Who will take responsibility for producing the annual report to the OPCW? Does the Minister believe that the Porton Down report will form the basis and that it will be enough to satisfy the treaty's requirements?

As many hon. Members have said, Porton Down will continue to play an important role in satisfying Britain's obligations when the treaty comes into force. It is crucial to ensure that this country is kept abreast of technological development in the chemical industry so that new and potentially dangerous chemicals or new ways of using existing chemicals can be brought under the remit of the treaty. We cannot rely solely on the OPCW to monitor those developments. Porton Down seems to be the only organisation capable of taking on that responsibility. The DTI appeared to recognise that in the discussion document it produced earlier this year when it called on Porton Down to monitor scientific developments.

At that time, Porton Down was a free-standing next steps agency, with a director general who was accountable to Parliament. It now has a managing director and is simply one of several components of the Defence Research Agency that operates as a trading fund. How will it effect Porton Down's role in the future when the treaty comes into force? We hope that it will continue to monitor technical changes in the chemical industry as effectively for the purposes of bringing new technology under the terms of the treaty as it will presumably monitor technical change for its military and business customers. We can hope, but we cannot be sure because of the uncertainty about the accountability of Porton Down to Parliament. The only way to guarantee that a blind eye is not turned to potential abuse is to enact statutory legislation to ensure transparency and accountability. It should not be too difficult to adapt the existing advisory committees at Porton Down to the requirements of the treaty.

The fact that, unlike in many other countries the Government here propose to operate the national authority from within the recesses of the DTI, may be seen as exacerbating the problems of transparency. There seems little doubt that a stand-alone agency would have been more easily held to account and its activities could have been more easily scrutinised. If the DTI is to publish an annual report, I hope that it will be regularly debated in Parliament so that the transparency is ensured.

There is a need for an advisory board. Organisations that carry out similar functions in other sectors of industry have advisory boards, and I should be interested to hear the Minister's response to the questions that have been asked on that subject. If, as the Bill progresses, further measures are considered which tackle the problem of transparency and accountability, the Bill will be able to do the job asked of it. We shall co-operate with other hon. Members to ensure that the Bill's passage through the House is as swift as possible.

5.42 pm

Sir Peter Emery (Honiton): I can probably claim to be as concerned at an early stage with the need for a chemical weapons treaty as anyone in the House as I am one of Parliament's representatives in the North Atlantic Assembly. Since 1982, the assembly's Science and Technical Committee has been pressing hard for the introduction of a chemical weapons treaty and two of its reports were written by the right hon. Member for Honiton.

The successful negotiation of the chemical weapons convention is a remarkable achievement—perhaps some of us do not underline that enough. The convention is the most ambitious multilateral arms control agreement ever. It seeks a global ban on an entire class of weaponry and will require verification in one of the world's most pervasive industrial sectors.

The entry into force of the convention now seems assured as it has received support from the United Nations and, generally, throughout the world. But there is a need, which has not been emphasised in the debate, to persuade those nations that may covertly possess chemical weapons to join the convention. It may be appropriate for us to examine harshly parties that do not join the convention.

One of the key implementation problems is to ensure that the convention is signed. It is particularly important for nations that are believed to possess chemical weapons to be brought into the convention. Some nations that are unhappy about what they see as excessively intrusive verification may be reluctant to sign the convention. For

example, some Arab nations have suggested on several occasions that they would be reluctant to sign a chemical weapons agreement unless Israel dismantled its nuclear weapons capability. There are various difficulties involved in gaining world acceptance of the convention. That is why I am asking my hon. Friend the Minister whether any consideration has been given to what steps may be taken—even half steps such as trading sanctions—against those who are apparently unwilling to sign the convention once it is in force. The nations that sign the chemical weapons convention should consider that issue. I hope that my hon. Friend is pressing for the relevant sites in this country to be declared as soon as possible, to enable the preparatory commission to determine the scale of the resources needed by the international Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons. We should urge all signatories to do that, so that we can proceed quickly.

Many people may think that chemical weapons are a modern problem, but that is not so. Chemical warfare dates back to antiquity. In the Peloponnesian war in 431 BC, Spartan forces used giant bellows filled with pitch, charcoal and sulphur to blow choking smoke into the besieged cities of Platea and Delium. Several centuries later, the Byzantine empire developed what was known as Greek fire, which was a flame-throwing device that produced sulphur dioxide—a binding and choking smoke. In 1456, the defenders of Belgrade used a gas containing arsenic against the Turks. An Australian observer at the time described the effect as murderous and said that the weapon should never be used against Christians. The use of shells containing chloride gas was considered in the American civil war.

When we consider the history of banning, we see that as early as 1899, efforts were made at the first Hague conference to discuss arms limitation and the settlement of international disputes.

Mr. Dalyell: Did the right hon. Gentleman say that there was an Australian observer in 1456?

Sir Peter Emery: I do apologise—I meant to say an Austrian observer. I do not know whether I slipped up or the hon. Gentleman misheard me, but 1456 was a little before the wallabies.

As early as 1899, the Russians proposed a ban on projectiles containing asphyxiating and deleterious gases. The United States opposed it, and it is interesting to consider its reason for doing so. The Americans opposed the ban in the belief that gas was probably a more humane means of warfare than bullets and shells and might be a weapon to achieve decisive results. As a result, the Russian proposal was not adopted.

The widespread use of chemical weapons in the first world war led to the only existing protocol on chemical weapons, created in 1925 in Geneva. It has a long title: the "Protocol for the Prohibition of the Use in War of Asphyxiating, Poisonous or other Gases and all Analogous Liquids, Materials or Devices and of Bacteriological Methods of Warfare". That is still an international treaty, but unfortunately it fell short of banning chemical weapons. It represents an international legal position on the first use of chemical weapons, but it does not outlaw the development, production or stockpiling of chemical weapons. The treaty and the Bill that we are now discussing achieve that end. Several agents were developed at the end of the last war, notably nerve agents in Germany and the even more lethal nerve gases in the United Kingdom.

It was in 1980, at the Geneva conference on disarmament, when negotiations began to produce a more effective arms control agreement governing chemical weapons. It was during the 1980s that many of us—some in the House, some in the North Atlantic Assembly and some in the United Nations—were pressing for efforts to be made to produce a bilateral chemical arms control agreement. It was the United States and the Soviet Union that achieved such an agreement. In 1989, the Soviet Union announced that it would begin destroying its stocks without waiting for a treaty to be signed. The United States then decided to halt production of binary chemical weapons. In the same year, in Paris, 149 nations pledged not to use chemical agents in warfare and called for their eventual elimination.

It is interesting, even before the treaty is in operation, that in 1990 the United States and the Soviet Union reached an agreement on chemical weapons under which they would begin to destroy 80 per cent. of their stocks immediately and would reduce remaining stocks to 1 or 2 per cent. of the existing total after the signing of the convention. There are occasions when the Soviets and the Americans are blamed for whatever, but in this instance it is unfair not to give them some credit.

There are certain problems when it comes to the need in haste to adopt the convention. I understand that we shall consider the Bill on Report, followed by Third Reading, the week after next. I am glad that the Government have responded to those who are urging that we should act quickly. What steps have my hon. Friend the Minister and his Department taken to try to prepare a list of scientists and British civil servants, or business people, who might work in The Hague under the preparatory convention? I agree entirely with Opposition Members and my right hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Jopling), who have urged that there should be a British input into the proposed administration. I understand that it is estimated that between 700 and 2,500 persons will be involved. The number will depend on the number of signatories and on the number of sites that will have to be inspected or may be inspected.

No one has talked about money, but we must ensure that there is proper finance, so that the administration at The Hague can inspect fully and properly without having to worry about finance. It should be remembered that the International Atomic Energy Agency in Vienna has had no increase in funding for seven years, which has led to considerable worries about the way in which it can carry out its operations. I do not want to see the same situation at The Hague.

Successful negotiation of the chemical weapons convention will be a milestone in the history of arms control. The steps that we are now taking move us forward and make us part of an historical achievement. I am delighted that we are making progress.

5.54 pm

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton): I thank the right hon. Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery) for his interesting history lesson. His slip of the tongue enables me to refer to Australia, which is opposed to chemical weapons and

[Mr. Harry Cohen]

to French nuclear tests in the Pacific, as we should be. The right hon. Gentleman presented me with an opportunity to make that point.

The Minister may have had his tongue in his cheek when he referred to "rapid ratification" by the Government. We should be asking why there has been such delay in introducing the Bill. It is long overdue. The text of the convention was agreed in late 1992. We should examine the reasons for delayed ratification. The Deputy Prime Minister, the then President of the Board of Trade, dragged his feet. Deregulation and privatisation of the Post Office was deemed more important by the right hon. Gentleman than a major international treaty to ban chemical weapons world wide. That is a clear example that members of the Tory party have become little Englanders.

It is vital that the United Kingdom should be among the first 65 to ratify the convention, not least because that will safeguard the jobs of Britons who have already secured employment with the international organisation at The Hague. Early ratification will also give us good standing in the decision-making processes that are being established. It will show additionally that we are keen on controlling chemical weapons.

The convention will come into force 180 days after 65 countries have ratified it. As the Minister said, we look to the United States and the Russian Federation to ratify it. Once the United Kingdom has ratified the convention, we shall be in a better position to urge those two major powers to respond quickly. That is why early ratification is important. The United Kingdom would have been seen as keener if we had ratified the convention earlier. The Government should be criticised for their tardiness.

I have taken a special interest in chemical weapons for many years. It is an interest that was given renewed vigour after the terrible bombing of Halabja by Saddam Hussein in 1988. Soon after that bombing, I went with my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) to meet the right hon. Member for Bristol, West (Mr. Waldegrave), who was then Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, to press for the Government, who had international obligations, to act immediately. History records that no action was forthcoming. That is to the eternal shame of the nation. We remained a full trading partner with Iraq. We did not even impose sanctions. As the Scott inquiry has already revealed, export control guidelines were being slackened. It was a shameful episode as Ministers turned a blind eye to murder by means of chemical weapons.

Under the convention, we shall be obliged not to assist any country to acquire a chemical weapons capability. That means that we need a proper export control regime. The current procedure is a farce because it is subject to the whim of political masters. The Scott inquiry has highlighted nooks and crannies that tell us how the Government view trade with obnoxious regimes. I hope that it will report during the Session. The Government should give an assurance that if the inquiry makes recommendations for changes in the law, they will implement them. There should be no ifs, buts or maybe this or that. It is clear that the export regime needs to be overhauled, and the sooner the better. Transparency must be introduced. That which the Government tell Parliament is the United Kingdom's policy must be seen to be implemented. It must not be subverted by Ministers or anyone else.

There must be transparency and accountability in the approach of the Department of Trade and Industry to the convention. As things stand, little information would be in the public domain on what the DTI was doing to ensure compliance with the convention. The DTI can refuse to disclose the nature of its activities, on the ground that that would jeopardise the commercial confidentiality of the companies providing information. The international co-ordinating body, the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons at The Hague, cannot make public any information provided to it by the DTI as a national authority. That must be changed, and I shall say a bit more about it in a minute.

Transparency is also needed in the activities of Porton Down, which has been referred to today. I have expressed my outrage at some of the activities there in the past. That is not to say, however, that some of them do not deserve support; I would never want to throw the baby out with the bath water. Porton Down's expertise in physical protection, such as gas masks and suits, is unparalleled, as are the capabilities of its analytical laboratories. My distaste relates primarily to medical counter-measures that require animal tests, especially when many of them could be carried out using alternatives to animals. Truly defensive work could easily be distorted into a potentially offensive capability. Other countries may take the same road using that excuse. I would like to see a tightening of procedures against that get-out.

The Government should consider giving an idea of the quantity of any chemical that is produced at Porton Down, even bearing in mind the 1 tonne limit to which the Minister referred. Under the convention, a certain level of transparency would be required in any case. After all, would we be willing to ratify a treaty that allowed the Iraqis to hide Salman Pak, their Porton Down, behind closed doors? The United Nations special commission on Iraq's weapons of mass destruction has complained to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office about British companies supplying the Salman Pak and Ad Dwar plants in Iraq. In their Scott mire, the Government just want to forget about it, but at its kindest the United Kingdom's role could be described as ambiguous on supporting Iraq's chemical weapons capability.

It is valuable to look at the Bill in a slightly wider context. It will almost certainly be the model for this country's implementation of any verification regime agreed for the biological weapons convention, which, although agreed more than 20 years ago, currently has no verification arrangements. Despite the other faults—some of which I have mentioned—of its political masters, Britain has been quietly in the forefront on that issue. I welcome that and pay tribute to the Government.

There will be another international meeting on biological weapons next week in Geneva. I hope that when arrangements are finished in the coming years, there will be proper co-ordination between the two verification regimes. I raise that issue now, because it could have implications for the proposed legislation in the relatively near future. There could be some overlap between verification of biological and chemical weapons. It is important to ensure that we do not have a situation where verification does not take place because each regime leaves it to the other. That is an important point and it should be taken on board.

Before talking about the specifics for strengthening the Bill, I want to look at an obligation that is not in it, but

which is important. Article X of the convention obliges each party to make arrangements to provide resources in one form or another for future assistance to any party attacked with chemical weapons. Before the Bill completes its passage through the House, may we have an idea of how much we might contribute to a voluntary assistance fund, which, I understand, is to be established? May we have an assurance from the Government that, in any investigation of alleged use of chemical weapons, British expertise will be placed at the disposal of the international organisation without charge, because experience of bureaucracy shows that financial questions impede prompt action? There would be no blank cheque; the costs of such investigations are relatively small, but the benefits of speedy action would be enormous. Nothing less than that can remove the moral stain that remains on this country for its inaction over Halabja.

The Minister referred to "challenge inspections" in the convention. That is important during peacetime. It is important that inspections should take place when allegations are made that chemical weapons are being used during wars between different countries, but they should also happen when it is alleged that a regime has used such weapons against its own people, as in Halabja. Swift investigation is vital. The organisation must be given all the power and authority to do that, should the need arise.

Sir Peter Emery: How does the hon. Gentleman see that applying where the nation had not signed the convention?

Mr. Cohen: That is a genuine point, and it is one of considerable difficulty. We must get all nations to sign the convention at the outset, and the ones that do not must come under continuing pressure. Even when a nation has not signed the convention, the international organisation should put pressure on it for inspections to take place. If that does not occur, the world will draw its own conclusions and should act accordingly.

On the specific aspects of the Bill, I am pleased that the Minister has agreed that an annual report should be presented to Parliament on the activities carried out by this country in implementing the convention. The report should contain the maximum information, taking into account the commercial confidentiality limitation, to which the Government have referred. The Government should not use commercial confidentiality as an excuse to provide very little information to the House. As in Australia, there could be an indication of the activity taking place under the convention, taking into account the restraints of commercial confidentiality.

I believe that there should be an advisory body for the Secretary of State on the implementation of the convention. Its members could be appointed by the Secretary of State, with its expenses paid out of the Consolidated Fund. It would be best to have one or two statutory bodies, but we can consider that matter in Committee.

I am thinking of tabling two specific amendments in Committee. One relates to clause 23, to which my hon. Friends the Members for Ilford, South (Mr. Gapes) and for East Kilbride (Mr. Ingram) on the Front Bench, and the hon. Member for North Devon (Mr. Harvey) have referred. There are flaws in its wording—let alone anything else—as well as in the powers contained in it. Clause 23(6) should be changed, so that there are positive procedures in the House and in the other place rather than the negative resolution contained in the clause. The regulations will provide the Secretary of State with tremendous powers, which I acknowledge may well be needed. In the main, those powers are likely to be exercised in secret. The accountability to Parliament in the making of those powers should be by positive, not negative, resolution.

I want to add a new paragraph after clause 26(1)(c) to make it an offence knowingly to make a false or misleading statement to any member of the inspection team, the in-country escort or the observer during an inspection. The reason is simple. During an inspection, it is vital that the correct information is presented to the inspection team. Unamended, the Bill would not make giving false or misleading statements an offence. Wilful obstruction covers only physical obstruction. False or deliberately misleading statements should be a punishable offence, otherwise a huge loophole opens up. Showing those subject to inspection a copy of the Act would impress upon them the need to tell the truth and assist inspection to the fullest extent.

The last time that we had legislation to ratify an arms control measure—the conventional forces in Europe treaty—there was a similar gap. I raised the issue then, but pressure of time prevented the legislation from being amended. I hope that if I were to move such an amendment later, it would be included this time.

The Bill, which ratifies an important treaty, is late. Sadly, the Government have not shown that they recognise its significance. However, it will make the world a much safer place and it is welcome. I wish the Bill a speedy passage.

6.10 pm

Mr. Mike Gapes (Ilford, South): I warmly welcome the Bill. I endorse the remarks of the right hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Jopling) who, like me, is a member of the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs, which called early last year for the speedy implementation of legislation in the previous parliamentary Session.

Mr. Jopling: The hon. Gentleman would wish to be accurate: the Select Committee's report was published this March.

Mr. Gapes: I thank the right hon. Gentleman. I meant the last parliamentary year; we are now in the new parliamentary year.

I was so concerned about the matter that I tabled an early-day motion, which received wide support from all parties, and I successfully secured an Adjournment debate on 24 April, in which I had the opportunity to press the Minister for Science and Technology, the hon. Member for Esher (Mr. Taylor), on why the President of the Board of Trade had not introduced legislation. I concur with the remarks made by hon. Members on both sides of the House about the inordinate delay and why it took three years for the DTI to propose legislation.

We have been told today that legislation is now being introduced rapidly. The problem is that there is not much time between its introduction today and its enactment, which must be in the near future to ensure that Britain is

[Mr. Gapes]

among the first 65 countries to implement the convention and to ensure that we are in at the very beginning. That will have to be borne in mind in Committee.

Mr. Oppenheim: I remind the hon. Gentleman that the Bill was published in July, so he has had plenty of time to consider it.

Mr. Gapes: The Bill was published in draft form in July. I understand that a revised version was published in the last few weeks. Therefore, the House was not presented with the legislation in July. The Queen's Speech referred to the matter only last week and it is now being pushed through quickly because 42 countries have already implemented the convention and yet more are in the pipeline.

It crossed my mind in July and August that 20 or 30 countries might soon implement the convention, causing the Government to rush legislation through in October in the clear-up period at the end of the last parliamentary year. Fortunately, that did not happen, so we may have a chance properly to scrutinise the Bill.

Many points have already been made but I wish simply to highlight two issues. The first, to which reference has been made, is the problem caused by the DTI being the national authority for the legislation. I have no problem with that in principle, but I am concerned that within the Department staff may not have the necessary expertise to cope with the complexities of properly enforcing the legislation. The danger might be that we have too few people, but with draconian powers, and as a result proper consideration is not given to the needs of the industry or the academic world. I hope that the Minister will assure us that full resources will be given.

One of the benefits of disarmament—the peace dividend—should be that far more resources are given to inspection, verification, implementation and monitoring of disarmament legislation. It is important that that is adequate. For reasons that we understand, the DTI has the lead role in this, but it is important to ensure that resources freed up by the disarmament process are used for verification and implementation of disarmament agreements. We should not skimp on that. It is important that proper resources are given for the full implementation of the treaty in Britain.

Associated with that is a second problem—transparency. Reference has already been made to an advisory board. It would help those in the DTI who must deal with the matter if there were an advisory board of experts, academics, people from industry, people who had some knowledge and perhaps retired military people as well—people who could consider some of the wider aspects. The board should be put on a statutory basis so that it could produce information and reports that could be more widely considered if necessary.

Linked to that is a matter to which reference has already been made. I welcome the Minister's statement on the publication of an annual report. In the interests of trust and wider confidence, however, it is essential that we do something similar to that done in Australia, where the first annual report of the director of safeguards and the director of the chemical weapons convention office has already been published and tabled for debate by the two Houses of the Australian Parliament. I cannot see any problem in Britain doing the same and I hope that, to that end, amendments will be tabled in Committee so that the Bill can be amended before its Third Reading.

The right hon. Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery) referred to the need to take action against countries that stay out of the regime. That is important. As the DTI is taking the lead role, that raises the matter of the successor regime to COCOM, the co-ordinating committee of western nations on technology transfers. I hope that some form of international sanctions, in terms of trade, exports and the transfer of technology, will also be considered so that countries that choose not to join the convention will know that there is a penalty in terms of economic co-operation and development.

The issue may be complex because some countries will not join a chemical weapons convention in principle due to their attitude to neighbouring countries and the non-nuclear proliferation treaty, but failure to join would be a terrible mistake. All countries have an obligation to join. The convention has been signed by 159 or 160 countries, but there are 184 or 185 members of the United Nations. It is important that we keep up the pressure on member and non-member states of the United Nations. For example, Taiwan is not recognised as an international state, but nevertheless it is an important international country and it has a significant chemical industry. We should ensure that such countries are part of the process.

The implementation of the convention will be of great importance for the future of the world. The world has struggled for many years to secure what may happen when it is enforced: the achievement of a verified international treaty allowing challenge inspections and enabling international organisations to introduce confidence and co-operation in the future.

We were given a history lesson on chemical weapons. My knowledge does not go back to the ancient Greeks, but I believe that enormous efforts have been made in this century. Reference was made to the Geneva discussions of the 1920s, but efforts were also made in the 1980s. At that time we thought that progress would be made, but the United States adopted a very difficult attitude to what it regarded as intrusion into its chemical industry. We have now come through that: the combination of Mr. Gorbachev's achievements in the ending of the cold war and universal recognition that the threats are real offer us the prospect of securing an international treaty.

I am pleased that the Government have introduced the Bill. I am sure that it will be received positively in all quarters. It is important to get it absolutely right, however, and I therefore hope that the Government will take account of the points made today by hon. Members on both sides of the House when the later stages of the Bill are considered.

6.20 pm

Mr. Ingram: With the leave of the House, Madam Deputy Speaker. I shall not speak for long because the Minister raised many points earlier and I feel that the House will benefit from what he says in reply. This has been an important and informative debate; all who have participated will probably leave the Chamber with more knowledge than they had initially. The same will apply outside the House.

The Minister said that the Royal Society of Chemistry had not provided him with an important briefing document. I have checked with the society, which confirmed that two copies of the document were given to his Department yesterday. I hope that that will be placed on the record, and I am sure that the Minister will correct any omission by his Department. The society should not be criticised.

I do not intend to deal with all the points that have been made, but the Minister asked for suggestions on how the Bill could be improved. We are trying to ensure its fairly speedy passage, but that does not mean that we should ignore the need for amendment. The Minister has been asked specific questions about the way in which the annual report will be presented to Parliament—for instance, will that be statutory? He has also been asked a number of questions about the way in which the regulations will be handled—will they be dealt with by the affirmative or negative resolution procedure?—and about the need for an advisory body, among other related matters. All those issues would require amendments to the Bill.

I am prepared to talk to the Minister with the aim of ensuring that the amendments are suitable, and that the Bill is eventually worded in the best possible way. The Minister said that he had not been contacted by an Opposition spokesman during the lengthy period since the Bill's first appearance, or since Britain signed the convention three years ago; I am now making an offer to him. If he wants co-operation on the amendments necessary to deal with the important points that have been raised today, I shall be happy to co-operate with him.

I congratulate every hon. Member who has spoken: some sound and cogent points have been made. I also thank the Royal Society of Chemistry, which has helped many hon. Members. It is clear that the authoritative document produced by Julian Perry Robinson has struck a chord with many people, and I hope that it will help the Minister to improve the Bill so that it can assist us all in dealing with a critical issue.

6.24 pm

Mr. Oppenheim: With the leave of the House, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It is clear that, in general, the Bill enjoys the whole-hearted support of hon. Members on both sides of the House. That was demonstrated by the enlightening and helpful speeches that we have heard.

I also appreciated the spirit of the comments made by the hon. Member for East Kilbride (Mr. Ingram). In the same spirit, I shall not respond in detail to his comments about British manufacturing industry. He paid tribute to the chemical industry for having notched up a large manufacturing surplus; I could name other industries that have been transformed in the past 15 years, but, in deference to the spirit of consensus that is so uncharacteristic of my performances at the Dispatch Box, I shall not do so. Instead, I shall do my best to respond to the serious issues that have been raised.

First, have we been late in presenting the legislation? The convention is extremely complex, and the Department of Trade and Industry has—rightly—consulted widely. We have had to ensure that the convention is implemented effectively and fully; we have also had the conflicting duty of trying to minimise the burdens on business. I think that hon. Members on both sides of the House recognise that necessity, and that we have achieved our aim without imposing any short cuts. My hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key) commented on that. The convention is complex, and we must translate it into a complex Bill; we consider it better to get the legislation right than to rush it.

The comments of the hon. Member for East Kilbride struck me as a little unfair. On the one hand, he said that we had been slow in presenting the Bill to Parliament, but on the other he said that we were rushing things. In fact, we have taken our time. We began the consultation process a year ago, and about three months ago we issued draft legislation. That has not always happened. I feel that there has been a reasonable amount of time for suggestions to be made. Moreover, I am proud to say that we are in the first group of countries that will implement the convention. The hon. Gentleman may say that we are a bit slow, but other countries have had even more problems than we have in implementing it. I feel that I should at least respond to some of the gratuitous comments that have been flung at my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister, who is not here to defend himself.

Mr. Dalyell: The Minister speaks of gratuitous comments. It was his mother who, on a famous occasion in May 1982, told me in front of a full House that I was treasonable—but I shall not pursue that.

I acknowledge the need to get the legislation right, but how are industry and others who will be affected to be told about the Bill's provisions? There is a communications problem, is there not?

Mr. Oppenheim: I shall deal with that point, which I consider valid. Let me say in passing that, in my 39 years, I have found that my mother is usually right—although she may have been wrong in the case of the hon. Gentleman.

A number of hon. Members raised an important issue. One of them was my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury, who indeed taught me economics, but at O-level rather than A-level. It is a minor point, of course. I do not think that I took the examination in the end; I think that I took Latin instead. These are not important issues, however. All that need be said is that I benefited enormously from my hon. Friend's teaching. I passed all my examinations; it is just that I may not have taken that particular subject. But I digress, and I shall risk being out of order if I continue.

Our relationship with Porton Down is enormously important. It is connected with the question of where the DTI takes advice on the whole issue of chemical weapons. The Department tends to take such advice from the widest possible range of advisers, but will rely particularly on Porton Down, the advice of which has already proved invaluable. It is an enormous, almost unique centre of expertise in the United Kingdom's defence against chemical weapons, and we shall draw fully on its abilities. We feel, however, that simply to set up a committee of experts may be limiting. We are open to other points of view, but we believe that we should draw as fully as possible on the widest range of expertise that exists in this country. Porton Down will play a valuable part in that.

The issue of whether new chemicals and newly developed chemical weapons fall within the convention has been raised. That is another area in which Porton Down will be invaluable. The convention and the

[Mr. Oppenheim]

legislation operate not merely against specific chemicals but against chemical weapons per se. Any development of new chemical weapons, therefore, will come within the bounds of the convention and the legislation, added to which there is scope, if necessary, to make rapid changes to the convention and the legislation.

The hon. Member for East Kilbride and other hon. Members spoke about export controls. The Bill makes no specific provision for export and import controls but it bans chemical weapons whether people are making them, trading in them or using them, because we intend that the existing licensing system for import and export controls should apply. The departmental responsibility in this area is perfectly clear. The President of the Board of Trade is ultimately responsible for issuing export licences. He has the final decision although, of course, he always consults the Ministry of Defence and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office before making any decisions. That is why there is no specific reference in the legislation to export controls.

Mr. Ingram: I do not want to cause delay but I should like to ask a question about export controls. If the DTI, as the national authority, identified that a chemical was being exported which could be used for weapons, who would have the ultimate authority? Would the judgment be made on the basis of trade by the DTI as the national authority in relation to the convention?

Mr. Oppenheim: First, the DTI would not licence the export of any chemical weapon, and it would also fall within the terms of the legislation that governs the convention because the convention prevents us from trading in chemical weapons. Such export would be illegal on both grounds and a licence would not be issued. In any case, the request would fall within the terms of the convention and one hopes that that would be picked up long before anyone applied for an export licence. It is unlikely that anyone would apply for a licence for chemical weapons when such weapons are illegal. I hope that that satisfies the hon. Gentleman.

The hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) mentioned the appeals procedure. The Bill has an appeals procedure as part of the licensing arrangements and it applies to schedule 1 chemicals that do not have to be licensed. I shall come to that matter. We intend to model the appeals procedure on the one that is soon to be introduced under the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act 1994. I assure hon. Members that the appeals procedure would include a committee consisting of those with sufficient expertise to advise on licensing matters.

The issue of whether there are short cuts on verification was mentioned. I assure the House that the preparatory commission process has not led to any weakening of the convention's verification procedures. United Kingdom experts have worked extremely hard and closely with officials to maintain the integrity of the convention, and our officials will continue to do so.

The hon. Member for East Kilbride and others were concerned about whether clause 23 was unnecessarily draconian. We looked carefully at that possibility and it concerned me when I looked at the proposed legislation. The first problem is that the chemical industry is large, diverse and scattered. Secondly, there is no single list of firms that might produce or use scheduled chemicals. Thirdly, the convention clearly requires the UK to produce a complete declaration of scheduled chemicals and not just an approximate list. The Department needs to assemble a complete list to fulfil our obligations under the convention. That is why clause 23 is relatively draconian and why, as a last resort, we also need criminal sanctions.

International experience in this area shows that without criminal sanctions there can be a low response. We carefully considered the implications of clause 23 and we are prepared to consider them further, but we think that they are essential. That goes to the issue of regulation, which was raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury. By instinct we are not regulators and want regulation only when it is absolutely necessary. I entirely agree with my hon. Friend that this area is absolutely black and white in terms of where the Government need to regulate. We are trying to make sure that we regulate properly. Clause 23 is necessary but if hon. Members are worried about it we shall listen to their concerns.

The hon. Member for East Kilbride mentioned the annual report. We want to ensure that the report is as informative as possible within certain constraints, and I think that Opposition Members accept what those constraints must be. First, commercial confidentiality is important, and that is allowed for in the convention. Secondly, national security must be considered and, thirdly, the convention insists that we must not reveal information that has been received specifically for the purposes of fulfilling the convention or about individuals. Therefore, we have to be careful about the information that we do reveal. However, within those bounds we are determined to ensure that the annual report should be as transparent as possible.

I have listened carefully to hon. Members and I think that it is sufficient that I have placed quite clearly on the record the fact that there will be an annual report. We will consider that further if hon. Members remain genuinely unhappy about there not being a statutory requirement. A report that is subject to normal parliamentary scrutiny is the best guarantee that the agency and the report will be effective. Parliament will be the ultimate scrutineer and arbiter.

Mr. Dalyell: One day the Minister will be long forgotten just as one day I suppose that we shall all be long forgotten. I do not doubt his good faith but a statutory annual report is totally different from one that Ministers promise in good faith from the Dispatch Box.

Mr. Oppenheim: I note what the hon. Gentleman says and I accept his concern. I hope that a Minister saying clearly on the record in the House that there will be an annual report is enough. If hon. Members are still dissatisfied, we shall consider their worries on that aspect. My strong view at the moment is that that should be sufficient. I have stated clearly that there will be an annual report; I hope that that is enough.

The hon. Member for Linlithgow raised another important issue when he spoke about what he called the licensing requirements of the short list of quite common chemicals. Some of them, such as carbon, are inert and others, such as sulphur, are relatively inert. I assure the hon. Gentleman that there is no licensing requirement for those chemicals. There are licensing requirements only for the very toxic schedule 1 chemicals. There is a reporting

requirement for relatively inert chemicals and it applies only to companies or organisations that maintain significantly large stocks of the chemicals as set out in the schedule. I hope that that reassures the hon. Gentleman and allays his concerns about research bodies and others needing to apply for licences for ordinary run-of-the-mill chemicals.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery) raised the important issue of what can be done about non-signatories to the convention. We shall continue to press hard that all such states should sign the convention. About three quarters of the world's states have signified that they will join. A relatively small number are still outside the convention and we shall be at the forefront of states pushing to ensure that they sign. The convention proposes constraints on shipping scheduled chemicals to states that are not party to the convention and that element of sanction already exists. Of course, the convention's signatories will be able to consider other measures, as I suspect, in some cases, they will do.

My hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury was worried about the compliance cost assessment. I have already dealt with the question of whether we are over-regulating in that area, but my hon. Friend raised particularly the point that smaller firms may not be affected by declaration and inspection requirements. I can assure him that for schedule 1 toxic chemicals, the size of firm is not a factor, and small firms will not be exempt. The compliance cost assessment applies to the relatively not-so-toxic chemicals below the level of schedule 3 and discrete organic chemicals. We see no reason to apply those measures to smaller companies unnecessarily. The measures are not licensing, but reporting requirements, and the convention does not require those companies or organisations to record what they have got. I hope that that reassures my hon. Friend.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Honiton asked about the various posts involved in the convention and the inspection regime. I can assure my right hon. Friend that we have already passed details of the inspector posts and provisional technical secretariat positions to the relevant qualified UK experts. I understand that several have already been interviewed. Some of the senior posts, such as the executive secretary, are already occupied by UK nationals.

The hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) mentioned the complaint made by UNSCOM to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office about British equipment being found at Salman Pak. I understand that UNSCOM asked for details of supplies from the FCO to assist in its investigation. UNSCOM did not make any complaint and all the items it found were dual-use and not licensable. If the hon. Gentleman wishes to pursue the matter further, he should approach the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

The Member for Leyton also mentioned the important question of article X of the convention, which requires the United Kingdom to give a report to the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons on the assistance that it gives to other states to protect them against chemical weapons. I accept that point, but the Government do not require special legislation to implement action.

I hope that I have answered all the substantive queries to the satisfaction of the House. I appreciate the spirit in which the debate has been conducted. I hope that our differences are relatively small because the legislation is important not just for our future as a nation, but for the future of the world. If the Bill is passed quickly, it will enable the United Kingdom to ensure the effective operation of the convention. I commend it to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time.

Bill committed to a Committee of the whole House.—[*Mr. Knapman.*]

Committee tomorrow.

CHEMICAL WEAPONS BILL [*MONEY*]

Queen's recommendation having been signified—

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 50A(1)(a),

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Chemical Weapons Bill, it is expedient to authorise—

(1) the payment out of money provided by Parliament of any expenses of the Secretary of State incurred in consequence of the Act;

(2) the payment into the Consolidated Fund of sums received by the Secretary of State in consequence of the Act.—[*Mr. Knapman.*]

Question agreed to.

Hong Kong (Overseas Public Servants) Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

6.43 pm

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Jeremy Hanley): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

The Hong Kong (Overseas Public Servants) Bill is an enabling measure, which will allow the British Government to provide a package of benefits to certain overseas public servants in Hong Kong. My purpose today is to explain the background to the proposal, and to set out the package of benefits which we propose to implement by Order in Council after enactment of the legislation.

In 1954, the Government of the day published a White Paper on the future of the colonial civil service. That White Paper anticipated the process of decolonisation and considered how civil servants recruited from this country to work on pensionable terms in the colonies and other dependent territories would be treated when a colony moved to independence.

The White Paper recognised that overseas territories owed a significant debt to the efficient work of the men and women of the colonial service, and that the British Government had a special obligation towards them as a result of their having been recruited to their posts by the Secretary of State for the Colonies or through the Crown Agents. To give officers confidence about their future, the White Paper set out the conditions that they could expect to be observed upon independence. Those conditions included maintenance of their terms and conditions of service, safeguarding of their pensions, the ability to retire prematurely, and the payment to them of compensation. The White Paper also renamed the colonial service as Her Majesty's Overseas Civil Service, or the HMOCS. Judicial officers form a separate HMOJ, but I shall refer to the whole as the HMOCS.

A further White Paper in 1960 refined the arrangements. In particular, it provided that the British Government should provide financial assistance to the territories concerned to help them keep the services of expatriate officers after independence. The White Paper also provided guidance on how the compensation arrangements should operate, and established a resettlement bureau to help the HMOCS members who retired prematurely to find new employment.

Since 1960, 42 former British dependent territories have become independent. The British Government implemented the arrangements by making Orders in Council for the payment of compensation by the successor Government to members of the HMOCS for the loss of their career prospects and of the Secretary of State's protection. The Government also negotiated public officers agreements which required the successor Government to pay pensions at a fixed sterling exchange rate. In most cases, the British Government reimbursed the cost of compensation in the form of aid, and in due course took over the pensions as an aid measure.

There are some 700 members of the HMOCS in Hong Kong who were recruited on pensionable terms before the Sino-British joint declaration was signed in 1984. Those officers are the last members of the HMOCS. They have contributed enormously to the success of Hong Kong, and many of them wish to continue in the service of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government after 30 June 1997. Like their predecessors in other territories, the officers are concerned about their future and need to know how they will be treated.

The Government considered the question of arrangements for the Hong Kong HMOCS at the time of negotiation of the joint declaration. To give overseas officers a guarantee that their services would be welcomed by the future Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government, China and Britain agreed, and the joint declaration makes it clear, that, after 30 June 1997, foreign nationals could continue in the service of the SAR Government on terms and conditions of service no worse than before. The joint declaration also provides that the pensions of all Hong Kong civil servants, which includes members of the HMOCS and their dependants, would continue to be paid by the SAR Government. Those pensions are, and will continue to be, paid in Hong Kong dollars.

Those important and far-sighted treaty provisions give members of the HMOCS in Hong Kong confidence that they can continue to work in the service of Hong Kong up to their normal date of retirement, and that their pensions will be paid. The joint declaration also provides that, after 30 June 1997, the top 20 to 30 posts in the Hong Kong public service should be held by Chinese nationals. Those members of the HMOCS who choose to stay on will not be able to aspire to the senior positions. Indeed, the process of localisation is already in full swing and will extend beyond those posts as a result of the need to build up a pool of local officers with enough experience to occupy the highest levels of government. The process of constitutional change will therefore inevitably limit the career prospects of members of the HMOCS in Hong Kong.

By 1989, the Hong Kong HMOCS was pressing the British Government to give its members the same package of benefits provided to their predecessors in other former dependent territories. Their representative body, the Hong Kong HMOCS Association, argued forcibly that its members were in the same position as their predecessors and that the British Government were honour-bound to treat them in the same way. It was supported by the Overseas Service Pensioners' Association—known as OSPA—which represents the interests of former members of the HMOCS from Hong Kong and elsewhere.

The Hong Kong Government judged that they could not provide a general compensation scheme. Hong Kong has a unified public service and the Hong Kong Legislative Council would not be expected to vote funds for special benefits for an exclusive group of expatriates. The only compensation that Hong Kong is prepared to pay is in respect of those officers who are required to retire for constitutional reasons or who are superseded under the localisation programme. Members of the HMOCS look to the British Government, rather than the Hong Kong Government, to provide them with compensation and pension protection which had been accorded in other territories.

After careful consideration, the British Government accepted publicly the associations' request for an HMOCS package of benefits. In formulating detailed proposals, we considered the arrangements made in the 42 previous

cases as well as the particular circumstances of Hong Kong. The package that I shall outline in a moment reflects those considerations, as well as the outcome of discussions with the two associations, and of course the Government's responsibility to balance the interests of the Hong Kong HMOCS and those of British taxpayers.

Dr. Jeremy Bray (Motherwell, South): In the interests of the Chinese civil servants and the overseas civil servants, is the Minister aware that a suggestion has been made recently in Hong Kong by Sir S. Y. Chung that a shadow Government should be appointed by China six months before the hand-over date to make shadow laws and to prepare a shadow budget? Does the Minister agree that that would cause great confusion in the civil service and for all those who seek to achieve a smooth hand-over in 1997? Can he confirm that the Government have no reasons to believe that that represents the views of the Chinese Government?

Mr. Hanley: I accept the hon. Gentleman's question. Although Sir S. Y. Chung's proposals appear to have been made in a personal capacity, they are damaging to confidence in Hong Kong. The Governor and the Hong Kong Government are committed to co-operation with the Preparatory Committee and future chief executive to ensure a smooth transition in Hong Kong. There is nothing in the joint declaration or basic law about a provisional Government. I believe that the establishment of such a body would only confuse and unsettle the community and the civil service. That is in the interest of neither Hong Kong nor China.

The Government remain committed to effective administration of Hong Kong until 1 July 1997, and we shall do nothing to undermine the authority of the Legislative Council elected in September. I continue to believe that it should be allowed to serve its full four-year term. I hope that the hon. Gentleman accepts that as a full answer. We should now stick more closely to the terms of the Bill.

Subject to Parliament's agreement, it is proposed that Hong Kong HMOCS members and pensioners should be offered the following package of benefits. First, on premature retirement, the HMOCS members would be allowed to retire before the resumption of sovereignty by China, with immediate payment of pension. To enable the Governor to phase departures, officers would be allowed to retire prematurely between 1 July 1996 and 30 June 1997.

The second part of the package is compensation. The HMOCS members would be paid compensation for loss of the Secretary of State's protection and career prospects, based on their seniority and length of service. The proposed compensation arrangements would be broadly similar to previous HMOCS compensation schemes, except that the actuarial factors used to calculate compensation are somewhat less generous. That is because the provisions in the Sino-British joint declaration offer the Hong Kong HMOCS officers a better chance of a continuing career than their predecessors could have expected.

There will be a cap on compensation of £120,000 at 1992 prices. That year was chosen because that was when we first put forward proposals on an HMOCS package for consultation with the interested associations. The cap was set with reference to caps in previous HMOCS compensation schemes, uprated in line with United Kingdom inflation. As the HMOCS members in other former British dependent territories were not required to pay tax in Britain on their compensation, the HMOCS members would be paid their compensation gross. The cost of any United Kingdom tax liability would be met directly by the British Government.

The compensation arrangements would be set out in two schemes: compensation scheme A and compensation scheme B. The only significant difference is that compensation scheme B would apply to officials who decided to retire prematurely and compensation scheme A would be for those who continue. The compensation arrangements would cost about £47 million at current prices.

The third part of the compensation scheme is a sterling pension safeguard scheme. The HMOCS pensions will continue to be paid in Hong Kong dollars by the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government after 30 June 1997. In line with the policy in the 1954 and 1960 White Papers, and subsequent practice, the British Government intend to provide the Hong Kong HMOCS members with pension protection. Unlike previous cases, the Government have decided not to protect the full sterling value of the Hong Kong HMOCS pensions at the date of change in sovereignty. As the Hong Kong HMOCS members receive salaries which have a greater purchasing power than those of their predecessors and of their British counterparts, the Government propose that their pensions be protected at a level broadly equivalent to the pensions received by officers in similar grades in the British public service. This principle of broad comparability underlies the proposed sterling pension safeguard scheme.

Sir Anthony Durant (Reading, West): I am speaking for the Overseas Service Pensioners Association, which is concerned about the formula with which my hon. Friend is now dealing. It feels that the divider of HK $21 is rather unjustified. It would rather stick to the value of a HK $14.6 exchange rate as at 1 January 1992, which it feels is a more satisfactory approach. I wonder whether my hon. Friend will comment on that.

Mr. James Couchman (Gillingham) *rose—*

Mr. Hanley: It might be for the convenience of the House if I accept another intervention.

Mr. Couchman: I was about to make much the same point as my hon. Friend the Member for Reading, West (Sir A. Durant). I believe that OSPA suggests that the Hong Kong dollar has never been at an exchange rate worse than HK $16 to the pound. Therefore, it sees the divider of HK $21 as totally illogical and unfair. If the safeguard scheme comes into operation, it will reduce pensioners' income to about 70 per cent. of what it should be under the present terms.

Mr. Tim Renton (Mid-Sussex) *rose—*

Mr. Hanley: Would my right hon. Friend care to intervene before I deal with those interventions?

Mr. Renton: I want to intervene on the same point. I take a contrary view. The Hong Kong Government and the British Government have worked out a satisfactory compromise. The Hong Kong dollar has been extremely strong, in fact a good deal stronger than sterling, for many

[Mr. Renton]

years now. Probably quite a few of us would rather take our pensions in Hong Kong dollars than in sterling, particularly with the prospect of a Labour Government. It is right that the British taxpayer should not be asked to take all the burden. I realise the difficulty of reaching a compromise on this issue, and I think that what is suggested in the Bill provides such a compromise.

Mr. Hanley: I am grateful to my right hon. and hon. Friends for their questions.

When we started considering the proposed scheme in 1991, the Hong Kong dollar exchange rate was HK $13.76 to the pound. To bring average Hong Kong and United Kingdom public servants' pensions into line, we calculated that the exchange rate would have to fall from that level to about HK $21 to the pound. That is why the divider of 21:1 appears in the scheme.

We can calculate a pensioner's protected pension by taking the Hong Kong dollar salary in 1991 for the grade at which he retired and dividing that figure by 21 to give the protected pension in sterling as at 1991. That amount is then uprated in line with UK inflation since 1991 to give the current value of his protected pension. In the scheme, his protected pension is described as his notional pension. If, at any point, the sterling value of his actual pension fell below the value of his notional pension, the Government would make up the shortfall.

So the Hong Kong pensioners will continue to be paid their pension. We are talking about a possibility that the Hong Kong dollar might fall. I should like to think that the Hong Kong dollar will not fall but will continue to be strong. It is the objective not only of Her Majesty's Government but of all people of good will that Hong Kong should continue to flourish and have a strong currency.

If the Hong Kong dollar fell, we would protect those pensioners as soon as it fell below HK $21 to the pound. That would mean that the pensions of those people who at present receive pensions higher than those of equivalent civil servants in the United Kingdom would be on broad parity. That seems to the Government to be a fair balance between the needs of protection for Hong Kong pensioners and for the British taxpayer.

Dr. John Marek (Wrexham): The Hong Kong civil servants were recruited by the British Government. They have an expectation of a certain pension at a certain rate. The Government seem to be saying arbitrarily that in certain circumstances they will reduce the civil servants' pensions by up to 40 per cent. Those of us who may be selected to serve on the Committee that will consider the Bill will wish to go into the matter in some detail. Is there any chance of the Minister publishing a draft Order in Council so that we have some meat on which to chew and we can consider the matter carefully? The Bill is an enabling measure. It is difficult to take exception to any of it. We need to be able to see, certainly in Committee, precisely what the Minister is getting at. If he could help the House in that way, it would go a long way towards what I suspect will be a more or less bipartisan approach to the Bill.

Mr. Hanley: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his careful and thoughtful intervention. I imagine that the Committee proceedings will be held within the next two weeks, although that is still open to negotiation through the usual channels. I hope to produce for members of the Committee as much information as possible to enable them to reach an informed opinion. I hope that that is helpful to the hon. Gentleman.

I assure the House that the British Government would not incur any significant liability under the sterling pension safeguard scheme unless the Hong Kong dollar fell substantially in value. That is just not likely to happen. Certainly in the foreseeable future, Hong Kong's economic stability and the publicly stated commitment by both the Hong Kong authorities and the Chinese Government to maintaining the linked exchange rate between the Hong Kong dollar and the US dollar will bring greater stability to the Hong Kong dollar. The maximum contingent liability under the scheme, based on the wholly unrealistic proposition that the Hong Kong dollar will be worthless on 1 July 1997, would be £130 million spread over 50 years. That liability would diminish rapidly with the passage of time and could be expected to halve within only eight years. We are talking about a contingency.

The fourth part of the package is resettlement help. The HMOCS officers who retire prematurely would be given financial help in finding re-employment or retraining. This help, some of which would be provided by a consultant or in other ways, would be limited to £2,500 per officer, and subject to an overall cost ceiling of £750,000. The Chinese Government have been informed of the proposal to provide benefits to members of the HMOCS in Hong Kong. They have accepted that this is a matter for the British Government.

An additional element of the package does not depend on the Hong Kong (Overseas Public Servants) Bill for its implementation. It is a proposed amendment to the Regulations on Supplementary Pension for Overseas Service, known as the SPOS. The regulations ensure that increases in all HMOCS pensions, not just those of Hong Kong, keep pace with inflation in Britain. The regulations as applied to Hong Kong are complex and technical, but in essence what we propose is an amendment which would allow the payments under the SPOS to take into account small reductions in the value of the Hong Kong dollar relative to sterling. That would provide some benefit to Hong Kong pensioners, particularly over the long term.

The proposed package has been discussed extensively with the HMOCS Association and OSPA. The HMOCS Association has given its full support to the early passage of the Bill. Despite the misgivings of some former Hong Kong HMOCS members about some elements of the package, the Government believe that it strikes a fair balance between the interests of the HMOCS pensioners and the British taxpayers who will have to fund it.

In conclusion, I urge right hon. and hon. Members, in considering the Hong Kong (Overseas Public Servants) Bill, to bear in mind the contribution that the HMOCS officers have made to Hong Kong, the uncertainty that they face over their future careers, and the honourable record that the British Government have established in providing a reasonable package of benefits to the HMOCS upon the ending of British sovereignty over our dependent territories. It is only right that the HMOCS officers in Hong Kong should receive benefits similar to those provided to their predecessors. I hope that the arguments that I have made will be supported by the House.

I thank the hon. Member for Wrexham (Dr. Marek) for his question. I have just heard that the information that he requested—schemes for Orders in Council—are at this moment being placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

7.6 pm

Mr. Derek Fatchett (Leeds, Central): In the spirit of these post-Nolan times, may I thank the Hong Kong Government for the hospitality that they have shown to me in recent days, during which I was a guest of the Government. I thank them for the timetable that they organised for me. It was my first visit to Hong Kong and it was a most impressive experience. It is difficult for anyone to come away from Hong Kong without having been struck by the nature of its society. It is an interesting society and one which is, for fairly obvious reasons, increasingly politicised. Everyone has a view on the events that are taking place and are likely to take place on the island. It was fascinating to hear the full spectrum of views that came in my direction. I am sure that the Minister has been through a similar experience. One or two people mentioned kindly to me the meetings they had recently had with him.

Two things struck me visually about Hong Kong. The first was the intimate relationship between the economy of Hong Kong and southern China. One can understand that only by seeing the extent to which Hong Kong's manufacture, if I may use that expression, now takes place in southern China. The second was the success of the Hong Kong people and Government in undertaking such a massive infrastructure project as the development of the new airport. The airport, the road scheme and the railway projects are all running virtually on time and in budget. That is a tremendous achievement and one which the Government and those directly involved in the projects can be proud of.

I thoroughly enjoyed my experience of Hong Kong. It taught me a lot about the place and I look forward to further contacts with the people of Hong Kong.

As for the specifics, we welcome the Bill. In particular we welcome the Minister's final comments about providing additional information for the Committee. My hon. Friend the Member for Wrexham (Dr. Marek) has never made such a potent intervention. Within a matter of moments his wish was delivered. One hopes that he will intervene similarly in other debates in future. It may also be helpful to deal with one or two of the points raised by Conservative Members. Of course they may also queue up to serve on the Committee, armed with all the additional information, and be able to make speeches at that stage.

It is right—the Minister made the point—to treat Hong Kong in line with all the other 42 similar experiences. It may be worth while putting on record the fact that last week I had a meeting with Ian Strachan and his colleagues of the Association of Overseas Civil Servants and they were broadly sympathetic to the Bill. They want it to have a quick passage through both Houses. They have some reservations about the sterling guarantee, as the Minister acknowledged in his speech. They said, however—it is very important for all to recognise—that the Bill represents the best available deal on the table. They accept it and want to make progress with it. I say to the civil servants that Labour Members will certainly do nothing to hinder that progress. Indeed, we will do all we can to ensure its speedy passage.

One thing struck me very much last week: the extent to which the civil service in Hong Kong is seen as an important element in civil society. The characteristics of the Hong Kong civil service are ones of which those who have worked in it, either as overseas civil servants or as Hong Kong civil servants, can be justly proud. It is seen as clean, corruption-free and supporting the rule of law.

When we in this House, for obvious reasons on occasions, criticise civil servants, we should look at the Hong Kong experience and the relationship between a clean, corrupt-free civil service and the rule of law and economic development. I hope that those operating in business in Hong Kong take on board the lesson that much of their success and the framework in which their businesses have operated have depended on the type of civil service operating on the island. All of us would wish to express our thanks to those who have worked in the service over the years.

The Minister referred to the fact that about 530 civil servants will benefit from the legislation. Of course the vast majority of civil servants in Hong Kong will not benefit and they will continue to serve the Government both in the pre-1997 arrangements and the post-1997 arrangements. They have also made a very important and successful contribution over the year.

There were anxieties, as the Minister will no doubt acknowledge, over the localisation programme. That is partly dealt with by the Bill. It has to be handled sensitively. There has been some success and it is obviously important that we continue to move forward.

One of the issues that clearly came to light, to which the Minister did not refer but which is important, was the need to maintain the character of the civil service in Hong Kong post-1997. That is important for the economic success of the island and for Chinese sovereignty. The decision on the appointment of the chief executive, which has to be taken by the Chinese Government during 1996, will have a significant impact on civil service morale. I am sure that all hon. Members participating in this debate acknowledge the importance of appointing someone who is seen as upholding the traditions of the civil service and the rule of law and who will give the service a sense of confidence. We will all be watching that appointment—it will be crucial to the post-1997 development of Hong Kong.

The Bill deals with the fears of overseas civil servants. It is right that we should deal with those fears and that we should come up with this legislation and deal with it in the way that we are. The Bill also reminds us—if I may broaden out to some of the Minister's finer points—that we are fewer than 600 days away from the change of sovereignty. The Bill is important because it is but one detailed issue on the path towards the transfer of sovereignty and the way in which we handle it will be significant in future.

When we looked at the work of the joint liaison group, I was delighted to see that progress had been made in a number of areas. We have already talked about the airport and possible developments in relation to container terminal 9. Such advances are significant and help to improve the atmosphere, and resulted partly from the meeting between the Foreign Secretary and his Chinese counterpart. There are difficult issues to be resolved and I think that the Minister will agree that we should place on record in this debate our thanks to all those on the

[Mr. Derek Fatchett]

British side who have played such a significant role in the joint liaison group and have made such a contribution, again as civil servants—not as overseas civil servants in that case, but as Foreign Office staff. They have performed a very important function on behalf of people here.

Although we have dealt with one fear through this Bill, there are other fears beyond its remit which arose time and again during my discussions with business people and politicians in Hong Kong. I should like to mention to the Minister—I do not expect an answer today—a matter which is not totally relevant to the Bill but is part of the changeover—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order. Interesting as the hon. Gentleman's trip to Hong Kong is, I am afraid that the rules of the House are very clear: we must debate only the Second Reading of the Bill. Allusions to other dimensions are acceptable, but there must certainly be nothing beyond that.

Mr. Fatchett: I was foolish enough to pre-empt you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, which was a mistake on my part. I was saying—I am sure that you will acknowledge the point's validity—that while the Bill deals with one set of fears, others exist in Hong Kong. The individuals whom I was going to mention, and who are relevant because their fears still exist, are the war widows and the ethnic minority groups. I hope that the Minister will acknowledge that the Government still have fears with which they must deal. The right measures have been introduced in the Bill, but I assure him that all the political groups in Hong Kong and the business interests recognise that other fears must also be resolved.

We are dealing only with a specific issue in this debate, but we must deal also with the anxieties and concern in Hong Kong. What impressed me was that against such a background, there is a great deal of robust optimism about the future. The society has very clearly stated values. It believes in the rule of law and has political accountability and an element of democracy. The through train post-1997 is crucial to the long-term economic success of Hong Kong.

My hon. Friend the Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) summed up the matter in the debate on the Gracious Speech when he said that Britain's involvement in Hong Kong and the role played by the British civil service will be judged not only in terms of what we have done over the past few years but by how we have entrenched and embedded a system for the years post-1997. That is the real criterion on which all our records will be judged.

What is clear is that, as part of the British record in Hong Kong, we have left a civil service that has maintained the rule of law and given to that island something of which we can be justifiably proud. That is why we support the Bill and, through it, we thank those overseas civil servants who have played their part in making Hong Kong the success that it is.

7.18 pm

Mr. Tim Renton (Mid-Sussex): May I say what a pleasure it is to be taking part in this short debate and what a pleasure it was to listen to the speech of my right hon. Friend the Minister, and that of the hon. Member for Leeds, Central (Mr. Fatchett) who is also fairly new to his position in the shadow Foreign Office team.

Speaking as a past Foreign Office Minister and one who had responsibilities for Hong Kong between 1985 and 1987, and who since 1992 has been chairman of the active all-party committee on Hong Kong, I find it a great pleasure to be so much in agreement with both speeches.

Before dealing directly with the Bill, may I be provocative for just one moment? I fully agreed with the comments of the hon. Member for Leeds, Central about the legacy that we will pass on in Hong Kong on 30 June 1997. I think that we can be very proud of that legacy. I would only suggest to the hon. Gentleman that he should act to convince the hon. Member for Rotherham (Mr. MacShane), who is sitting behind him, of that.

In a debate on this subject at the Oxford Union some two weeks ago, in which we both took part, the hon. Member for Rotherham advanced some very extreme ideas. More to the point, he advanced the idea that Britain should be thoroughly ashamed of its position in Hong Kong. That is wrong, and I hope that the hon. Member for Rotherham will come to regret those remarks. I am moving on to the subject, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I am grateful to hear that the hon. Gentleman is moving on to the subject because this debate is very specific.

Mr. Renton: I think that the Bill, quite simply, is a good housekeeping measure. The legislation is necessary, and the Government are to be congratulated on the speed with which it has been brought before the House.

My right hon. Friend the Minister of State took us through the basic points of the Bill very thoroughly. All hon. Members will be interested in the Bill's resettlement element and in the help that it provides to the members of the overseas civil service and the overseas judiciary who may decide to retire early. If they decide to retire early, it is important for them to know that they will receive assistance in resettlement. That provision may be a further encouragement to some people to retire early.

The main bone of contention in the Bill—perhaps the only one—is that to which my right hon. Friend referred: the peg at which the safeguard to pensions comes into play. That must be a balancing act, but, given the generosity of the pension arrangements in Hong Kong in recent years, which have been based on a substantially higher rate of inflation than that of the United Kingdom, the principle of comparability must apply. Therefore, the decision to make the peg—the point at which the Government would step in to help—the rate of 21 Hong Kong dollars to the pound is, frankly, not unreasonable.

I am sure that the Bill will not have a long Committee stage. It is an advantage that we have discussed that important issue this afternoon and, as the hon. Member for Leeds, Central said, perhaps, having got that out of the way, there will be time at some stage in the future for us to debate some of the other matters to which he referred: a Bill of Rights; the new Special Administrative Region passport and whether it should be visa free, as I hope it will be; and the point that the hon. Member for Motherwell, South (Dr. Bray) raised about the considerable confusion that any interim legislative assembly or interim governmental body in Hong Kong which came into effect before 30 June 1997 would cause.

I am very pleased that the Governor of Hong Kong has already gone on record as saying that he could not possibly support that idea. In such a debate I hope that we might also be able to consider the position of the new fully elected Legislative Council in Hong Kong. I appreciate, however, that those points are not in order this evening.

I certainly support the Bill and hope that it will reach the statute book very quickly.

7.23 pm

Sir Russell Johnston (Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber): Pretty well every hon. Member who has spoken thus far has subscribed to the general view that the Bill is non-controversial. Indeed, the Library research paper describes it as

"a relatively straightforward piece of legislation aimed at creating similar conditions for Members of HMOCS in Hong Kong as have applied in the past when colonies have passed out of British sovereignty."

Nevertheless, it is a fact, of which I am sure the Minister is aware, that there are some in the Overseas Service Pensioners Association who do not take quite that line and feel that they have not been as fairly treated as has been claimed. It is only appropriate and right that their opinion should be ventilated. We are, after all, talking about a very limited number of people. The essential argument that some of them use is that the proposals laid before the House do not provide safeguards equivalent to those afforded to expatriate pensioners in other former colonies who enjoy 100 per cent. protection of the original purchasing power of the pension awarded to them on retirement.

One such pensioner, Mr. A. Thorne, wrote to my hon. Friend the Member for Cheltenham (Mr. Jones). I should like to read out a couple of paragraphs from his letter to which the Minister might be able to respond in his winding-up speech. I shall not read out the first page as it deals mainly with the divisor, a matter already raised by two Conservative Back Benchers. Mr. Thorne wrote:

"HMG claims that the proposed safeguard scheme will protect Hong Kong pensions at a sterling value broadly equivalent to those paid to comparable former UK public servants despite any evidence that they can be fairly equated."

Well, that is an argument, I suppose. Mr. Thorne develops it in the next paragraph when he states:

"Apart from the obvious defects in arriving at the divisor, no account has been taken in these comparisons of the differences that result from the fact that, in the absence of a ministerial system, Hong Kong civil servants, at every level, carry a degree of responsibility and public accountability which home based civil servants are shielded from. Accordingly, a simple comparison of Hong Kong salaries with those of officers in equivalent ranks and grades of the home civil service makes no allowance for such extra burdens. It follows that the comparisons which have been made in formulating this pensions safeguard scheme are not on a like with like basis."

I do not necessarily espouse that argument, but it deserves a response. I hope that in due course the Minister will provide one.

I shall read one more sentence on the question of the divisor. The correspondent alleges:

"Despite many requests from individual pensioners and OSPA, the officials charged with drawing up the scheme have refused to provide calculations showing how the divisor of 21 has been arrived at."

That could also be dealt with in Committee.

We are approaching the end of the time in which we are responsible for Hong Kong, but it is important for people at every level to remember that many questions still need to be answered and criticisms are still being made. I was delighted when the hon. Member for Leeds, Central (Mr. Fatchett), during his recent visit to Hong Kong, made a commitment with regard to the 6,000 or 7,000 ethnic minority group. I wish that the Government would follow his good example.

I should not like to think that the Government have devised a scheme that treats pensioners and the widows of pensioners from Hong Kong any less favourably than pensioners from the other 42 or so colonies. The trouble with many actuarial measures is that they are often too complicated for simple people like me to understand. It is very important that pensioners clearly understand these measures and regard them as fair.

7.29 pm

Mr. Denis MacShane (Rotherham): Like other hon. Members who have spoken in the debate, I whole-heartedly support the Hong Kong (Overseas Public Servants) Bill, which is one of the building blocks that we are now putting in place in the lead-up to 30 June 1997.

Two weeks ago, I had the great pleasure to debate the issue of Hong Kong with the right hon. Member for Mid-Sussex (Mr. Renton) in a rather more crowded house at the Oxford Union. We debated the question of whether the British Government have betrayed the people of Hong Kong. I spoke on behalf of the people of Hong Kong because Martin Lee could not attend the debate, and the right hon. Gentleman spoke for the Government. My side won by a margin of 244 to 36, which showed not the power of my persuasion but the idealism of young people on key democracy and human rights issues.

Mr. Renton: I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way. I take this opportunity in the post-Nolan era to declare my interest in the subject. I should have said at the beginning of my speech that I recently visited Hong Kong as a guest of the Hong Kong Government. I much appreciated their generosity and I have already declared my trip on the Register of Members' Interests.

The hon. Gentleman took a rather extreme view in the Oxford Union debate. He said that he believed that British passports, or right of abode in this country, should be granted to the 3.5 million Hong Kong people who currently hold British national overseas passports. His view was received sympathetically by the audience at the Oxford Union, so perhaps he would like to confirm tonight whether that is also the policy of the Labour party.

Mr. MacShane: I do not think that we should have a re-run of the Oxford Union debate in this place, although I would be happy to participate. I was most affected by the arguments of young men and women—our future leaders and intellectual elite—who drew attention to the fact that some 250 million people from European Union countries have the right to settle and to work in the United Kingdom. They pointed to the unfairness of denying the same rights to 52 war widows and 7,000 stateless Asians who are neither Chinese nor of British origin.

We are slowly putting the building blocks in place, and I appreciate the measured contributions that we have heard tonight. In introducing the Bill, the Minister stressed its importance as a small, but important,

[Mr. MacShane]

confidence-building measure. I hope that the right hon. Gentleman, in his wider role as the Minister responsible for Hong Kong, will convey to the Chinese Government the deep concern of hon. Members which is reflected in early-day motion 82—which appears on the Order Paper for the first time today, standing in my name and those of other hon. Members—about the plight of Wei Jingsheng, a Chinese human rights activist who is now on trial for his life. There is some contradiction between the confidence-building measure that we are seeking to establish in law tonight and the decision of Beijing in that case which is likely to undermine confidence in a stable future for Hong Kong.

Labour Members have very few objections to the substance of the Bill. Hon. Members have referred to the plight of the war widows, the stateless ethnic and Asian people, and the status of the current British dependent territories passport holders who will receive national overseas passports after 1 July 1997. Other Hong Kong inhabitants will receive Special Administrative Region passports, and I agree with the right hon. Member for Mid-Sussex that they should be granted visa-free entry into the United Kingdom. I emphasise that point to my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, Central (Mr. Fatchett).

Representatives of Her Majesty's overseas civil service have approached the Government in an effort to secure the best possible packages. They have considered the early retirement option and they wish to secure the value of their pensions after 1997. I hope that the Hong Kong dollar will remain stable. I hope also that sterling will be a much more stable and durable currency in the future through closer links with the process of European integration—but that is a subject for another debate.

I am concerned that civil servants and other groups in Hong Kong who are covered by the legislation will fall foul of article 23 of the basic law, which prohibits

"political organisations or bodies of the region from establishing ties with foreign political organisations or bodies."

Some civil servants—for example, judges who have served in British colonies and dependent territories—will find that, if they continue to live in Hong Kong after 1 July 1997 and seek to form quite normal associations so that their interests may be represented, under that article they will be unable to make representations and establish ties with their colleagues in other parts of the world. That is a fundamental concern about the post-30 June 1997 situation in Hong Kong and it has been raised with me during my many visits to Hong Kong in recent years.

As we introduce other legislation to address specific issues between now and 30 June 1997, we must have some regard to articles in the basic law that may nullify the objectives of those who make representations to hon. Members.

7.37 pm

Mr. Mike Gapes (Ilford, South): I shall not detain the House for long. It is important that we pass the Hong Kong (Overseas Public Servants) Bill, although it is a relatively insignificant tidying-up measure. We must reassure and restore the confidence of the few hundred people in Hong Kong who will benefit from it.

My hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, Central (Mr. Fatchett) referred to the fact that the legislation will not benefit other civil servants in Hong Kong and, as my hon. Friend the Member for Rotherham (Mr. MacShane) said, all Hong Kong civil servants must wonder about their positions post-1997. The present chief executive of the Hong Kong civil service will be replaced by a new appointee after 1997. The Chinese and Hong Kong press have reported the remarks of a potential candidate for that post, the present Hong Kong Chief Justice, who has said that the Bill of Rights and other very modest measures go too far. It is worrying that already senior figures in the administration, the legal system, the civil service and elsewhere in Hong Kong are beginning to adopt a different way of thinking about matters that the civil service in Hong Kong administered in the past and will continue to deal with in the coming year.

Two years ago, the Foreign Affairs Select Committee dealt with Britain's relations with Hong Kong and China, and its report drew attention to a number of matters that I shall not discuss now as they are outside the scope of the Bill. It made clear its concerns about the need for a human rights commission, which the Government unfortunately rejected.

Mr. Deputy Speaker): Order. The hon. Gentleman has been quite ingenious in continually mentioning the word civil servant and then proceeding to argue about some other aspect. I am quite sure that the usual channels will read the debate and recognise that both sides of the House would like a debate on Hong Kong, but that cannot take place this evening.

Mr. Gapes: I take your advice, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I shall not pursue that line of argument any further.

It is important that the Government do not consider such tidying-up matters to be the end of the process. Issues involving war widows and people who are effectively stateless, and other matters referred to by the Foreign Affairs Select Committee should be dealt with expeditiously in the next year, so that they can be resolved before 1 July 1997.

7.44 pm

Mr. Hanley: With the leave of the House, I shall reply to this excellent Second Reading debate.

I am pleased that the Hong Kong (Overseas Public Servants) Bill received a warm welcome from the House. It is essentially non-political and technical and, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Sussex (Mr. Renton) said, it is a good housekeeping measure that recognises the British Government's responsibilities to the last serving members of HMOCS.

I am particularly grateful to the hon. Member for Leeds, Central (Mr. Fatchett) for giving the proposals his full support and for the tone of his comments. I am extremely pleased that he is now more familiar with Hong Kong. Hong Kong is rather like a Chinese meal: soon after people leave it, they want to go back for more. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman wants to return to Hong Kong. It is a remarkable place.

Mr. David Faber (Westbury): This evening.

Mr. Hanley: I am sure that this evening Leeds is more pressing.

I am sure that Hong Kong HMOCS officers and pensioners will appreciate the warm tributes that hon. Members on both sides of the House have paid to their commitment and contribution to Hong Kong over many years.

I was not surprised that the House focused on the detail of the package of benefits rather than the principle of providing Hong Kong HMOCS with a package in the first place. After all, we are not doing anything for Hong Kong HMOCS officers that was not done for their predecessors in many other former territories. I note that no hon. Member questioned whether such benefits should be provided and thus doubted the need for this enabling legislation.

All hon. Members recognise that the Bill is necessary and must be implemented without delay. I am glad, too, that the elements in the package that I outlined earlier, and that hon. Members will have an opportunity to consider in detail later, command more support. Any proposal that offers benefits and involves actual expenditure and contingent liability is bound to attract comment, particularly about the costs involved.

Of course, I recognise that other issues need to be resolved, some through the efforts of the joint liaison group, by negotiations between British and Chinese representatives, and others between the Hong Kong Government and the British Government. Although certain issues need to be resolved over the coming 18 months, it is most important to sustain confidence in Hong Kong—confidence in which I firmly believe—so that Hong Kong can continue, with the greatest degree of autonomy and continuity, its current system that has made it such a success.

May I almost intervene on myself and reply to the hon. Member for Rotherham (Mr. MacShane), who mentioned Wei Jingsheng? My right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary raised that issue on 3 October with the Vice-Premier and Foreign Minister of China, Qian Qichen. We raise issues of human rights and specific cases of concern whenever we meet.

The hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber (Sir R. Johnston) made one small comment with which I disagree. He said that we refused to provide full calculations of the figures. I can assure him that I provided the chairman of the Overseas Service Pensioners Association with a full description of the methods used to calculate the 21:1 divisor, and my officials have provided numerous lists and tables detailing the Hong Kong and United Kingdom salary and pension comparisons. There are more than 50 pages of detailed calculations, and I am sure that I could provide them to the hon. Gentleman if he would like to work through them before the Standing Committee meets.

I conclude by saying a little more about the sterling pension safeguard scheme. I do not want hon. Members to leave tonight without understanding that it is not a bad deal for those for whom we have great admiration and wish to provide.

The proposed pension safeguard scheme differs from previous schemes and does not offer Hong Kong HMOCS officers full protection of the sterling value of their pensions at 1997 rates. Hong Kong pensions are currently paid in Hong Kong dollars with no guaranteed conversion rate to sterling, so the British Government will assume a new contingent liability for those pensions.

Let me explain why. There is a solid guarantee in the Sino-British joint declaration that the autonomous authorities of Hong Kong will continue to pay pensions after 30 June 1997. The British Government have full confidence that that provision will be honoured. I should tell the hon. Member for Rotherham that, although article 23 of the basic law sets limits to political organisations in Hong Kong having links with such organisations abroad, I am not clear whether that is relevant to HMOCS as article 27 of the basic law guarantees free speech and freedom of association, including labour organisations.

The Bill, therefore, addresses the assistance that should be provided to HMOCS pensioners over and above the existing arrangements whereby they receive their pensions in Hong Kong dollars with no protection against currency movements and having regard to guarantees in the joint declaration. Some have argued that the British Government should protect the full sterling value of Hong Kong HMOCS pensions, but it would be unfair to expect British taxpayers to provide such support as the salaries, and hence the pensions, of the Hong Kong HMOCS have a greater purchasing power than those received by their predecessors and their counterparts in the British public service. In addition, many former Hong Kong HMOCS officers have enjoyed big pension increases over the years, awarded by the Hong Kong Government. Indeed, they have deserved them, but those increases were based on the relatively high rate of inflation in Hong Kong, which has no relevance to the cost of living for pensioners who have retired to the United Kingdom, for example, thus the purchasing power of Hong Kong pensions has in many cases greatly increased since the officers retired, and the British taxpayer should not be asked to protect those windfall increases.

Claims that in some cases our proposed scheme would protect only about 60 per cent. of the sterling value of those Hong Kong pensions do not represent the full picture. The real test of the scheme is what percentage of the original sterling purchasing power of those pensions would be protected by the scheme. The answer is that, on average, the scheme would protect 80 per cent. of officers' Hong Kong pensions and 100 per cent. of almost all widows' pensions, so we have decided that the scheme should be based on the principle of comparability with the British public service. As I explained, we cannot offer Hong Kong HMOCS officers full pension protection. Equally, it would be wrong to leave them with no protection at all, however unlikely an exchange rate collapse might be. That is why we proposed the safety net.

The principle of comparability with the British public service strikes a just balance between the interests—for which the Government are equally responsible—of HMOCS and the British taxpayer. Two points should be borne in mind. First, the proposed scheme would provide a safety net that does not exist at the moment and, secondly, the chances of any significant liability ever being incurred under the proposed scheme are remote. In practice, the contingent liability is expected to halve after eight years and disappear altogether after 18.

I am grateful for the tone of the thoughtful comments by hon. Members on both sides of the House, showing good will both to the people of Hong Kong and its continued future and to the dedicated civil servants who have helped to make Hong Kong the success that it is and will continue to be.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time, and committed to a Standing Committee, pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of Bills).

HONG KONG (OVERSEAS PUBLIC SERVANTS) BILL [*MONEY*]

Queen's recommendation having been signified—

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 50A(1)(a),

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Hong Kong (Overseas Public Servants) Bill, it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of any expenditure incurred by the Secretary of State under or by virtue of the Act.—*[Mr. Ottaway.]*

Question agreed to.

Derwent System Schools

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Ottaway.]*

7.49 pm

Mr. Clive Betts (Sheffield, Attercliffe): I want to address the House on the subject of Derwent system schools generally and in Sheffield, and I will refer to three schools in Attercliffe that are experiencing particular difficulties.

The Derwent building system was used in the construction of a number of schools in this country in the 1950s. It has been difficult obtaining from the Department of Education and Employment information on the number of Derwent schools built in this country. Perhaps the Minister has those details. I believe that there are more than 100 such schools throughout the country. The Government's latest estimate, in response to a parliamentary question that I asked three years ago, was that it would cost about £300 million to replace Derwent schools.

Sheffield has eight Derwent schools. Seven are mainstream schools that were inherited from the old Derbyshire council prior to boundary changes, one of which is being dealt with by transferring it from its existing building to a more traditional one at Carter Lodge school, where the secondary school has closed. I thank the Minister for his help in arranging that transfer and the necessary credit approvals to fund it. That leaves Birley Spa primary school, Birley primary school and Birley nursery school in my constituency, and three other schools in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Heeley (Mr. Michie). In case there is a danger of entering into a political debate about who must take responsibility for constructing Derwent system schools, I understand that several are located in Essex. Local authorities of all political complexions and persuasions have been responsible for Derwent system schools in the past.

The schools provided reasonable and adequate accommodation for many years until 1987, when the Health and Safety Executive found severe structural problems. I will go into all the complications, but, in essence, it was found that water from the flat roofs of the schools was running down the walls and rotting the timbers. One problem with the Derwent system is that the roof is held up by the walls alone, so if they start to rot the roof will eventually collapse.

The prognosis was that the life of the buildings could be prolonged provided that structural support work was undertaken. One can see today visible and physical evidence of the props that were installed to support the roofs and walls. Even though that work cost £1 million, it is only an interim, temporary measure and continuing regular inspections and further repair and structure will be required. Derwent system schools have other problems. They have poor energy efficiency, and higher general repair and cleaning costs.

Every so often, the local authority is charged with sending its structural engineers to check the schools, and it then places orders for the necessary work.

One consequence of the situation is a great deal of uncertainty for pupils, parents and staff and a large continuing cost for the local authority. From the

beginning, the authority has tried to reassure parents and staff that there was no immediate safety problem—that the structural support work would deal with the safety aspect. Even then, there is still the problem of not knowing how long the schools can continue to exist—of parents not knowing, when their children start school at the age of five, whether the school will still be there when the children are 11.

In 1987, after the authority had consulted the staff and parents and the buildings had been examined, it was agreed that a phased replacement programme was needed. As the schools were all built by Derbyshire council and are all located in a certain part of Sheffield, it would be impossible to replace them all at one go. South-east Sheffield is the area of highest population growth in the city. There is considerable new building and the area's birth rate, as in other parts of the city, is not falling. The local authority has gone through a rigorous process of removing surplus places from schools throughout the city. I had a slight disagreement with the Minister over the closure of Shirebrook school, which falls within the two-mile radius of Birley Spa school. Shirebrook was closed with the agreement of the Minister on the initial decision of the city council. We now have extra mobiles because the schools in the area are overcrowded and cannot accept any more pupils.

I do not accept that the Derwent system schools can be taken out and not replaced. Birley Spa, which is the first school on the authority's list for replacement, has 450 pupils. Birley Spa primary school has 500 pupils, and about 80 children attend Birley Spa nursery. The school lives of all those children are blighted by the uncertainty of the current situation.

Since 1987, the local authority has tried repeatedly to secure Government agreement on a replacement programme. Last year the Minister was good enough to meet a delegation from the local education authority. The head teacher of Birley Spa school, Mr. Geoff Mawson, came along to persuade the Minister that action was needed. As usual in meetings with the Minister, we got tea and a bit of sympathy but no action or resources. The LEA has £1 million of credit approvals this year for dealing with school building problems in the Sheffield area. The cost of replacing the school in the worst condition, Birley Spa, is estimated at £2 million, so there is no way that the LEA could redirect credit approvals already given to solve that one problem. There are other problems—not least to do with rewiring schools throughout the city.

Our argument is that this is a case of exceptional basic need and that credit approval should be given in that respect, particularly as the situation has worsened. If the Minister did not see fit to grant a specified credit approval for Birley Spa school when we met him last year, I hope that he will pause to reflect and think again, because further evidence that has come to light is pertinent and ought to influence the Minister's thinking.

The proper regular inspections that have been rigorously undertaken by the local authority have revealed the need for additional safety work. That is not surprising because we knew that the buildings were deteriorating. When external panels were removed from Birley Spa school in the summer to reveal the timber, the amount of rot was found to be so substantial that £100,000 must be spent on that school alone. That expenditure will not cure the problem but will give the school a two-year life. Thereafter, further sums will have to be spent regularly. Engineers and architects in Sheffield council's design and building services department calculated, assuming that the condition of the buildings does not miraculously improve, that it will cost £1 million to keep Birley Spa open for another 10 years. Clearly, spending £1 million on a building which we know will be incapable of providing a decent framework for a school in years to come is an utter waste of money.

The authority had to decide whether to spend £100,000 to give the school a guaranteed life of two years. It did not know that the work would cost £100,000 until it had been started. It was a case of stripping out the panels and finding the rot. The authority could, alternatively, have tried to do something much more fundamental, but the resources were not available and, even then, the problem would not have been cured permanently.

The authority is making decisions in a vacuum. It does not know where the Government stand. If the Government said that the authority should maintain the building for two years and they would then deal with the problem permanently, we would know what to expect. If the Government said that the authority should maintain the building for five years, agreed to put their officials to work with council officials, agreed a five-year programme and then agreed a programme of phased replacement, we would know what to expect. But we do not know what is happening. All we know is that the Government have decided that the school does not need replacing this year, but we do not know whether they think that it will need replacing next year or the year after. We do not know how much money to spend on the school in the interim to maintain the building. We know that there is no permanent solution—even after spending £100,000.

The cost of the repair work does not come from thin air, but out of the budget allocated for the repair of other schools throughout the city, which means that the other 187 schools in Sheffield will receive less money. That will often mean that a flat roof in another traditionally built school will not be repaired or will be patched up rather than replaced, which will cause it further problems in future. That is a short-term, uneconomical way of tackling problems.

It is not merely the authority that is placed in a difficult financial bind. The problems of wood rot, panels falling apart and the ingress of water cause difficulties inside Birley school, which affects the authority's expenditure—from its own budget—on internal fittings and the school's general appearance. The head of Birley said that in the past four years—before those additional problems—he has had to spend £50,000 from his school budget. As he put it, that money could have been used to provide three extra teachers or additional books and equipment, which the school badly needs. Birley Spa school has the worst problems because it has a two-tier structure, but the other schools are in a similar position.

We cannot simply wait until repair work on the school is completely out of the question, buildings start falling down and, for safety reasons, pupils are taken out and have nowhere else to go. The authority has carried out a detailed analysis of surplus places in the area, and there are no other places for the pupils to go. Additional building work is being carried out in the area, and a number of schools are full and are having to make use of mobile classrooms. Surplus places might exist, but only outside the two-mile radius, and it would be unfair to

[Mr. Clive Betts]

make children face the prospect of being bussed around the city, without any planned replacement for the school having been agreed.

We cannot contemplate spending £1 million on a series of temporary running repairs to maintain a structure that has no long-term future. That would be economic madness from anybody's perspective, whether the Government, the city council or the people who pay the bills—the council taxpayers of Sheffield and the taxpayers of the country. We need a replacement programme. What is happening is not merely a matter of cost and economics—it affects children's education. We might have disagreements across the Chamber about whether class sizes affect children's education, but I hope that there will be no disagreement over the fact that substantial building work in schools, as well as general uncertainty, affects children's education.

Birley Spa school draws pupils from an estate which is recognised by the city council as an area of deprivation that is in need of urgent attention and has top priority. The most recent survey showed that 42 per cent. of families in that community were on income support and more than 20 per cent. of them were unemployed. Such deprivation means that education must be taken even more seriously there than elsewhere, although I believe that education should be taken extremely seriously everywhere. The school wants to develop some form of nursery provision to deal with the problems of deprivation.

The issue does not merely involve economics, but the life of a school. Geoff Mawson, the head of Birley Spa primary school, has sent me a letter in which he explains that the repairs this year have cost £100,000. He understands that the money is taken out of the authority's general budget for schools, which means that other schools will also suffer. He explains that £51,000 has been spent out of the school budget and, on top of that, an extra £8,000—double the school's allocated budget for repairs and maintenance—has had to be spent on dealing with the problem in the past few months.

In his letter Mr. Mawson states:

"The disruption has been heartbreaking. Since September we have had a rota of 66 children sharing one classroom at a time whilst their rooms were being repaired. This is the third time this has taken place in six years! The youngest children have suffered the longest with repairs still taking place! There was no indoor PE for the first half term. There were fewer school assemblies as displaced classes were housed in the hall. Dinners have been disrupted. The shock of the building being condemned for a second time gave little time to us to plan for this emergency.

The repairs and external painting will only guarantee the school's safety for two years! The school building is already an expensive drain on the LEA and the school's resources. The scaffolding has now gone, but the children have lived through another traumatic period. All this has been at an educational cost.

The only agreement seems to be that we need a new building, but no-one can tell me what will happen when this two year period comes to an end. We are a large Primary school, families want to send their children to this school, but the uncertain future is a case of trying to manage the impossible. The children, parents and staff deserve better than this."

I agree—they deserve much better. Mr. Mawson continues:

"I am writing on their behalf to make you aware of our desperate situation and to ask you through your position as a Member of Parliament to draw this to the attention of the Minister concerned."

I am doing so tonight in the most public way.

I was speaking on the telephone this afternoon to the head of Birley primary school—Birley Spa and Birley are two separate schools, although their names are similar. I asked Mr. Blakey, the head, how things were going. He said, "If you can hear me through the noise, we are knee deep in the middle of building work. We have had three months of disruption out of the school year." Builders are outside the school, stripping the panels while children of five are running around. It is difficult to protect children and educate them at the same time under those conditions.

Mr. Blakey said that it was a difficult process for young children to go through. He said that there were no spare classrooms in the school, which was full, and the dining room was having to be used, which disrupted meals. He said that the school was in a state of chaos and turmoil, and the children's education must be suffering as a result. He said that he hoped that it was the last time that the school had to suffer in that way. There is a nursery next to the school, where children under five have to suffer the same disruption and where their educational provision is similarly affected. It is unacceptable.

I hope that tonight the Minister will give a number of commitments. Perhaps we can even reach some agreement. The position is unacceptable and we cannot allow it to continue; it is affecting our children's education. All the money that we are spending—we can have disagreements about whether it is enough—is clearly not being spent to best effect. The children's work is being disrupted and money is being spent on building work which only temporarily relieves the problem and postpones the school's replacement. That is not good economics.

If the Minister agrees to another meeting will he agree to it being held at the schools in question? Instead of sitting in his office in the Department for Education and Employment, watching the water flow from the fountains in the beautiful atrium which was built at enormous expense, will he come to the schools where water is pouring down the walls, causing the timber to rot and disrupting the educational lives of children? Will he come to the schools to see the problems for himself, meet the parents and staff and listen to what they have had to go through?

I am looking for a commitment of credit approval for the next financial year first to replace Birley Spa school, which all the heads in the area, and the governors, have accepted is in the worst condition of all the schools to which I have referred because it is a two-storey structure. The other schools should be subject to agreed replacement, with Department officials talking to council officials and agreeing on the best way forward. I want to see an end to the disruption of education, the replacement of lousy buildings and an end to uncertainty.

The schools have kept going and they have maintained high standards. I am aware of the great efforts that have been made. The heads have shown extraordinary commitment, as have their staff. Great credit is due to them for the way in which they have coped. They have continued to educate children in extremely difficult circumstances. The schools are excellent but the buildings are appallingly inadequate. Only the Government can implement a policy that will replace the present buildings with decent new buildings in which children can be educated properly. Those new buildings will match the commitment of the staff to provide good education, and their commitment will have even greater results if new school buildings are provided, which the children deserve.

8.10 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment (Mr. Robin Squire): The hon. Member for Sheffield, Attercliffe (Mr. Betts) has raised an important issue. As he said, this is the second occasion on which I have heard his arguments for Birley Spa school and others. Last time, of course, responsibility for capital expenditure came within my remit. This time, my hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs. Gillan) is the responsible Minister. I undertake to draw the hon. Gentleman's comments to my hon. Friend at the end of the debate. They will receive her full attention.

The Government are concerned that schools should offer their pupils a good and safe learning environment. The statutory duty to ensure that school buildings are safe lies with school governors and local education authorities. The hon. Gentleman knows that. We share a similar background as former leaders of local authorities. To help governors and LEAs discharge the statutory duty effectively, my Department provides advice to local authorities and school governors to alert them to building defects of potentially national significance. The procedure is intended to act as an early-warning system so that authorities can plan accordingly.

In essence, my Department issues a so-called defects letter to all authorities whenever news of a particular building problem could usefully be broadcast. Usually one authority will spearhead the fault-finding process and let the Department know. The scheme has proved so useful that a pack of defects letters is now included in the "welcome pack" for schools entering the grant-maintained sector. When appropriate, the Department will also commission research into the defect, usually through the Building Research Establishment, and disseminate the findings to local authorities.

As the hon. Gentleman said, it was the Sheffield LEA which informed us that it had identified problems with some 1950s Derwent timber framed schools. They were manufactured by Vic Hallam plc in the 1950s and 1960s. The Derwent system comprises permanent buildings of one or two storeys, mainly based on a timber post and plywood box beam framing construction. The buildings are braced by tongue-and-groove roof boards and framed external wall panels. Later forms of the system used different types of cladding such as brick work and tile hanging, although the same principle of structure remained.

As the hon. Gentleman knows, Sheffield LEA reported to my Department that it had found deterioration in the external walls and in certain internal structural members of Derwent buildings. Other common faults were rotting of the timber columns between window sill and floor level, rotting of timber internal columns between floor level and lower ceiling level at the point at which a change of room height occurred and rotting of external columns over their entire height, when adjacent to rainwater outlets, together with other examples of junctions between plywood beams and timber posts that were exposed to water leaks.

Sheffield alerted us to the problem in 1987. Later that year, the Department issued a defects letter to LEAs informing them that further investigations were being carried out by the authority. The Department stressed the importance of carrying out adequate surveys to determine individual building needs.

The Department commissioned some research into the system and sent a copy of the report to LEAs in March 1988. Principally, the report made recommendations for the investigation of Derwent system buildings, but also emphasised the importance of checking all buildings with a similar construction. The Department invited authorities to advise it of any further cases that they identified. There has been only a limited response. I am advised that we are aware of only between 10 and 15 cases. There are, of course, other timber-framed buildings that have not necessarily been specifically identified as Derwent constructions. We are well aware of the difficulties in Sheffield schools, to which the hon. Gentleman has diligently drawn to our attention in the past.

I have already said that schools must offer a good and safe environment for their pupils. We are committed to improving the condition of school buildings. To that end, substantial capital resources have been provided in recent years to enable local education authorities and school governors to improve their building stock. We estimate that, between 1990-91 and 1993-94, LEAs spent about £2.7 billion on their schools.

Generally, capital sums allocated by my Department are not tied to specific projects. Local authorities are given permission to borrow up to a certain level to fund capital programmes for all their services, including education. This borrowing limit—it is called the basic credit approval—is made up of the sum of the annual capital guidelines for different services that are issued to the authority net of any anticipated receipts.

Ultimately, therefore, it is up to LEAs to decide their own priorities, both between services and projects within services. Nor is the basic credit approval, which is issued by the Department of the Environment, the upper limit on authorities' capital spending. Authorities can invest their own capital receipts as they see fit, and they can use funds from their revenue budgets for capital purposes if they wish. Recent relaxations to local authority capital controls—in particular, a reduction in the rate of set-aside required for debt redemption—will help LEAs to maximise the use to which they can put capital assets.

I acknowledge, however, that in recent years tight public expenditure survey settlements have meant that allocations available for improvement or replacement work have not been as high as some local authorities might have wished. It is worth explaining, therefore, that the criteria for allocating capital resources were agreed with the local authority associations over 10 years ago.

Priority in the allocation of schools' annual capital guidelines is first given to commitments arising from projects started in previous years. That is fairly obvious. After that comes the provision of new school places in areas of population growth, basic need, and exceptional basic need, which is a sub-category of basic need. Exceptional basic need essentially covers cases where a surveyor has condemned teaching places or described them as unsafe or structurally unsound. Exceptional basic need cover is given only where repair is either impracticable or actually more expensive than replacement. Such instances are usually emergency cases, but in the light of the hon. Gentleman's comments I confirm to him sincerely that we shall examine extremely carefully any evidence which he or the LEA may forward

[Mr. Robin Squire]

to my Department that may show that in the school or schools that he mentioned the problem comes under the qualifications of exceptional basic need.

Mr. Betts: The Minister has said that exceptional basic need covers a school that cannot be repaired or where repair becomes more expensive than replacement. Does the Minister accept that account should be taken of repairs that are immediately necessary and repairs that will continue to be necessary over a period of, for example, five or 10 years? The cost of new buildings should be weighed against repairing existing structures if repair work will have to be continued for five or 10 years.

Mr. Squire: I cannot deny that there was a strong strain of common sense in what the hon. Gentleman said. I am happy to revisit the priorities that were established—I may well have made that clear to him in a previous responsibility—particularly in the light of the points that he is making. At the present time, I can reiterate only what the priority was. He will appreciate that, because there are invariably more bids than there is funding available, it would require broad agreement across local authorities, and I would be happy to receive that. There may be opportunity for local authorities to pursue that with me or my hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham.

The other priority category covers the implementation of cost-effective schemes to remove surplus school cases, and the hon. Gentleman is aware of their impact. We also make allowance for liabilities for work at voluntary aided schools and for approved capital work in special education. The remaining resources are then distributed by a formula to contribute towards the cost of all other capital-related work at schools. The latter category may include cases that are not exceptional basic need but where replacement is considered to be the most sensible option. Obviously, local education authorities are free to include Derwent buildings in annual capital bids for exceptional basic need cover if they think that a case meets the definition.

Alternatively, LEAs are free to bid at any time for a supplementary credit approval from the Department's limited capital reserve. There are always many competing bids for the resources and only the most urgent and deserving bids are successful. These can sometimes include cases that are not exceptional basic need but that nevertheless appear urgent. We also give priority to any supplementary credit approval bids, involving private sector investment in line with the principles of the private finance initiative.

Very substantial sums have been made available for capital work in schools—more than £600 million this year. Nevertheless, each year, we have to make tough discussions about what to include in our list of successful projects. The hon. Gentleman has schools with Derwent buildings in his constituency, and he highlighted in particular, but not exclusively, Birley Spa. When we met to discuss this issue last year, I explained that a bid for exceptional basic need could be given only where repair would be more expensive than replacement. Surplus provision in the area was also a factor. The LEA has since applied for funding under a supplementary credit approval, which was not successful in the most recent round because of competing bids against very limited resources.

We have made careful note of the hon. Gentleman's arguments on behalf of those schools. I can repeat only that the crucial factor is the availability of resources in each financial year and, of course, the priority criteria, to which I referred. Exceptional basic need is, as its name implies, an exceptional category, essentially for the replacement of condemned buildings.

As I said at the outset, this is the second occasion on which I have discussed this issue with the hon. Gentleman—in rather grander surroundings than our first meeting. On each occasion, I have been impressed by the sincerity and strength of his arguments, and in particular his commitment to Birley Spa school. I shall take that message back to my hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham and ask her carefully to consider the points that he has made tonight when making her decisions for capital allocations in future.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-three minutes past Eight o'clock.

House of Commons

Friday 24 November 1995

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PETITION

A19 (Easingwold)

9.34 am

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale): I beg leave to present a petition supported by more than 3,000 residents of my constituency and the county of north Yorkshire, calling for the northern junction of the A19 Easingwold bypass to be made into a roundabout. In the 12 months since the bypass opened—today is its anniversary—there have been three fatal accidents.

The petition reads as follows:

To the Honourable the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain & Northern Ireland in Parliament assembled.

The humble petition of the residents of the parliamentary constituency of Ryedale and other citizens of Great Britain & Northern Ireland declares that the A19 junction north of Easingwold should be made into a roundabout to prevent further needless deaths.

Wherefore your petitioners pray that your honourable House do urge the Secretary of State for Transport to implement such improvement without delay. And your petitioners remain in duty bound to this honourable House & will ever pray.

To lie upon the Table.

Earnings Top-up

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. MacKay.]*

9.35 am

The Minister for Social Security and Disabled People (Mr. Alistair Burt): The purpose of the debate this morning is to enable the House to take note of the rules that the Government propose for a new benefit, earnings top-up, which is to be introduced on a pilot basis from October 1996 in eight areas of the country. The plans for the pilot were published in July, in the Green Paper entitled, "Piloting Change in Social Security—Helping People into Work".

The intention of earnings top-up is to increase income in work for lower-paid workers who do not have children. It will operate in much the same way as family credit does for families with children and will have the same objective: simply to make it more worth while to be in work than out of it. The benefit will be claimed mainly by post, awards will last unchanged for 26 weeks in most cases and workers will find their income increased by up to £54 a week. That should provide a substantial incentive to take and remain in work.

Both the idea of an earnings top-up for all lower-paid workers and its introduction on a pilot basis mark radical new departures for the United Kingdom. No other country offers a targeted income boost to all those in work at certain incomes. There is thus no experience by which to judge the impact of such a benefit. That is why we propose to test it through a pilot, the first of its type in the United Kingdom.

Previously, social security changes have been introduced nationally or not at all. In consequence, some innovative ideas have not been tested. Meanwhile, practical difficulties in other proposals may emerge only after they have been introduced. Now we are moving to a different approach. The earnings top-up scheme is temporary and experimental. It will last for three years, although individual recipients may continue to be paid for a further two years, and it will take place in only eight pilot areas. It will be introduced on an extra-statutory basis, but we want everybody to be absolutely clear about what its rules are. We have therefore laid before the House the draft rules of the scheme. Of course, if it is eventually decided to implement earnings top-up nationwide, we shall return to Parliament with the necessary legislation.

I would like first to say why we believe it right to try out such a benefit and how the pilot will be conducted. When we look at the characteristics of unemployed people, we find that 60 per cent. of them—1.35 million out of 2.32 million—are without dependent children. Experience shows that many of these will move back into work quickly, but it is apparent that some people still face disincentives to move into work. With their skills at their disposal, the income that they can command in work is not enough to provide an incentive to work.

The existing family credit scheme makes work more rewarding. It removes any disincentives to work which might arise from the gap between earnings and out-of-work benefits. It has proved successful in a number of ways: it has enabled the unemployed and lone parents to get a foothold on the employment ladder; and it ensures

[Mr. Alistair Burt]

that other families are able to stay in work during a rough patch when perhaps one partner loses his or her job. But, of course, that benefit is confined to families with children. The Government now believe that it is time to test whether the principle of in-work assistance works for those without children.

The earnings top-up pilot will begin in October 1996 and will run for three years. It is an income-related benefit for people in work and in that respect it is like family credit, but without the necessity of children being involved. The extension of in-work assistance to this group is almost wholly unprecedented and there is little evidence either here or abroad to tell us what might happen. For that reason we believe that it is right to test earnings top-up before taking any decision to implement it nationally. That would be an unacceptable risk with taxpayers' money—perhaps more than £500 million for the higher rate of the two models that will be piloted.

We do not know categorically that increasing in-work income will be as effective a work incentive for people without children as it is for families with children. However, research by the Policy Studies Institute clearly shows that family credit helps people with children to move into work and, crucially, to stay there. The Centre for Labour Market Studies has also found that the amount of in-work income has a positive effect on the decision to take up work and that that influence is strongest for married men. But we do not know whether people without children will respond in the same way. That is why we need to pilot earnings top-up before we commit resources on a large scale. It is also the reason for piloting two different rates of benefit—to examine whether it is the existence of help or the amount that has the greater effect on work.

Piloting an in-work benefit is a new venture and we want to get it right. Therefore, we set out our proposals in detail and canvassed views in a consultation document before finalising the detail of the proposals. The consultation produced a high standard of response, and a summary of the points that were made has been placed in the Library. I thank all those who contributed to that consultation. During the consultation both employer and employee representatives expressed concern about the suggestion that we might also test the feasibility of payment through the wage packet. This probably attracted more responses than any other single aspect of the scheme. There were concerns about the cost, the loss of confidentiality for employees and the increased risk that wages might be depressed.

As well as canvassing views through the Green Paper, the Benefits Agency was busy holding discussions with employers and payroll experts on the costs and feasibility of the proposal. In the light of that study and the representations that were received we have decided not to pursue payment through the wage packet for the present. I am sure that that decision will be welcomed by all those who were concerned on that point.

The question whether employers might depress wages in response to earnings top-up is important: perhaps it is the most crucial issue. The best way to see whether they do and the effect is to pilot the measure and find out, which is exactly what we intend to do. We have no evidence that employers have reacted to family credit by reducing wages, but the position may be different in some employment sectors where all employees are potentially eligible for a benefit top-up. The effect on wages will be one of the most important questions to be tackled in evaluating the results of the pilot exercise.

We intend to test earnings top-up in eight areas and the consultation document explained how those would be chosen. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced the final selection on 6 November. It includes areas in north Wales, central Scotland, the south coast, Newcastle, Sunderland and South Yorkshire. The areas that have been chosen reflect different types of labour market, but they all have high unemployment rates and a high proportion of vacancies. They are the sort of areas in which we would expect earnings top-up to be successful and they have been selected quite deliberately to maximise the chances of obtaining a clear outcome.

We are now in the process of tendering for the research that will enable us to evaluate the outcome. The research project will be detailed and complex—perhaps the most complex that the Benefits Agency and the Department have undertaken. We acknowledge that it will be no easy task, but we propose to collect a great deal of information about the labour market in the pilot areas before, during and after the pilot project. We shall be able to compare that with what happens to employment in four matched control areas and we will know a great deal about the individuals who claim the benefit. From the research it will be possible to evaluate the effects of earnings top-up in the pilot areas and extrapolate the findings nationally.

Mr. Denis MacShane (Rotherham): It is a remarkable breakthrough in Government theory to try something before putting it into national practice. As the Minister responsible for the Child Support Agency, does the hon. Gentleman think that the experience of that and previous examples of Government policy might have been happier if they had been tested through similar pilot schemes before being put into national practice? The Minister does not have to answer.

Mr. Burt: In lieu of anything else to do of course I will answer if you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, will allow us to digress for a moment. The issue of pilot schemes is interesting but the crucial question is whether, if we seek to make a change in such areas, we are prepared to run a scheme in which some people will be getting an advantage for a time while other people are not. That sometimes means that a pilot scheme cannot be undertaken. The Child Support Agency involved such a degree of change and its administration was such a distinct change to what had gone before that, although piloting was considered, it was decided that it could not be done.

There will be occasions when we plan to do something new for which a pilot would not be appropriate. The hon. Gentleman is right to speak about a breakthrough and that breakthrough involves getting the opportunity to pilot anything in the field of social security. When I came to the Department it was one of the first topics that I raised when speaking to officials. I said that it would be nice to have an opportunity to conduct pilot schemes but I was told, "But Minister, benefits are national and pilots would be difficult. We cannot have somebody in Gateshead getting a different rate of benefit from somebody in Gatley."

It is necessary to think about whether there are circumstances that make it worth conducting a pilot scheme. This is an important breakthrough, but not every scheme is appropriate for pilots. However, I hope that when the opportunities arise we will take them.

The rules of the scheme are based to a large extent on those that already operate for family credit. At least half the draft rules are identical to the equivalent family credit provisions, but, obviously, there are changes in recognition of the absence of dependent children. Other changes relate to the unique status of earnings top-up as an experimental scheme. The rules provide for what will happen when workers move into, out of or between pilot areas. These provisions have no precedent in social security.

We also propose to pay a lower benefit rate for those who are under 25. That is the case for income support but not for family credit. Younger workers, and especially those without children, have lower household costs than older workers. They quite often live at home with their parents or in shared accommodation with friends. Young workers can also more easily be better off in work because their income from out-of-work benefits is lower than that of older workers.

A further difference from family credit is that earnings top-up will be time limited for certain self-employed people. There will be an upper limit of four awards for self-employed workers whose net earnings are continuously below £20 a week. They will receive benefit for at least three years. We have decided to impose this limit because continuous very low earnings cast doubt on whether employment is truly remunerative. We do not wish to discourage self-employment—far from it—but it is not the role of a social security scheme to prop up failing businesses indefinitely.

The final published version of the rules and any future amendments will be placed in the Library. The Social Security Advisory Committee will also be kept informed. Earnings top-up is yet another example of our commitment to create a better social security system. Social security costs each working person £15 every working day. That is £92 billion a year or 30 per cent. of all Government expenditure. The nation's resources are not infinite and that is why our reforms have focused benefits on those who need them most. We are encouraging incentives to work and personal responsibility.

As we approach the end of the century the social security system is evolving into an efficient machine that protects the most vulnerable, adapts to changing need and does not outstrip the nation's ability to pay. Our reforms are beginning to take effect and they will continue to flourish. By the year 2000 growth in social security spending is projected to be down by £4 billion. Total savings in the next century will amount to more than £14 billion a year. We have a clear set of principles, we have translated them into action, and they have worked. One proof of that is our record on unemployment which, as I have said, is better than the European Union average. That proves that our strategy is working. In the United Kingdom the proportion of the population of working age who are unemployed is lower than the proportion in Germany, France or Italy.

A key element in our strategy is the belief that helping people back into work is the best way to improve their living standards. It is the best way to improve people's prospects and to help them become independent. The benefits system can be an important springboard to take people out of dependency. Last year's Budget unveiled a comprehensive package of work incentives, into which the pilot scheme fits very well. From April 1996, housing benefit will be extended at the full rate for an extra four weeks for people moving into work. A national insurance holiday of one year will apply for employers taking on long-term unemployed people. Family credit payment will be speeded up to remove the gap between the end of income support and the first family credit payment.

From October 1996, we estimate that earnings top-up will reach 20,000 people throughout the country. The Conservative party is the party of real work incentives. Many of the measures to which I have referred have been announced against a backdrop of carping criticism from Opposition Members—it says here. They are now beginning to speak of using the benefit system to help people into work. The earnings top-up scheme is a vital part of our strategy to do just that.

The labour market is changing—

Mr. Keith Bradley (Manchester, Withington): The Government have a great deal of support for these measures.

Mr. Burt: Of course we have. Unfortunately, we do not have support from Opposition Members when things get difficult and it is necessary to take difficult decisions. They find it much easier to carp.

Mr. Denis MacShane (Rotherham): The Benches behind the Minister are full.

Mr. Burt: My colleagues' support in spirit for these measures is massive.

The labour market is changing, as we all know. Comparing the same parts of the economic cycle between 1979 and 1990, overall employment has increased by 6 per cent. Female employment and part-time employment have both increased, but demand for unskilled labour has decreased. More and more, employers are looking for people with higher skill levels. That renders vulnerable the workers who do not have such skills and risks trapping them in unemployment. That is a worry for us all. Earnings top-up is part of our answer to that problem.

We know of one answer from the Opposition—"Let's impose a statutory minimum wage."

Mr. Bradley: That is right.

Mr. Burt: The House will not be surprised to hear—

Mr. Malcolm Wicks (Croydon, North-West): Skip the next bit.

Mr. Burt: The House will not be surprised to hear that we do not accept that the minimum wage offers a solution. Compelling employers to pay unrealistic wages would put people out of work, not help them into it. The worst hit would be precisely those whom earnings top-up is designed to help, the young and the unskilled. Study after study confirms that. What is more telling, a minimum wage would not help the worst off.

[Mr. Burt]

The Institute for Fiscal Studies found that the poorest 30 per cent. of families would benefit less than the richest 30 per cent. That is because many people earning low wages are second or even third wage earners in more prosperous families. In its report, the institute stated that

"those people most affected would be young single people living at home with their parents and the wives of working husbands . . . This means that the effects on poverty and inequality would be small".

In-work benefits can be effectively targeted. Earnings top-up, for example, will assist single people whose income from work is up to £125 a week, and couples whose income is up to £164. It will give them a weekly income boost averaging about £19 for single people aged 25 and over, and £24 for couples. The gain could be up to a maximum of £54 for a couple, and about half that for a single person.

Those who advocate a minimum wage despite all its shortcomings might also claim that in-work benefits transfer to the taxpayer costs that could or should be borne by employers. We want to see all people better paid. The way to achieve that is to improve standards in education and enhance skills to boost productivity. Then, and only then, can employers afford both to invest and to pay more. Increasing wages without productivity would merely replace low pay with no pay.

There is a further point to make about the introduction of the pilot scheme. It represents another stage on a consistent pathway of social security reform. The Government consider the effective reform and control of the social security system to be a distinguishing feature of a party's fitness to govern in modern society. The Government have led social security reform by way of a series of coherent principles. Encouragement to work by way of the development of in-work benefits, such as earnings top-up, has been crucial. It has played its part in the success of the United Kingdom's overall employment strategy. At the same time it has contrasted sharply with one of the fundamental characteristics of Opposition Members, which is their failure to contribute anything to the social security debate.

Commentators and politicians agree world wide that welfare reform is a matter for keen and important debate. If control of social security is lost, the impact on the economy is devastating. We cannot, of course, have debate if there is only one voice. Plenty of contributions are made by Back-Bench Members, but when it comes to the Front Benches the debate is in danger of being seriously lopsided.

After its most recent electoral defeat, the Labour party privatised its policy making and hived off social security reform to the Commission for Social Justice, with a remit to think the unthinkable. This move, launched in a blaze of publicity, to boldly think where no think tank had thought before, led to an even higher profile. The right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair), the Leader of the Opposition, no less, hailed that it was a new Beveridge. After that, the small print was read, and there was a great deal of it. We have heard no more.

The able and canny hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) wrestled with social security reform as a member of the Opposition Front Bench. When he might have mentioned the unmentionable, he was moved to other responsibilities. The hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) now has the social security job. How we all regret that it is not the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn), who at least has a programme for social security reform. As I have said, the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury has been given the baton and given six months to think the unthinkable. By 8 May 1996, all will be revealed. Thinking the unthinkable nowadays in the Labour party means having a proper, costed and well-thought-out policy. For years past, we have been tackling problems, and throughout we have faced opposition to our measures and demands for more money.

The public know nothing about the Labour party's plans. They do not know whether Opposition Members intend to find the extra £4 billion a year that we have been saving, let alone whether they can find the extra £14 billion a year that our measures will save by the next century. The Opposition do not tell us whether they consider social spending to be too high, too low or just about right. They do not tell us where they would pitch it. They can oppose in that way and they can protest that way. I suspect that it is possible to campaign that way. But no party is fit to govern that way.

The aim of the earnings top-up pilot scheme is to help people with low earning power to move into work and stay there. We are testing the scheme—at a cost of £25 million in a full year—to be sure that it will help people with low earning power in the way that I have described without adverse consequences. We are breaking new ground. I am grateful for the way in which our proposals have been received up to now. I look forward to the debate. I am glad to have had the opportunity to confirm our position.

9.56 am

Mr. Keith Bradley (Manchester, Withington): The purpose of the debate, which the Minister started to outline clearly before he went into his flights of fancy about the development of Labour party policy, is to consider the draft rules on the earnings top-up, which have been laid before Parliament. As the Minister rightly said, they reflect the consultation that took place following the publication in July of the Government's paper entitled "Piloted change in social security: helping people into work".

It could be argued that with 2.5 million people registered as unemployed, the debate might have focused more clearly on what positive measures the Government are taking to create real long-term jobs, to tackle skill shortages and to give some hope to the thousands of long-term unemployed and to the thousands of young people who have never had a job. If we were enjoying full employment, or something approaching it, or if employment was adequately paid, there would not be such a problem with those needing benefits and the amount of money spent on providing benefit would be relatively small. The social security system would not have to take the strain of low-paid employment.

It is worth repeating that there are 2.5 million registered as unemployed. It should be remembered also that 1 million have been unemployed for more than one year. About 250,000 have been unemployed for more than four years. We know that 1 million earn less than £2.50 an hour and that 300,000 earn less than £1.50 an hour. Those

are scandalously low wages. The issue today, however, is more about a clear statement of the failure of the Government's economic and employment policies.

We are discussing proposals—I cut through the Government's wider comments—to increase family credit payments or wages top-up to single people and childless couples.

It is worth noting that the cost of family credit for families with children has risen dramatically over the years from a mere £42 million in 1980-81 to £1.48 billion in 1994-95 and an estimated £1.682 billion in 1995-96. That is partly explained by increased take-up over the years, from about 50 per cent. when the scheme was first introduced to almost 70 per cent. now, and partly to changes in the rules on working hours eligibility. There are now almost 600,000 people claiming the benefit.

The rate of increase in take-up has slowed down in recent years, which gives clear credence to the view that a significant factor in the considerable budget increase is that the benefit is really subsidising bad employers paying low or poverty wages. Unless a floor is set to the extension of the family credit scheme in the earnings top-up, the problem will be exacerbated. I shall return to that point later.

The Government's statistics, published in their expenditure plans 1995-96 to 1997-98, show that over those four years there has been an increase of about 75 per cent. in the number of people claiming family credit, but during the same period the cost has risen by a staggering 300 per cent. It would appear that the same people are receiving more money. Why should that be? I again suggest that the real reason is that family credit is taking the strain for very low or poverty level wages.

On the Government's specific proposals, we welcome their decision to pilot the new earnings top-up in eight areas, with four control areas, and to monitor the scheme. We recognise the value of applying different rates to test the real validity of the proposals. As my hon. Friend the Member for Rotherham (Mr. MacShane) said in an intervention, the Government have at long last learnt that introducing new policy on a national scale immediately, as happened with the Child Support Agency—which I mention for the Minister's benefit—is fraught with danger.

I want to ask a number of questions about the pilot scheme. However, as I have mentioned the CSA, one other question immediately comes to mind. I note in the draft rules that when a childless couple have a child during any six-month period of claiming the top-up, they can immediately move to family credit because that is more generous. It is right that that should happen. However, when we moved amendments to the child support legislation which would have given the same facility in child support cases where maintenance had been withdrawn during a six-month period—and people need to move quickly to family credit so that they do not lose out—the Government said that it was not possible to do it so quickly. However, such a facility is now being piloted with the Government's proposals. Will the Minister comment on that and agree to rethink child support so that mothers can be treated in the same way, thereby ensuring that they receive the maximum amount of benefit at any particular time?

I come now to my substantive questions about the draft rules. There does not appear to be any requirement on the employer to include any element of education or training with the job being offered through the top-up scheme. In view of the appalling lack of skills training in this country, are not the Government missing a real opportunity to encourage employers to take training seriously? Should not it be included as a requirement of participation in the top-up scheme? The Government's Green Paper states:

> "The most desirable way to increase earnings capacity is to improve skills through education, training and experience."

The Minister may argue that the job provides experience, but there seems to be no requirement to include education and training, which should form part of the scheme.

It is clearly envisaged that once a person has entered the scheme, he will be entitled to the top-up benefit throughout the three-year pilot period and then for a further two years if appropriate. What safeguards will the Government introduce to ensure that people taken on to the scheme are not merely replacing existing employees, thereby enabling the employer to substitute an existing wage rate for a lower wage rate and gaining from that?

What monitoring will be undertaken to ensure that wages are reasonably increased, with a consequent reduction in the benefit top-up, during the pilot period? Monitoring all the pilots is essential to ensure that the quality of jobs on offer is retained. What sanctions will the Government introduce to ensure that employers do not exploit the new payments to reduce wage levels? Can we have more details about the cost of monitoring? We already know the cost of the scheme. I recognise that evaluation of the scheme is absolutely crucial, both between pilot and control areas and within pilot areas. Can the Minister give more details of the criteria that will be employed by the researchers to ensure that evaluation is sensitive to the real needs of the project? We welcome the fact that the researchers will be independent.

One important consequence of using the pilot approach to test earnings top-up is that there will be no independent tribunal to determine questions of eligibility or right of appeal. Is the Minister satisfied that the procedures outlined in the draft rules are sufficient to ensure that employees are properly protected where there are disputes about eligibility or the right to participate in the scheme?

On the question of payment method, I heard in the other place—and the Minister repeated it today—that the discussions with employers on payment being made through the wage packet have now been dropped. We share the concerns expressed, in response to the consultation, about confidentiality and the potential for the employment details of the partner of the claimant to be given to the pilot scheme employer. I want to be sure about that point, because not only could the benefit calculations have been passed to that employer, but other details of the relationship. Will the Minister confirm that such matters will now be dealt with through the Benefits Agency and that the employer will have no role to play?

To what extent are the Government committed to the proposals? We note that the scheme will not be introduced until October 1996—more than a year from now. What is the reason for the delay in introducing the pilots if the Government are committed to the measure forming a key part of their welfare to work policies? We also note that the pilot schemes will run for three years. We understand the need for proper monitoring and evaluation, but as the pilot period will not be completed until 1999, other matters may stop the scheme being introduced.

[Mr. Keith Bradley]

On a more important point, the cost of the pilot scheme is £75 million over three years and is expected to cover 20,000 applicants. If it were extended nationally to all those who are eligible, it could involve an estimated 500,000 people at a cost of £1.5 billion over three years. Can we be clear that if the pilots are successful, the scheme represents a spending commitment by the Government, or should I take a more cynical view and rely on the Government's own consultation paper, which states:

"it cannot be assumed that it will lead to national implementation or that the range of people covered and the benefit rates would remain the same".

Will the Minister clarify the Government's position? We would expect at least the rates in the pilot scheme to be introduced, with the subsequent £1.5 billion spending commitment.

An issue that was discussed in another place, but was not answered satisfactorily, is the 24-hour working rule. I remind the House that under the jobseeker's allowance, if a person works more than 24 hours, for whatever pay and even if it is below JSA benefit levels, his or her partner loses eligibility for the means test for JSA. Will the same apply to the earnings top-up rules? If a partner not only earns more—which would clearly take him or her out of the top-up—but works for more than 24 hours, as with the jobseeker's allowance, would that make the other person ineligible for in-work benefit, whatever the joint income might be? Will the Minister look at the inter-relationship between the hours rule and the hourly paid rate?

Finally, I touch on the poverty trap, which is an important issue. The Government accept that the introduction of earnings top-up cannot avoid creating a poverty trap. They acknowledge the problem inherent in income-related benefits of high marginal withdrawal rates of benefit as earnings rise. Like family credit, earnings top-up will have a taper of 70 per cent. so for each £1 of extra income, earnings top-up entitlement will decrease by 70 per cent., albeit at the expiry of the 26-week award. It will clearly interact with other benefits, national insurance and the tax system and, although it is unlikely that many cases will involve a tax rate in excess of 100 per cent., the combined impact will be a real disincentive to increase hours of work.

I note from the Government's rules that they hope that the £10 full-time work supplement will help to overcome that problem, but clearly there is still a disincentive to work. Does the Minister have any other proposals to tackle that problem? Unfortunately, the structure of the new benefit will do little to tackle the serious poverty trap and disincentive created by in-work benefits, especially for couples and home owners.

Will the Minister look again at page 15 of the Government's consultation document, which outlines the effects of the top-up on certain categories of people and identifies some discrete examples? Will he do what was done successfully during the passage of the jobseekers Bill and place in the Library additional examples of how the benefit will impact on other benefits and on earnings, extending the benefits to different categories of families, increased hourly rates and different households. The assumption behind the examples in the consultation document is that all the people involved live either at home or in rented accommodation, but the impact on home owners is not clear when they are in the benefits system. Can the Minister extend the range of examples?

The poverty trap issue has to be addressed more fully. When I tabled a Parliamentary Question asking how many families faced a marginal deduction rate of 70 per cent. or higher for each £1 earned as a result of benefit tapers, the Minister told me in a letter that the Government

"estimated that 600,000 people faced a marginal deduction rate of 70 per cent. or more."

Clearly that is not acceptable and we have to find other methods of mitigating the effects of the poverty and employment trap.

It is clear that after 16 years, the Government are at last attempting to tackle the welfare to work problem. We welcome that and we have welcomed the introduction of the pilot schemes. However, I repeat the Labour party's view that, without a real floor on wage levels through the introduction of a national minimum wage, the real scale of in-work benefits cannot be tackled.

We all know that, following the abolition of wages councils, many people, such as cooks and carers in residential homes, receive poverty pay levels because of the lack of a national minimum wage. The Government argue that by letting wages fall, people will price themselves into work and more jobs will follow. The evidence suggests quite the contrary. It shows that the same people are in the same jobs but they are paid less. In the industries that were covered by wages councils, wage rates have fallen by up to 25 per cent. and there has been a net loss of 18,000 jobs.

Using the figures for the pilot schemes, if a national minimum wage were introduced at however modest a level, many of the people included in the scheme would be floated off in-work benefits. Obviously, we have to link a national wage to other positive employment measures and to look at the way in which the benefits system interacts with the tax system to ensure that there are positive measures to overcome the poverty and employment trap. If through those combinations we could reduce the massively escalating costs of in-work benefits, we could more closely target the money to where it is really needed—helping people in the employment market.

The Labour party has already announced a series of imaginative and comprehensive measures on welfare to work such as our eight pathways into employment for the long-term unemployed and, more recently, a more imaginative package of opportunities for the under-25s, which will have much greater impact and represent a more effective welfare to work policy.

Although we welcome the introduction of the pilot schemes today, we shall monitor their impact as closely as the Government. In conclusion, I repeat that as the pilot schemes will not commence until 1996, we look forward to introducing our own package of effective welfare to work measures well before the pilot schemes come to fruition.

10.19 am

Ms Liz Lynne (Rochdale): I welcome the proposed pilot scheme to study the earnings top-up for two main reasons. First, I welcome any pilot scheme in social security. Too many changes in the Department of Social Security have been introduced without having been

thought through adequately and have resulted in problems, mainly with implementation. The jobseeker's allowance, for a start, has had to be delayed. I understand that Benefits Agency doctors are having great problems meeting deadlines on medical tests for incapacity benefit, and, of course, there is the discredited Child Support Act 1991, under which only 29 per cent. of cases dealt with in the past year were correct. Therefore any large-scale pilot scheme is extremely welcome. It should reduce disruption and chaos, and I hope that it will reduce mistakes.

The second reason why I give the pilot scheme a cautious welcome is that the principle of the policy is absolutely right. No one should be worse off by taking a job. The Liberal Democrats fully support that principle and have long advocated one low-income benefit, combining family credit and income support.

But simply being in favour of the principle does not mean that the scheme should be implemented without careful consideration. I know that the Minister has made that clear. The potential for an earnings top-up being an open cheque for low-paying employers must be monitored extremely carefully. The record on family credit is far from encouraging. The cost has grown considerably over the past few years. I know that there are many reasons for that rise—the most important being the level of take-up, since £8 of every £10 available is now claimed, compared with £7 in 1992.

In addition, since the 1994 Budget, the welcome £28 disregard for child care has contributed to that bill. I honestly believe that £28 is not enough, but we are not debating that today. That positive development alone, even together with the other developments, does not explain the growth in the family credit bill. Part of that growth must be down to lower wages brought about by the abolition of the wages councils.

The crucial difference with the earnings top-up is that, unlike family credit, everyone over the age of 18 will be entitled to it depending on their wage—even though, as the Minister stated, those aged between 18 and 24 will get less; the same as they do on income support. I have never been able to understand that distinction and I sincerely hope that the Minister will take the opportunity to look at it. I do not accept his arguments that costs for those aged between 18 and 24 are necessarily lower than those for people over the age of 24.

A further difference is that the employer does not automatically know that the employee is in receipt of family credit. Although the earnings top-up will not be paid through the wage packet, if low wages are being paid, the employer will obviously know that the majority of the employees will be receiving a top-up. That could exert a downwards pressure on wages which must be monitored very carefully.

I obviously cannot mention the earnings top-up without talking briefly about jobseekers. The Government rigged the market in favour of employers when they brought in the jobseeker's allowance and they even refused to accept a House of Lords amendment which would have given a person the right to turn down a job if it paid wages below income support level. So employers know that a person who does not take a job offer risks losing benefit. Therefore employers have a double incentive to push wages down. Again, the taxpayer will pick up the bill. Such a downward trend on wages must also be monitored carefully.

A further point that the Government need to address is that, as I understand it, people in receipt of the earnings top-up will lose their passported benefit in free prescriptions and dental and eye check-ups during the pilot scheme. Will the recipients of the earnings top-up receive those benefits if the scheme goes nationwide?

Although, as I said, I give the pilot scheme a cautious welcome, it must be considered carefully and not again used to save the employer money at the expense of the taxpayer.

10.24 am

Mr. Denis MacShane (Rotherham): This has been a very interesting debate on a very important subject. Yesterday, the Prime Minister told the House that wage earners' incomes and employment had increased substantially under his stewardship. Yet this morning—how can I put it—the acceptable, human face of the Department for Social Security has told us that we have a great national crisis and taxpayers' money has to be shelled out, on a pilot scheme to begin with, to subsidise low pay. There is therefore a fundamental contradiction between the fantasies that we heard yesterday and the ginger exploration of the truth that we have heard this morning.

I am fascinated that although the hon. Member for Bury, North (Mr. Burt)—the hon. Member for marathon running—is with us this morning, not one Back-Bench Member is behind him, despite the fact that this is supposed to be a five-hour debate on social security called in Government time. Sitting on the Labour Front Bench are our shadow spokesmen Nos. 1, 2 and 3—or Nos. 1, 3 and 2; I am not sure of the running order.

The Secretary of State for Social Security is not present. When he is in the House, he spends most of the time decrying Europe, the minimum wage and social security systems over there, and when he is not in the House, he spends most of his time living in his chateau in France. I find some contradiction in a man who continually rubbishes France when he is sitting on the Government Front Bench, yet loves the country so much—its minimum wage and its social security and health systems—that he likes to spend as many weekends, as much of his holidays and perhaps his retirement there, which of course will not be long coming.

Mr. Burt: And skiing.

Mr. MacShane: He will have time to learn to ski quite soon.

We have had a beguiling debate and a soft presentation of the pilot scheme by the Minister, but the core problem is that there is a fundamental divide between the two sides of the House. The divide can be put very simply: Labour Members believe that the question of pay in the labour market is a matter of economic efficiency and justice, and the Conservatives believe that it is a matter of employer power and charity.

We want to move from a system of taxpayers' charity to sustain employer power and low wages in the labour market to one of justice and economic efficiency, so that instead of the taxpayer having to subsidise the employer, we can ensure that wages and incomes are properly paid and people earn a fair share of the value that they contribute to the wealth they create in different forms of the national economy.

[Mr. MacShane]

I have here a wage slip which was handed to me in my constituency. It is a proper wage slip and not black money or informal cash. It shows a hourly rate of pay of £1.80 an hour. After the national insurance and so forth is deducted, it shows that, for a 53-hour week, the take-home pay is £99. That, under any sense of justice or national morality, is a scandal and a disgrace.

If hon. Members went to the job centre in Rotherham, they would find that there are a number of jobs paying £2.30, £2.40, £2.50—under £3—an hour. That is not a living wage; it is barely a dying wage. It is a wage of miserable, mean and minimal existence brought about by the deliberate structural policy of 16 years of this Conservative Government, aimed at widening the wealth gap in our society and the difference between those in work and the power that they have to contribute through negotiation and partnership to the determination of their wage, and the power of their employers.

Will the Minister guarantee that the trade unions, if they exist in the firms involved in the pilot scheme, will be allowed to monitor it? If they do not exist in those firms, what steps will he take to ensure that there is proper employee consultation and involvement in the monitoring of the scheme?

How can we put matters right? How extraordinary it is—how politics have changed—that Labour Members now pray in aid Winston Churchill.

Ms Lynne: A Liberal.

Mr. MacShane: As the hon. Lady points out, he was a Liberal. Winston Churchill introduced wages councils because he saw the downward spiral of bad wages driving out good and wages going endlessly down, and he realised that national regulation was needed.

One can see different examples of the minimum wage around the world. The Secretary of State for Social Security, who lives in France for some of the year, always talks about the high unemployment in Spain and France. We can cite America where there is a national minimum wage and where far more jobs have been created than in the European Union. If the Minister will leave Europe alone, I shall leave America alone.

I have just come back from Taiwan, a fascinating country. I examined the two areas of employment about which I have some detailed personal knowledge—journalism and the steel industry. Journalists and steel workers in Taiwan earn more than their equivalents in the United Kingdom. The statutory minimum wage in Taiwan—here I have to be a little cautious with regard to my Front-Bench colleagues—is 70 per cent. of average male earnings. Such a minimum wage is not on the policy cards in this country.

In Taiwan and in other dynamic Asian economies, there is a commitment to three things: first, to full employment; secondly, to a compression of wage ratios so that there is not an ever-widening gap between top pay and bottom pay, as is happening in the United Kingdom; and, thirdly, a strong commitment to manufacturing instead of the front-loading to the City and to the financial sector which has been the aim of Tory employment policy over the past 16 years.

The fundamental point is that we must move from taxpayers' charity. Everyone in the House pays money to low-paying employers and the evidence of that is growing day by day. We recently had a meeting of the all-party transport group. The managing director of one London bus company told us that when he took on people, men mainly, who had families, the first thing they did in addition to filling in the employment forms was to fill in the appropriate benefit claim forms. The Government have turned employers into welfare agents. They have made it clear to employers that they can pay low wages because the state and the taxpayer will pick up the difference.

I welcome the pilot scheme. However, as my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Withington (Mr. Bradley) said, it will not come into operation until the end of next year. Before then, at that time or shortly afterwards, there may be a decision of the people that will, thank goodness, mean that those sitting on the Government Bench take decisions more in the national interest. A fundamental divide remains between the two parties. We need a national minimum wage and we need a commitment to making work something from which people draw not only personal value, but an income that corresponds to their needs. We must move away from the ever-widening wage gap and ever-increasing poverty in work. However well intentioned the pilot schemes are, they cannot make a significant contribution to the widening wage gap, the wealth gap and the poverty in work problem that we have today.

10.34 am

Mr. Burt: With the leave of the House, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I thank the hon. Members who have contributed to such an interesting debate. I am especially grateful to the hon. Member for Rotherham (Mr. MacShane), who was the only Back-Bench contributor, and I appreciated his remarks very much. They may detain me for a little while later in my speech because I want to get into the meat of the minimum wage versus other policies argument. It is an extremely important debate. I suspect that not all of the hon. Gentleman's colleagues share his view on the minimum wage, especially not his view on the rate. The minimum wage raises crucial questions. I think that the hon. Gentleman is profoundly wrong and I believe that any minimum wage scheme at the level that he and some of the biggest unions want would have disastrous effects on the United Kingdom in terms of employment opportunities, differentials and competitiveness.

We do not have a social security system like the ones in the far east; we have a European one. Europe and the United Kingdom must work out how we can remain competitive while ensuring that we have a decent welfare and social security system.

Mr. MacShane *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Burt: The hon. Gentleman shakes his head because he thinks that the answer is simple. I suspect that the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury knows that the matter is far more complex. I suspect that one of the reasons for his silence this morning is that he prefers to concentrate on these matters for a little longer rather than making a speech like the one made by the hon. Member for Rotherham.

I shall deal first with the easier issues and then I shall get on to the more detailed questions. The House agrees on one point; helping people to move from unemployment into work and then ensuring that they stay in work is a key priority. In-work benefits have a role here and that has been acknowledged by all parties. We do not agree on the minimum wage and I shall return to that subject.

I am grateful for the fact that the experimental, piloting approach has been broadly welcomed. When I came to the Department of Social Security, I could not understand why such an approach had not been national policy before. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State broke new ground through the jobseeker's allowance and this scheme goes a little further. I welcome this approach because it provides new opportunities and I suspect that it will be used more in the future. Dealing with the complexities of the benefit system is extremely difficult and finding ways in which to test out ideas is helpful.

To meet the challenges of the changing labour market, we have to be flexible and innovative. Although we are willing to embrace new ideas, we must be sure that they will work. A piloting approach is, therefore, a far more effective way in which to introduce experimental changes. It not only allows the value of new ideas to be assessed, but enables operational procedures to be tested and problems to be ironed out before any wider introduction.

I turn now to the pilot areas, how they were chosen and what happens after we have evaluated the pilot projects. It is important that the pilot areas for a scheme such as this one should be selected on an objective and rational basis which maximises the chance of obtaining clear results from the experiment. As we are putting more than £70 million over three years into the earnings top-up, we want to have the best chance of obtaining a result. Whether we decide to extend the scheme or not, at the end of three years, we shall have a great deal of knowledge under our belts. The key to getting it right, therefore, will be careful evaluation.

Preparing the ground for evaluation was just as crucial. To do that, we agreed a range of objective criteria which were then used to choose the pilot areas.

As the building block for pilot location, we have used travel-to-work areas—a statistical tool that identifies self-contained labour markets by considering the proportion of people living in an area who work there, and the proportion who do not. Using those self-contained labour markets will minimise positions in which neighbours would be treated differently and workmates would be treated differently.

Our basic approach has been to identify places where we predict that earnings top-up will work. Therefore groups of travel-to-work areas with relatively high unemployment and a relatively high proportion of vacancies were placed on a short list. We reckoned that if ETU was not successful there, it would be safe to assume that it would not work elsewhere. We published that list in July and asked people to tell us what they thought.

A number of factors influenced us in assessing the suitability of the short-listed places. We needed to find places in the group that were similar enough to be compared, and at that stage we considered factors such as labour market type, population density, size and type of firms and operational feasibility. We are testing the scheme in several different labour markets, as may be seen from the consultation documentation—major urban areas, large towns and rural areas as well as seaside communities, which have a characteristic pattern of employment. That will allow us to consider the impact of the initiative throughout a range of communities.

We have selected three major urban areas. One will test scheme A, one will test scheme B and there will be one control area. We have selected three large towns, three rural areas and three seaside towns.

A couple of arguments were made about what we shall do afterwards and a couple of arguments were made about the evaluation of the pilot.

I shall say a little more about evaluation. The pilot may be small in scope, but it has big potential. It has the potential to provide a wealth of information to inform the future direction of our policies. To assess that potential, independent researchers will evaluate and analyse the scheme on an on-going basis.

We shall monitor the impact of the scheme in a variety of ways. Interviews with employers and employees will provide details of what people think about the benefit. Longitudinal studies in the pilot areas will build up an increasingly detailed picture of the impact on local labour markets over time. The Benefits Agency will keep extensive management statistics. A 100 per cent. database will record the details of all claims and renewals and provide a unique record of the client group of the benefit.

Monitoring the effect on wages and on employers' wage-setting behaviour is one of the most important reasons for piloting ETU. The hon. Members for Rochdale (Ms Lynne) and for Rotherham, as well as the hon. Member for Withington, mentioned that as a crucial issue.

The research process as described has been designed to enable us to examine that matter closely. We shall be able to draw comparisons between the wage-setting behaviour of employers in pilot areas and those in control areas; that is why they have been so carefully matched. We can use the longitudinal analysis in the pilot areas, tracking patterns of wage-setting behaviour over time, and we can set up interview surveys with employers to focus on their attitudes and behaviours. The pilot gives us the opportunity to look closely at the interaction between the benefit system and employer behaviour.

Mr. Bradley: Although I understand the monitoring and evaluation during the process, I repeat my question: what sanctions would the Government introduce to prevent employers from cutting wages by participating in the top-up scheme?

Mr. Burt: The very nature of the pilot is that one cannot have sanctions. We do not know whether sanctions would be needed. We do not know what employers' behaviour would be. There might be a position, in a specific industry or industries, that would require no growth in wages for a couple of years, and we are as likely to observe that in a control area as in a pilot area. All that the pilot studies can tell us is how wage-setting behaviour in the pilot areas compares with wage-setting behaviour elsewhere.

Obviously, if one of the major effects is that in all the pilot areas, wages are massively reduced in order to balance the amount of benefit that comes in, we shall all have learnt a big lesson. That is what we are trying to discover. We do not believe that that will be the case.

[Mr. Burt]

Obviously, another crucial aspect will be the interaction between wages set, jobs created and the amount of benefit spent. We all agree that the worst of all options is for a person to do nothing and rely solely on social security. The next worst option is for a person to be in a low-paid job, but that is better than doing nothing. We all want people to be in higher-paid jobs.

The issue that comes between us is that the hon. Member for Rotherham and others believe that the Government can artificially set those floors—the hon. Member for Withington believes the same thing—and that that will prevent low pay. We do not believe that, and we believe that there is therefore a greater danger in trying to do that than in creating jobs in the first place. All that the pilot seeks to do is provide us with further information about the way in which that will work.

We would prefer people to get into work at more or less any wage than to do nothing. Pay is better than no pay, and the pilot helps us to go along that route. However, if it turns out that employers merely regard it as a huge subsidy and axe people's pay, we know that the taxpayer will not stand for that. We have no evidence that that is the case with family credit. We shall find out what happens.

The hon. Member for Withington asked whether employers would be involved. The answer is no. Employers would only have to check from time to time what a specific wage might be, if that information needed to be collected. The employer will not be directly involved.

The hon. Member for Rotherham asked about trade unions' involvement in the evaluation. I am not aware of a problem. If trade unions want to keep a monitoring eye on wages in an area, they are free to do so. I am not aware of a problem with that. I do not believe that they play a part in our research studies because they are independent research studies, but if they have any comments to make about what they observe and they want to feed them into the research process, they are free to do so. I envisage no problem with that.

A couple of issues were mentioned in relation to family credit—first, the way in which the family credit scheme works at the moment and, secondly, whether we can make changes to child maintenance similar to the ones that we are making with ETU.

I feel strongly that the hon. Member for Withington was wrong with his estimates about family credit. Take-up is increasing steadily. It is 81 per cent. by expenditure and it is likely to continue to increase steadily. More than 370,000 people have moved from income support to family credit in the past three years, showing its effectiveness at moving people into work.

It is not right to say that family credit is taking the strain for lower wages. The average wage in family credit is about £3.80 an hour and most couples need family credit for only six months or a year to tide them over a bad patch. We know from other manpower surveys that we have made that employers are indifferent to the level of family credit because it does not affect all their employees. Family credit has been a tremendous success, and should not be given a bad write-up.

The hon. Member for Withington asked whether we would make in child maintenance the type of change that we are making with ETU. First, my memory of child support tells me that the specific change that he suggests will work both ways. Some people are advantaged by family credit carrying on at the same rate. If we were to make a change in one direction, I would be under pressure from other quarters to make changes in the other direction. We feel that, on balance, it is better to leave family credit as it is for child maintenance.

However, we can do things operationally in the pilot that we cannot do nationally, That is why we are taking the opportunity to make the change in family credit, to the advantage of those who are on it. It is a beneficial move. We do not have the ability to do it nationwide, but we shall take the opportunity of the pilot to test it out.

The hon. Member for Withington argued about the lack of an education and training component in jobs. The scheme that we are discussing is not the right place and the right scheme to tackle that issue. We all know the importance of increased training for youngsters, in the form of further education in the classroom environment and by training in employment. The Government's record in that has been exceptional, as shown by the range and number of schemes that they have run and the quality of the schemes that have been introduced.

We do not believe that it is appropriate under the scheme to require employers to provide training for their ETU recipients. Employees will have a range of skills and, where skills training is needed, a variety of programmes will continue to be available, under schemes run by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, which can help them. Some recipients of ETU will already be in jobs. It is not a question of the measure being excluded from the scheme. It should be available anyway, although it is not a requirement in the scheme.

A contradiction came up in the question of sanctions, as well as in this case. If we want the scheme to work, we must make it as easy as possible for employers to take part. If we set a series of conditions by which employers must abide before they can take part, we will lessen the effect. Let us give it a run. It is a very bare pilot which aims to give employers and employees an opportunity. Let us look at the scheme for three years and see how it works before making value judgments about what we need to load on top of it. I suspect that the way in which the hon. Member for Withington—under pressure from his trade union paymasters and others—might have wanted the scheme to run would have made it over-complicated.

I have dealt with the sanctions and safeguards point—

Mr. MacShane: And with the trade union paymasters.

Mr. Burt: Well, it is Friday morning. What I said was true, and I see no reason to exclude it from my remarks.

Mr. Bradley: Just so the record is absolutely clear, I should declare that I am not a trade union-sponsored Member of Parliament.

Mr. Burt: I am delighted that the hon. Gentleman is not sponsored by a trade union. It places him in a minority among all his colleagues, but it is nice to know.

Mr. Robert Jackson (Wantage): Is not the point that it is not the hon. Gentleman but his whole party that is sponsored?

Mr. Burt: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for making such a valuable point which, I am sure, will not have been missed.

The delay in the introduction of the scheme until October 1996 was raised. We have referred to the difficulty of introducing some of the other changes in social security, and it is important to get these matters right. The only reason for the delay has been to give us extra time to make sure that all the necessary administration is in place. We will be busy next year as other changes in social security come through, and there is a danger of overload. We want to be sure that the scheme is off and running to the best of our ability.

Consideration must be given to Benefits Agency staff who must implement the scheme and who already do a tremendous amount of work in delivering the social security changes and basic social security work. We must take account of the pressures that they are under, and respond to them with a measure that has the approval of the whole House. I always feel strongly about that when I visit the staff, who do a great job. We are often asked by them to give extra time to implement the various changes and proposals that we have brought in over the years, and we have done so on this occasion.

The extra time allows us to undertake an evaluation prior to the introduction of the pilot scheme. We want to find out what employers are up to, and we want to get benchmark wages evaluated over a period of time. The delay gives us extra time to do that evaluation research, and I hope that I have made clear that the evaluation will not just run from the start of the pilot. It must be done beforehand, and there will be extra time to do it.

The hon. Member for Withington asked whether there was a commitment to spend on the national scheme after the pilot project is finished. That is a question to be considered at the end of the pilot scheme by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and my colleagues. We will take that decision in the light of circumstances at that time.

Mr. Bradley: The Minister should be consistent.

Mr. Burt: The whole point of the pilot is to try to find out precisely what will happen. There is no comparison between the two sides of the House when it comes to consistency, as the Government explain what we do and the principles upon which we work. It is cheek of the highest order for the hon. Gentleman to encourage me to make a financial commitment for the future. The Government clearly lay out their policies and financial commitments in Budget projections, and the total absence of any similar projections from the Opposition gives us a lopsided argument.

If the hon. Gentleman would like to take this opportunity to describe a whole range of policies and predictions for the post-election period should he sitting on this side of the House, we will be riveted. If he were to do that, I suspect that the House would be much fuller than it is now. But we will have to wait six months for the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury to think the unthinkable again. The Government have 8 May 1996—which marks the expiry of that six-month period—marked in our diary, and we shall be looking forward to that date.

To return to the details of the scheme, the 24-hour rule has been mentioned. We have introduced the easement from 16 hours to 24 hours in the jobseeker's allowance and income support for the future, but I did not understand the hon. Gentleman's point, as it is not relevant to earnings top-up. All that is needed is that at least one partner should be working for 16 hours or more, and the hours worked by the other partner are not relevant.

Rather than reducing incentives for partners of unemployed people and jobseeker's allowance and income support claimants to work, we are increasing them. From October 1996, we are increasing from 16 hours to 24 hours a week the number of hours that partners of jobseeker's allowance and income support claimants can work. That ensures that partners do not lose contact with employment. We are increasing the earnings disregard for couples on income support and jobseeker's allowance to £10 a week, and the back to work bonus lump sum is to be increased to £1,000 if either partner moves into work that takes them off income support or jobseeker's allowance.

For couples receiving in-work benefits, any increases in income by either the claimant or the partner will reduce benefit, but that does not mean that there is no incentive to increase the hours of work or to start work. For example, family credit or earnings top-up continues at the same rate as the 26-week award, irrespective of any increases in wages or even if a new second wage comes on-stream. Family credit and earnings top-up pay an extra £10 premium if a person's working hours increase to 30 a week or more, and having two partners in work will, in most cases, increase income sufficiently to lift them off benefit altogether. That is an aim we should all share.

A particular point connected with this matter is the poverty trap, to which the hon. Member for Withington referred. The hon. Gentleman asked if we could provide further examples, and I will be happy to do so. The Government looked into the matter when it came up. A small number of people will be affected, but the hon. Gentleman was right to draw attention to the matter. The problem arises in cases of payment of the 30-hour premium where earnings top-up falls below £10 a week. The premium is disregarded in housing benefit and council tax benefit, but an increase in earnings that leads to lower earnings top-up is not recognised in housing benefit and council tax benefit, and a claimant's net income can be reduced as a result of an increase in earnings. But the numbers of applicants who will be affected are negligible because it will affect people who are paying higher than average rents and who are entitled to very small amounts of earnings top-up.

The changes required to overcome the problem would introduce complexity, and the cost cannot be justified because of the number of people involved. I will exemplify the matter further to seek to reassure the hon. Gentleman. We looked at the matter when we saw that a problem could arise, and it was something that we would have liked to have tackled. The general trend since 1988 has been substantially to reduce the poverty trap, and while we do get some high marginal rates at the top end, there are substantially fewer people affected than before. We are anxious to eliminate the poverty trap wherever we can, but we feel that the numbers involved in this matter will not cause an over-riding problem.

I conclude by referring to a national minimum wage and in-work benefits.

Ms Lynne: Will the Minister answer my question about the loss of passported benefits, such as free prescriptions and free eye and dental check-ups, which

[Ms Lynne]

will happen as a result of the pilot test for earnings top-up? If the scheme goes nationwide, will that be changed? Will people still get those passported benefits?

Mr. Burt: I apologise to the hon. Lady for not answering her question earlier. I cannot give a commitment on that matter. The hon. Lady knows that we have to have a line for passported benefits to be applicable, and that line is income support. It would be difficult to consider at this stage expanding the scheme further to include earnings top-up. But the hon. Lady asked us to look at the matter during the pilot process, and we will. We must take account of whether passported benefits are an incentive or a disincentive to work. We do not believe that the benefits are as important as getting a job and having the right wage in the first place, but we will take the matter into account.

There remains a fundamental difference between the Government and the Opposition on the question of a minimum wage. I repeat the claim made by the Institute for Fiscal Studies that the richest 30 per cent. of the population would have a larger net gain from the minimum wage than the poorest 30 per cent., because the large majority of those on very low wages are members of families or households in which other members are earning higher wages.

Mr. Bradley: Does the bottom 30 per cent. to which the Minister referred include all pensioners who are not in work?

Mr. Burt: I think the quote must be about wage earners. From the context of the article, it must include all wage earners, but we will check that. There is no substance to the distinction that the hon. Gentleman is seeking to make, but I would be interested in the response to that point.

The claim made by the IFS is that the richest gain from the minimum wage rather than the poorest. That cannot be the hon. Gentleman's objective, but I believe the claim to be true. The people most affected would be young, single people living at home with their parents, and the wives of working husbands. The effects on poverty and inequality would be small.

We also know, from our experience of other European countries with a national minimum wage such as France, Belgium and Spain, that they all have rates of unemployment significantly higher than the United Kingdom. The DTI economists estimate that a national minimum wage of, say, £4.15 an hour as advocated by a number of larger trade unions could cost some 950,000 jobs with half restoration of pay differentials and 1.8 million jobs with full restoration of pay differentials.

Mr. MacShane: Can we move away from simply citing three or four European countries that have higher unemployment rates than the UK and have a minimum wage. Can we look, for example, at America or at Asia? Few Opposition Members are in favour of setting the rate that the DTI has plucked from the air. In speeches and papers, speaking only for myself, I have insisted that a minimum wage must be flexible, must be arrived at after consultation and should seek not to have any negative employment consequences.

Mr. Burt: One can seek to have no negative employment consequences from a minimum wage, but one will have them. That is the point. The figure has not been plucked out of the air—

Mr. MacShane: What about Asia?

Mr. Burt: I shall come to Asia in a minute.

I suspect that the figure of £4.15 commands quite a lot of attention from Labour party members in the hon. Gentleman's constituency, even if it does not command the attention of the Opposition Front Bench. I still believe that the fundamental questions are not being answered by the Opposition. It is a huge con to say that the rate will be set should the Labour party ever come to Government. The Opposition have not told people what the rate will be and have not dealt with the point about differentials. Those matters will be crucial and have never been dealt with seriously by the Labour party.

The hon. Member for Rotherham (Mr. MacShane) would like this country to have a social security system equivalent to those in the United States or Asia, but I do not think that the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury will take account of that in his deliberations. We have a European welfare structure, and Europe will have to compete with Asia and the United States for manufacturing jobs in goods and services, which means that our competitive edge must be excellent. We will not achieve that through the introduction of a minimum wage that would lose jobs, push up pay differentials and ruin competitiveness.

The hon. Member for Rotherham should talk to European employers and understand their concerns about continental Europe's competitiveness for the future. We are attracting investment because we have not signed up to the social chapter, and a number of our colleagues in Europe are only too sorry that they did not take the opportunity that we did.

When the Leader of the Opposition spoke to the Confederation of British Industry, he chronically misunderstood the social chapter when he declared that it was a set of principles from which Britain could pick and choose. Everyone knows that that is not the case. The social chapter is a commitment by majority voting to policies that might seriously damage employment prospects in this country. That misunderstanding combined with the minimum wage would be devastating for the United Kingdom. The Government want jobs to be protected, preserved and improved. The social protection measures proposed by the Opposition, however well meaning, could not do anything other than cause enormous harm.

We have had a good debate this morning which has ranged widely. A good pilot scheme is being introduced, which will tell us a great deal. I look forward to giving more information and advice. If Opposition Front Benchers would like the opportunity to meet officials over the next few months for a detailed briefing on the practicalities and operations, I would be happy to set that up. I think the whole House welcomes the scheme. The Government are making progress in improving in-work benefits as the best way of getting people into work. We

have proved our success in the past with family credit, and the success of the pilot scheme will prove that the Government have their fingers on the pulse of employment, jobs and benefits.

I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion, by leave, withdrawn.

Speed Cameras

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—[*Mr. Burns.*]

11.4 am

Mr. Robert Jackson (Wantage): I thank my hon. Friend the Minister for rushing back to be here for this debate, which has been brought forward somewhat. I congratulate his driver on getting him here along the M4 through the Thames Valley police area. In view of the subject matter of the debate, I hope that he did not drive too fast past any speed cameras.

In only a few minutes, I do not have time to address the criticisms of those who are opposed to speed cameras. I know that some people feel that there is something sneaky about them and that the increasingly widespread employment of that kind of technology in law enforcement is a threat to privacy. I respect those concerns. Doubtless, as we see more use of cameras generally for law enforcement—I think it is a policy of the Home Office to promote their use—the House will need to reconsider the privacy issues that are raised. However, when we passed the Road Traffic Act 1991, we approved the principle of using speed cameras to detect speeding motorists and I dare say the issues of principle were fully considered at that time.

We should not misjudge public opinion. Individuals who are caught speeding are often irritated and even angry. There was an article in one of the Sunday newspapers a few months ago by a journalist who had been caught speeding not once but twice in the same afternoon in Oxfordshire. He resented that and took advantage of his position as a columnist to complain about it. Opinion polls that ask people about the issue as an abstract proposition, and not in the immediate context of having just been detected speeding, show strong positive public support for speed cameras. For example, the 1993 Lex report on motoring asked those interviewed their attitude to the statement:

"cameras to catch people speeding or going through red lights are an important contribution to road safety".

Some 86 per cent. of those asked agreed with that statement. A recent survey by the firm Autoglass found that six out of 10 drivers thought that speeding was as socially unacceptable as drink-driving.

Why is there public support for speed cameras? I think they are simply common sense. People know by instinct the high cost, to individuals, families and society as a whole, of road accidents, and they know by instinct that there is a connection between road accidents and speeding.

The practical question is whether speed cameras make a difference. They have been in operation in Germany, the Netherlands and some states of Australia for a number of years. They have also been in operation in this country since the implementation of the Road Traffic Act 1991, notably in Oxfordshire where three years ago a special initiative to introduce the cameras was adopted jointly by the Thames Valley police and Oxfordshire county council. I wish to pay public tribute to the two officials most closely involved, Chief Superintendent Peter Viner of the Thames Valley police, and David Hook, the county engineer.

[Mr. Robert Jackson]

Our experience in Oxfordshire demonstrates that speed cameras are effective in reducing accident rates. Since the cameras were introduced, accidents at camera sites have fallen by 36 per cent., casualties are down by 31 per cent. and serious and fatal accidents are down by 23 per cent.

The gains to the individuals and the families who have been spared death or maiming are obvious. The House always has a duty to recognise the wider social and economic gains. The Thames Valley police have given me an estimate that a mere 1 mph reduction in overall speeds would give the NHS at least £31 million a year to spend on other things. Social services would have to pay less to victims or their families by way of benefits and disability allowances. The emergency services would require less resources if there were fewer accidents to clear up. On the wider economic front, congestion costs on the roads would be reduced and fewer accidents would mean that less output would be lost from the economy.

The principle of speed cameras is right and the evidence justifies the view that the House took in 1991 when it voted for its introduction. The problem is essentially one of implementation and there we come to the problem of financing, which is what I am mainly concerned with today.

Although speed cameras are being slowly introduced around the country, the fact is that, because of pressure on their budgets which I do not expect to be relaxed in the near future, few police forces can afford to introduce speed cameras, their related equipment and the civilian staff to process the data. The Thames Valley police and Oxfordshire county council, working together, have put over £500,000 into their scheme, but that is still exceptional across the country. If the policy is to be implemented on the appropriate scale and the full benefits reaped, there has to be more financial support or stronger financial incentives to encourage the authorities responsible for road safety to introduce and operate it.

The obvious way forward is to tap some of the funds that are generated by fine income for the introduction of speed cameras. Thames Valley police currently operate no more than 16 cameras at over 200 locations in their police area. That generates an income from fixed-penalty fines of some £2 million a year. The money goes, in toto, to the Treasury. None of it is, at present, directly available to sustain the arrangements that generate that income.

Against that background, I and other Oxfordshire Members have been pressing the Home Office and the Treasury for action to enable some of the resources generated by the policy to be used to finance it. I do not know whether the Home Office has some concealed doubts about the principle of the speed cameras policy. If it does, I hope that it will say so and justify those doubts. If it does not regard road safety as a priority, it should say so and explain why; and ditto if it has any doubts about the efficacy of speed cameras in promoting road safety or, indeed, about the principle of remote surveillance.

Meanwhile, the Home Office is presenting the problem as essentially one of Treasury doctrine, specifically the Treasury doctrine against hypothecation. Of course, there is a good case against hypothecation. It was summed up in a recent letter on the subject from my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary to my right hon. Friend the Member for Witney (Mr. Hurd) which, in connection with speed cameras, argued:

"the earmarking of revenues, or hypothecation, could lead to waste and poor value for money in the areas it happened to favour, and to problems in financing other essential elements of public spending."

I do not accept the validity of the second part of that sentence, which suggests that there might be problems in financing other essential elements of public spending but I recognise that the first part, about possible waste and poor value for money, has a point. On the other hand, there is also no doubt that the lack of finance is preventing the full realisation of the speed camera policy with all its potential economic and social gains. That, too, needs to be fed into the equation and balanced against the anti-hypothecation doctrine, which I do not believe can, or should be, regarded as an absolute that blocks all progress.

Meanwhile, it cannot be said that the Treasury is incapable of striking such a balance between its doctrine and practical common sense. The Road Traffic Act 1991 provided that the enforcement income arising from parking offences in the 34 London boroughs could be retained by those boroughs. That policy has now been extended across the whole country. Indeed, I understand that Oxfordshire county council is considering the introduction of such a scheme in Oxford city. If measures against illegal parking can be financed by retaining the income from fixed penalties, I ask myself, why can the operation of speed cameras not be so financed?

Let me give another, perhaps somewhat more remote, instance. In the summer, I and other members of the all-party arts and heritage group had the privilege and pleasure of visiting Hampton Court, which has been transformed over the past 10 years by the work of the Historic Royal Palaces agency. That achievement was possible only because the Treasury has been prepared to relax its hypothecation doctrine and allow the agency to retain the gate fee from visitors, thus giving it and its staff both a financial incentive to attract visitors and the means by which to make the palaces more attractive to visitors. That was a welcome instance of a relaxation of Treasury doctrine in the direction of common sense and an interesting parallel with the case that we are considering today.

I understand very well that there would be legitimate grounds for complaint if speed cameras were to come to be regarded by local authorities and the police as an additional source of revenue. There would be real problems if the public were to come to believe that that was how they were regarded. Welcome as it might be to Oxfordshire's hard-pressed schools if some of the money generated by speeding fines in the county of Oxfordshire could be spent on them, it would be a mistaken approach. We need a financial system which allows the police and local authorities to retain enough of the fine income generated by speed cameras to cover the cost of their introduction and operation. In that respect, section 55 of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 could be a model. It requires that any surplus income from fines for parking offences over the costs of policing them has to be declared annually and its expenditure has to be ring-fenced.

In the context of speed cameras, the surplus revenue from costs should probably continue to flow to the Treasury, although that would of course not necessarily provide any guarantees for the public against suspicion that the policy has a revenue-raising, as well as a road safety, motivation. Indeed, perhaps the best way forward would once again be to follow what I understand to be

the policy of the 1984 Act, according to which surplus income from parking fines has to be applied to the support of public transport or to highways improvement.

It is not my purpose today to pursue those details. My point is simple. The House has voted for a certain policy: the introduction of speed cameras. That policy can be demonstrated to be working and shown to have substantial benefits. The widespread implementation of the policy is being blocked and hindered by a lack of financial resources. A ready remedy lies to hand, but access to it is denied by a combination of Home Office misgivings and Treasury absolutism. That Treasury absolutism can be shown to be less absolute than it has been presented by the Home Office. It is time that the Home Office committed itself to making this valuable and worthwhile policy effective.

11.17 am

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. David Maclean): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Wantage (Mr. Jackson) on his success in obtaining this debate, which raises an important issue. The Government recognise that the judicious use of speed cameras has a role in improving the effective and efficient policing of road traffic and in the promotion of road safety. There is not, therefore, a fundamental difference of view with my hon. Friend about the use of such cameras. The issue is how improvements in the use of cameras can best be made and how they can be funded. It is important therefore that the background to the issue is fully recognised.

The road traffic law review report, or North report, recommended in 1988 that the law should be changed to allow the use of cameras for enforcing road traffic law. The Government accepted that recommendation and the law was changed by the Road Traffic Act 1991. The changes came into effect on 1 July 1992. The Government have always supported the use of speed cameras as a means of enforcing speed limits and reducing casualties on our roads, and there has been a significant growth in their use.

Thames Valley police—the police force in my hon. Friend's constituency—and its highway authorities have been at the forefront of the development of cameras, on which I congratulate them. In 1994, Thames Valley police dealt with over 41,000 speeding offences that were detected by cameras. Only one and a half hours ago, I was at the police college in Bramshill. I hope that offences this year do not increase to 41,001 purely because of my driving along the M4 in the past hour. I shall pass any bills on to my hon. Friend.

In England and Wales in 1994, 156,000 traffic offences were dealt with following detection by camera. Some 74 per cent. of those were speeding offences and the balance were red light offences.

Despite those developments in the use of cameras, I recognise that their funding has always been a difficult issue. The funding arrangements are not fixed, but it was originally expected that the police would be responsible for the purchase and running costs of cameras, while the highway authority would be responsible for the installation and site maintenance. The Home Office circular that set out the arrangements, however, made it clear that other funding arrangements could be agreed between the police and the highway authorities. The provision for alternative funding arrangements recognised that the highway authorities have a responsibility to promote road safety and that they might consider funding cameras.

The developments since the 1991 Act came into force have shown that highway authorities have so far funded the purchase of more cameras than the police service. The police funds for cameras come under the police forces' vehicle and minor works budget. The money available for forces in England and Wales to purchase cameras in 1995-96 is £150.8 million, of which the Home Office funds some 51 per cent. Of course, the police have many demands on their budgets and may not have been able to give the priority to the purchase and running of cameras that they would wish. The police services have difficult spending choices to make.

Against that background, I understand why a number of hon. Members have written to the Home Office to suggest that the fine income from cameras, or at least some of it, should be reinvested directly into the purchase and running of more cameras. My hon. Friend has explained in some detail why such a course would be beneficial. I have also recently received a detailed report from the chairman of the environment committee of the royal county of Berkshire about the hypothecation of speeding fines. I am very familiar with that issue and I know that the primary motive underlying such requests is the promotion of road safety. I have to say, however, that the matter is rather more complicated than it first appears. There are a number of difficulties with the idea of recycling fine income in the way proposed.

Mr. Robert Jackson: Will my right hon. Friend give us the total amount of fine income that has been provided to the Treasury from this policy?

Mr. Maclean: I cannot offhand. If I cannot supply my hon. Friend with the information by the end of the debate, I shall send it to him.

My hon. Friend mentioned hypothecation and I am glad that he recognises that there is a powerful case against the hypothecation of tax revenues, which my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for the Home Department put in his letter. It can lead to waste and poor value for money in some of the areas that happen to be favoured by it.

There is another reason to be wary of proposals involving hypothecation. If Government revenue is hypothecated and is allowed to rise in an uncontrolled way, it will either drive up the total of public spending, which I am sure that my hon. Friend would not want to happen, or squeeze out other priorities. Again, neither he nor I would want that.

My hon. Friend mentioned his visit to Hampton Court palace. The Historic Royal Palaces agency is allowed to keep the gate fees from visitors who happen to go to Hampton Court, but that is not hypothecation. The fees that visitors pay are no more taxes than the charges for entering Madame Tussauds or the cost of tickets to the theatre, so the question of hypothecation does not arise.

It is true that we have allowed local authorities to retain the proceeds of penalty charges for parking fines, but changing the recipient of the income does not change its nature or classification. Local authorities still have to account for the revenue that they receive and the expenditure they incur. We have to take account of that expenditure in assessing priorities.

[Mr. Maclean]

As my hon. Friend knows, the income from fines imposed by courts goes to the Consolidated Fund at the Exchequer. We believe that, in 1994, fine income from speed and red light cameras amounted to about £8.7 million. The money, along with other income, is then allocated to spending, according to Government spending priorities.

Just because speed cameras can generate fine income for the Treasury, it does not follow automatically that some of that money should be reinvested in cameras. There are Government priorities that do not generate any income and funding for those has to come from somewhere and has to be taken care of in the national cake. The first point is, therefore, whether the cameras should have a greater priority in spending decisions and I shall return to that.

There are other equally serious difficulties in recycling speeding fine income. Foremost is the importance of never forgetting that speed cameras have been introduced to promote road safety, not to make money for anyone. They were not designed to generate income. It is essential that they are never seen as money-making machines, to be placed at honey spots on roads, where they can make money. They should be placed by roads where there is a danger or a risk, or where speed has to be reduced.

Cameras form part of the law enforcement methods used by the police and it is vital that the public recognise the reasons why cameras are deployed and continue to support their use. The impersonal enforcement of traffic law by technology makes it all the more important that the road safety purpose of cameras is understood and supported by the public. Indeed, that is a part of policing by consent. Public opinion surveys have shown that speed cameras have good public support at present. That is only so because they understand why they are being used. The reasons are better understood and the public know that there is a road safety purpose. If there were any suggestion that the cameras were being introduced merely to generate income and that those operating them had a vested interest in the fine income, it could undermine support.

Mr. Jackson: My right hon. Friend will realise that I recognised that point in my speech. I hope that he will comment on my suggestion that the principle of the 1984 Act could be followed as an answer to it.

Mr. Maclean: My hon. Friend has made an interesting suggestion. Later I will tell him what we are considering and he might not be disappointed by our approach. I wanted to stress some of my fears. We must be careful about using this interesting and helpful technology, which can benefit the police and generate fine income, but, and this is of prime importance, can also reduce accidents, casualties and deaths on our roads and lead to a safer and better environment. It is a goose that is laying a golden egg by delivering, not money, but a safer and better road system. We must be careful to do nothing that kills off those benefits.

My hon. Friend is also motivated by a concern to promote road safety, and that is the purpose of the police and the local authorities in his constituency. It is no idle speculation to say, however, that using cameras to generate income puts at risk the road safety objective. There is already evidence of that in Canada. The former local authority in Ontario recently used speed cameras in a way that was seen by the public as purely for income generation. They turned against the cameras and in the local election the Opposition promised to ban them. They won and speed cameras have now been banned in Ontario.

It is not too far fetched to say that there is a lesson to be learnt from Ontario. Retaining public support is vital. We should retain public support in the way in which cameras are deployed. They are not deployed simply to catch speeders and collect their fines. The approach is to focus on accident black spots, where the greatest saving in lives and injuries can be made. Moreover, the use of speed cameras is signed to warn motorists that they face detection, because we want to see motorists complying with the law rather than having to enforce it. We put up signs to warn motorists rather than just sneakily catching them out. Enforcement is the last, but necessary, resort. Again, that is part of policing by consent.

But there is, of course, a dilemma within that approach if the police or highway authority want to rely on fine income for their camera operations. The more successful they are at getting the public to comply with speed limits, the less income they receive. There are ways in which that problem can be lessened, but it is, nevertheless, a point that needs to be borne in mind by those who advocate hypothecation of fine income from speed cameras. It is necessary to take a long-term view of the funding issue and not base a strategy on the immediate effects and results of camera technology.

From what I have said, I know that my hon. Friend will appreciate that there are real difficulties in simply adopting a policy of recycling fine income from speed cameras. We need a considered strategy that does not put the road safety objective at risk. It must also show how best to use the cameras efficiently and effectively. The one thing of which we are currently certain is that there should not be a direct link between fine income and funding. That would undermine the road safety objective of the cameras. The funding of cameras and the enforcement of the law must be seen to be impartial. They must be separated. I know that the traffic committee of the Association of Chief Police Officers in England and Wales shares that concern.

We have not been idle. The Government have been active in our assessment of the use of camera technology for enforcing road traffic law. The review of road traffic policing, which formed part of the review of police core and ancillary tasks, considered the role of camera technology. It recommended that the funding arrangements for the cameras should be re-examined. The review group, which included the chairman and secretary of ACPO's traffic committee, also recognised the importance of not having a link between the funding of cameras and the fine income. The Government have accepted the recommendation to re-examine the current funding arrangements.

I mentioned earlier that we need to see whether cameras should be given a higher priority in spending decisions. To do that, we need to establish clearly the costs and benefits associated with their use. Much of the support for their increased use has grown from their perceived effectiveness in reducing average speeds and the level of casualties at or near their sites. It is certainly true that much of the research undertaken on particular schemes has shown good results. For example, the Department of

Transport's study of camera sites in west London shows that cameras there helped to reduce road deaths and serious casualties in the area by more than a third in their first full year of operation. Those casualties fell from 297 to 187. It is also worth noting that, in the same period, drivers' journey times improved.

But some other evidence of the cameras' success is more anecdotal and scattered. We know that the success of cameras has not been universal. The review of road traffic policing noted that more evidence needed to be collected on the effectiveness of cameras. It seems clear that much depends on the way in which the cameras are used. That covers not only their deployment but the supporting legal and penalty structure for dealing with offenders. It could also include the question whether the use of cameras has reached a saturation point at which the public consider their use to be oppressive. Nor do we know what the longer-term projections may show about the success of cameras.

Much has been made of the idea that the costs of cameras are outweighed by their benefits. Some of their benefits have been identified and costed. The savings in casualties can be costed using the Department of Transport standard costings: a fatality costs £784,000 and a serious injury £89,000. But other savings have not been fully calculated, such as the savings in police time and other savings to the health service.

On the other hand, there is the question of cost. The cost of operating the cameras has been calculated in some individual operations, but it is common to overlook the fact that there are costs over and above the capital and police running costs of a system. In particular, there are the costs to the courts of dealing with an offender, either by fixed penalty or by prosecution. Where prosecution is involved, there can also be a cost for the Crown Prosecution Service.

Generally, my hon. Friend will be pleased to hear that the conclusion that we have reached so far is that there is a good prima facie case for believing that cameras can bring substantial benefits, but that there are still some areas of uncertainty that need to be examined. In the light of those concerns, we have recently commissioned consultants to carry out a cost benefit study of speed cameras and traffic light cameras. The work is being carried out by a team from Price Waterhouse, and the study is at an early stage. The study is supported by the traffic committee of ACPO, and I know that Thames Valley police—my hon. Friend's own police force—is among the forces that the consultants want to visit.

Mr. Jackson: When does my right hon. Friend expect the consultants to produce their report?

Mr. Maclean: It is difficult to say when it will be produced, but I want to get it as soon as I can. It is an issue on which we want to take a fairly early view, so I will not set them a leisurely time scale in which to do it. On the other hand, I want to ensure that they get all the information and evidence that they wish, and I can see no objection if my hon. Friend wishes to give them information or evidence of his experience. I would certainly not tie their hands in the information that they collect and the views that they are given. I will also want to ensure that they talk to the highway authorities and draw on their experience, and consult the county surveyors.

Having said that, I want to get the report in the new year. We will then be in a much better position to assess the effectiveness of cameras and also to address the issue of funding in the light of it. I would emphasise, however, that we do not support a direct link between fine income and cameras. The prime issue is promoting road safety. That is paramount.

I am grateful that my hon. Friend has raised this issue today. It is an important issue that the Government are keen to address and on which to reach a final and considered conclusion. Our initial conclusion is that there can be substantial benefits from speed cameras. The process in which we are now engaged with Price Waterhouse and ACPO is ensuring that we get it right. If we get it right, we will satisfy the points that my hon. Friend made about the spread of cameras; we will have got the financing for it right; the fine income generated will be considered appropriate by the public; the public will continue to accept speed cameras as a good thing; and, of prime importance, we can cut substantially road accidents and traffic deaths.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-three minutes to Twelve o'clock.

House of Commons

Monday 27 November 1995

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

TRANSPORT

Newbury Bypass

1. **Mr. David Martin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the likely starting date for the construction of the Newbury bypass. [643]

The Minister for Railways and Roads (Mr. John Watts): Tenders will be invited for the main works contract on Friday 1 December. We aim to start the main works as soon as possible in 1996. We have already carried out all the necessary demolition of buildings on the route and clearance of the rest of the site will take place before the main works begin. Construction should then be completed within two years.

Mr. Martin: I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on keeping the scheme in the roads programme during a difficult public expenditure round. He knows how important the road is for those who live and work in Newbury and all points south, including Portsmouth, as a connection with the midlands and the north. Will the Minister ensure that what he has said today is well publicised, as there has been considerable trouble making by the Liberals, who have been doubting the Government's intention to proceed with the scheme?

Mr. Watts: Trouble making by Liberals or anyone else is much to be deplored. The former Secretary of State, my right hon. Friend the Member for Peterborough (Dr. Mawhinney), announced in July that the road would go ahead. My right hon. Friend the present Secretary of State made the same announcement in October. I do not know how many times we need to say so, but go ahead it will.

West Coast Main Line

2. **Mr. Nigel Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many passengers used the west coast main line in 1994. [644]

Mr. Watts: I understand that some 11 million passenger journeys were made on InterCity West Coast services during the financial year 1994-95.

Mr. Evans: That is an excellent figure, but does my hon. Friend agree that it would improve greatly if we invested the sums necessary to upgrade the west coast main line as quickly as possible? It is important strategically to the United Kingdom for manufacturing and tourism and for places such as Manchester which wish to attract the Commonwealth games and, one hopes, make a successful bid for the Olympic games in future. Can my hon. Friend say exactly when the west coast main line will be upgraded, as the speed with which that happens is important for those of us who live in the area?

Mr. Watts: My hon. Friend is right to point out the importance of that key line. The contract for the development of the new state-of-the-art signalling system is on line to be let by Railtrack early next year. Next year, Railtrack also intends to let contracts for the main infrastructure works to the track and power supplies.

Mr. Olner: Surely the Minister realises that the past two years of dithering, during which money has been promised but not spent, has meant that many of those 11 million passengers arrived late or had their services cancelled. When will he take action to get the promised money in place?

Mr. Watts: Railtrack continues to spend substantial money on the west coast main line every year. As I have just explained to the House, the key to the upgrade project is the development of the new signalling system. It has been put out to tender, there has been enormous interest from the private sector in developing a new system under the private finance initiative and the contracts will be let early next year. The contracts for the main upgrading work will also start to be let in the course of next year.

Mr. Gill: Is my hon. Friend prepared to analyse the 11 million passengers to discern how many of them join the west coast main line at Birmingham international or Wolverhampton because of the withdrawal of the inter-city line to Shrewsbury? In his future deliberations, will he consider extending electrification from Wolverhampton to Shrewsbury so that my constituents in that county town can be served by an inter-city electrified service?

Mr. Watts: I do not have at my fingertips the information that my hon. Friend requires, but I shall certainly draw his remarks to the attention of Railtrack.

Rail Privatisation

3. **Mr. Janner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what are his proposals for the privatisation of the rail industry. [645]

The Secretary of State for Transport (Sir George Young): Our proposals are to improve the efficiency of the railways by transferring the British Rail businesses into the private sector. The rolling stock leasing companies—Roscos—and some of the other businesses have been sold, the first franchises are on course to be awarded next month and we are on course to privatise Railtrack in the spring of 1996.

Mr. Janner: Has the right hon. Gentleman read the decision of Mr. Justice Brooke in the case brought by the Save our Railways group against passenger rail franchising, in which the judge granted a judicial review? Does he propose to respect the decision of the High Court and to postpone franchising while the review takes place, or will he once again do what the Government do so often, which is simply attack the judge because he disagrees with the judge's decision?

Sir George Young: As the hon. and learned Gentleman may know, the Government were not a party to the

decision—it was against the franchising director of the Office of Passenger Rail Franchising. As a barrister, he will understand that the court has done no more than decide that there is a case which should be considered in more detail. The decision does not affect the franchising process, which is going well, and the first franchises are due to be awarded before the end of the year. It is business as usual. We are confident that Opraf has a strong case and that the court will recognise that.

Mr. Waller: I am sure that my right hon. Friend agrees that the best basis on which to judge privatisation is the quality of service to customers. Does he also agree that the rolling stock companies are now thinking of developing innovative new trains that would make use of information technology to provide the very best service, comparable with that currently enjoyed by airline passengers?

Sir George Young: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The rolling stock companies, now in private sector hands, have an appetite for investment and access to the necessary funds. I am confident that, as with all previous privatisations, investment will increase after privatisation and be higher than it would have been had BR remained in the public sector.

Mr. Chidgey: Will the right hon. Gentleman confirm that not all the track access charges have been fully expended by Railtrack on the repair and renewal of the rail infrastructure? Will he call for a report from the Rail Regulator, setting out what actions should be taken to deal with the matter, before the proposals for the privatisation of Railtrack are completed?

Sir George Young: As I am sure the hon. Gentleman knows, the Rail Regulator, John Swift, has all the powers that he needs to ensure that the provision made for track access charges under the Railtrack regime is spent on that purpose.

Mr. Robathan: Is my right hon. Friend aware that, before the war and before rail nationalisation in 1947, there were about 15 railway stations in my constituency, yet under a nationalised British Rail all those stations were closed, although one—but only one—has now been reopened? Does he agree that it is extraordinary that people should now try to defend British Rail, whose history has been one of decay, closure and inefficiency, and which has been the butt of endless jokes for the past 48 years?

Sir George Young: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I am confident that under a privatised railway we will reverse the decline in the use of the railways over the past 40 to 50 years. My hon. Friend will be interested to know that, since 1979, 224 stations have been opened or reopened—a record that knocks into a cocked hat the record of the Labour party when it was in government.

Ms Short: The minimum conditions laid down for the initial franchises to run rail services do not meet the requirements of the Government's own legislation—which is that they be based on the timetable operated by British Rail immediately prior to franchising. Will the right hon. Gentleman confirm that on many inter-city services there have been cuts of a third or more and that, in the case of the Gatwick express, services are to be slashed from every 15 minutes to every 30 minutes, with no requirement that there be any trains after 8 o'clock?

The right hon. Gentleman should not wait for the courts to force him to comply with his own legislation; instead, he should halt the privatisation process and not restore it unless and until he can provide services under privatisation that are at least as good as current services.

Sir George Young: It is for the judge, not me, to decide the response to the hon. Lady's first question. However, I said in my earlier reply that Opraf was putting forward the case with vigour.

On the hon. Lady's substantive point, I wonder whether she has read the Transport Select Committee's report—which was unanimous—which says about the very issue that she raised:

"We agree that franchisees must be allowed some flexibility in the provision of services and in operational matters. We also have no objection in principle to the omission of profitable services from PSRs, since it will be in franchisees' interests to provide them."

Mr. Congdon: Given that British Rail is hardly an example of a well-run organisation that puts the interests of its customers first, does my right hon. Friend agree that much can and will be gained by its privatisation? Does he also agree that the Opposition Members who opposed the privatisation of British Airways are also among those who are opposed to the privatisation of British Rail? Is it not the case that they were wrong then and that they are wrong now?

Sir George Young: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. He may have seen with some astonishment the statement by a shadow transport spokesman that a Labour Government would confiscate a franchise even if the franchisee were providing a better service to the passengers at a lower cost to the taxpayers. That is the absurd dogma presented by the Labour party. It is also the case that the Labour party opposes privatisation but, when an industry is successfully privatised, Labour-controlled local authorities then invest in the privatised industries and share in those industries' growth and success.

Urban Congestion

4. **Mr. Jon Owen Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to act to reduce urban congestion. [646]

The Minister for Transport in London (Mr. Steve Norris): Local authorities are best placed to tackle the problems caused by urban congestion in their areas. The Government will continue to assist through the resources that they make available to local authorities for transport investment.

Mr. Jones: If it is all down to local authorities, why did the former Secretary of State for Transport say in his comments to the Transport Select Committee that the Government needed to address that matter? During the past 16 years, we have seen continuous growth in the number of vehicles on our roads, and the roads cannot take it, especially those in our cities. Urban congestion is probably the largest transport issue, yet the Government are complacent and do nothing except deregulate buses. Bus deregulation puts more coaches on to the roads but they have fewer passengers in them, which is the very opposite of what is needed.

Mr. Norris: It may be that confinement to the Whips Office has blunted the hon. Gentleman's appreciation of

the great transport debate which the previous Secretary of State for Transport initiated and to which many Opposition Members responded enthusiastically. It may come as a further disappointment to the hon. Gentleman to know that the broad principles of that debate are well established and that local authorities across the country welcome the package approach to the local transport settlement. They see it as the right way forward which brings a comprehensive local transport solution. Incidentally, they have been enthusiastic applicants for the package in this year's settlement round.

Sir David Mitchell: On congestion, may I revert to the Newbury bypass and ask whether my hon. Friend will take effective action to stop the bypass being obstructed by those who flout the law?

Mr. Norris: Yes, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Allen: Is the Minister aware that one of the best ways to reduce congestion might be to encourage the greater use of school buses and coaches but that, to do that, we need to convince parents that using school transport is better than taking children to and from school in the morning and evening? Will he therefore consider introducing legislation to make the wearing of seat belts on school buses compulsory? Will he also ensure that old vehicles are brought up to standard so that parents are reassured? I hope that he will not hide behind the European Community, as this matter is entirely within the competence of the British Government. Will he please ensure that they introduce the relevant legislation?

Mr. Norris: The hon. Gentleman is right to say that school transport is important. About a third of all vehicles on the road in the morning rush hour are said to be school journey related. He is equally right to say that such journeys would be better undertaken by more efficient forms of transport such as the school bus. Sadly, however, he is wrong to suggest that the problem lies in the compulsory wearing of seat belts. I warn him not to take that course. If it is a commitment that he is making on behalf of his party, I should be interested to hear him expand on it.

If the hon. Gentleman is referring to the fitment of seat belts, which might be a more accurate expression of his question, he should know that the legal position is that this country is, in fact, leading the way in Europe. This is the one country that has understood the importance of such a development for schoolchildren everywhere and it is making excellent progress, despite the best efforts of the Commission, to ensure that the measure is implemented at the earliest possible date. I hope that it is something in which the hon. Gentleman at least will be prepared to take a little pride.

Sir Peter Emery: Will my hon. Friend, who I know is very concerned about congestion in cities, consider the worsening situation caused by the growing number of articulated vehicles being used for daytime deliveries, often in very crowded areas of a city? Will he consider bringing about powers so that, in certain areas, deliveries are limited to 30 cwt vans rather than massive articulated lorries?

Mr. Norris: My right hon. Friend makes a valid point. It is indeed of concern to us that so much of the problem, in our medieval towns particularly, is caused by heavy vehicles. Several local authorities have now instituted arrangements whereby deliveries can be made only early in the morning or late at night. In fact, we are looking at the proposition of having a general distribution depot located on the fringe of a town from which journeys into the town could be made by much smaller vehicles. My right hon. Friend is on to a very good point.

Marine Safety

6. **Mr. Denham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the role of the Marine Safety Agency on ensuring compliance with the safety of life at sea—SOLAS—and health regulations. [648]

Mr. Norris: The Marine Safety Agency aims to ensure the compliance of United Kingdom ships with international ship safety standards. It also checks a proportion of foreign ships calling at UK ports for compliance with those standards. It has similar functions for standards of food hygiene and supply, and catering facilities for crews on board ships. Of course, the application of public health and food hygiene regulations to passenger areas is a matter for port health authorities.

Mr. Denham: Will the Minister confirm that the United States coastguard report on the QEII's arrival in New York in December criticised the Marine Safety Agency, called for action against it, and said:

"I do not see how any country could interpret Safety of Life at Sea regulations as was done in this case."?

Although the QEII's problem voyage is—thankfully—history, does not that disturbing episode raise a question about the ability of the Marine Safety Agency to guarantee safety for passengers stepping aboard any vessel leaving any port in this country? Is not a top-to-bottom shake-up of the MSA required, so that it does what the Minister says that it does, and ensures that regulations are interpreted in this country as they are in the United States and other countries?

Mr. Norris: In my experience, the MSA does a first-class job, as, I would think, the majority of the hon. Gentleman's constituents employed in the marine industry might have occasion to tell him. As he knows, the MSA is conducting an investigation into the matters surrounding the QEII sailing in 1994. My understanding is that that report will be issued shortly.

Mr. Matthew Banks: May I congratulate my hon. Friend and the Government Front-Bench team on their response to the recent Transport Select Committee report in relation to safety at sea? Does my hon. Friend agree that it is important that the Government work at international level to raise safety standards on our seas, because passengers do not simply travel on safe British ferries?

Mr. Norris: My hon. Friend is entirely right. He will know, as I do, that the Government's intention is to apply the highest possible standards in that regard and that the International Maritime Organisation is currently in session discussing that very topic.

Pedestrian Crossings

7. **Mr. Simon Coombs:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many pedestrians have been killed at pedestrian crossings in the past five years; and if he will make a statement. [649]

Mr. Norris: In all, 541 pedestrians were killed at crossings in Great Britain between 1990 and 1994, but there was a 25 per cent. decline in the yearly totals over the same period.

Mr. Coombs: Does my hon. Friend agree that, although those figures obviously show very satisfactory progress in the right direction, they are still far too high? Frankly, should we not expect that pedestrian crossings are safe places for pedestrians to cross roads? Will my hon. Friend therefore initiate discussions with representatives of the police and ask them to give closer attention to monitoring the behaviour of motorists and pedestrians at such crossings to enable improvement of the figures still further in future?

Mr. Norris: I will, of course, bear very much in mind what my hon. Friend has said. I should point out to him one or two important matters. First, pedestrian fatalities are at their lowest level since records began in 1926. Secondly, a Uniroyal survey showed that about 90 per cent. of pedestrians who used signalled crossings, including pelican crossings, crossed the road against the red pedestrian stop light; perhaps pedestrians should bear that in mind. The survey also showed that 95 per cent. of all motorists in London stopped immediately at a zebra crossing when pedestrians were waiting to cross.

Mr. Barnes: Are cameras not one of the most effective ways in which to control traffic, because drivers then obey the rules? Would it not be fruitful to have more cameras in the vicinity of pedestrian crossings to ensure that people's behaviour there was correct? Would it not be helpful, therefore, for the Government to supply county councils and others with the funds to install cameras?

Mr. Norris: The hon. Gentleman raises an interesting point. It is certainly true that camera technology has helped us tremendously with speed reduction. It has saved dozens of lives and it has overcome any initial reservations about its use. We have in mind the extension of camera technology for precisely the reasons that the hon. Gentleman outlined. I hope that he will appreciate that I cannot give undertakings at this stage about the untried project to which he referred. However, we bear it very much in mind.

Sir Irvine Patnick: I thank my hon. Friend. What steps is he taking to ensure that councils, such as Sheffield, adequately illuminate pedestrian crossings and deal with dangerous junctions, such as the one at Abbey lane and Abbeydale road south where another serious accident took place as recently as last Saturday?

Mr. Norris: Guidelines are published by my Department on the installation of pedestrian crossings and one of the matters that are considered is their illumination. My hon. Friend is right to draw to the House's attention the fact that, for every local authority, there can be no more important function than trying to reduce the utterly needless waste of 70 lives which, tragically, are still lost on our roads each week.

West Coast Main Line

8. **Mr. Rooker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the timetable for upgrading of track and signals on the west coast main line. [650]

Mr. Watts: The tendering process for the new signalling system is well under way. Tenders have been received and Railtrack is aiming to let the contract early next year. Railtrack expects to let the main contract for upgrading the west coast main line during 1996. The whole modernisation programme is expected to take around eight years to complete.

Mr. Rooker: I thank the Minister for that answer. May we have a commitment, in so far as it is possible to give one, that the priority in upgrading the west coast main line will be the stretch between London and Birmingham? The Birmingham loop is a disaster and it tends to be neglected when the west coast main line is discussed. Given that in that city we have the national indoor arena, the national exhibition centre and the international convention centre, which were all put there without central Government funds, whereas other parts of the country, especially the north-west, have had some financial featherbedding, the Government must give a commitment that the priority will be the Birmingham-London stretch of the west coast main line.

Mr. Watts: I do not wish to add to any inter-regional strife between Opposition Members. The hon. Gentleman is right: the southern stretch of the west coast main line was modernised furthest back in history and is, therefore, a priority. Services to Birmingham will be a priority within the overall project.

Mr. Brandreth: Can my hon. Friend confirm that, over the past five years, there has been £6 billion of investment in our railways? Does he agree that the west coast main line is a priority overall, including the stretch to Crewe and off to Chester? We need investment from Government, from the European Union and especially from the private sector to ensure that we have a superb main line railway service from the south up to and into the heart of the north-west.

Mr. Watts: My hon. Friend is right to say that the west coast main line modernisation is the biggest and most important project in the domestic railways.

Transport (London)

9. **Mrs. Bridget Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is his estimate of the financial benefits to business of London's public transport system. [651]

Sir George Young: London's public transport system brings great benefits to both business and individuals, as was confirmed in the independent Healy and Baker 1995 report on Europe's top cities, in which London came first in terms of both international and external transport.

Mrs. Prentice: Given that the direct benefit of the London underground network to London is some £1.2 billion and to the economy as a whole is some £2 billion, why are the Government cutting London Transport's grant by about 32 per cent. in the next three years? Was the Secretary of State's warning, that London Underground's core funding will be threatened in tomorrow's Budget, true?

Sir George Young: The hon. Lady will have to wait until tomorrow to see what my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor has to say. Investment in London Underground in the past three years has been higher than at any time in the previous two decades. That puts a slightly different gloss on the picture painted by the hon. Lady.

Mr. Dykes: May I once again welcome the construction of the Jubilee line extension, which will take the route from docklands to the terminus in my constituency? There is already an excellent service on that line, with trains running at a maximum of every seven minutes during the daytime. Will my right hon. Friend confirm that the number of jobs created originally by that massive scheme—opened by my hon. Friend the Minister for Transport in London—has increased at the margins since then? Many business people use the service now, and an increasing number will use it in the future. Will my right hon. Friend press for additional new rolling stock for the Metropolitan line for similar purposes? I have no Nolan interest to declare.

Sir George Young: I welcome what my hon. Friend has just said. The substantial sum of money invested in the Jubilee line is an example of our commitment to investing in London, and that has been aided by some private finance initiatives for the Isle of Dogs. I shall raise the second part of my hon. Friend's question with London Transport. The securing of additional stock for the Northern line, which will come on-stream early next year, is another private finance initiative, and I am anxious to pursue other private finance initiatives with London Transport as fast as I can.

Railways

10. **Mr. Hall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the condition of Britain's railways. [652]

Sir George Young: Recent high investment and increased efficiency have brought real improvements to our railways. Privatisation will build on this and stimulate further improvements in the quality of infrastructure and services.

Mr. Hall: The whole focus of the Tory party's transport policy has been on disfranchising the travelling public through deregulation, fragmentation and privatisation. The policy has been driven by the desperate search for tax cuts and by Tory party ideology. Railtrack is not sure whether it or the contractor is responsible for safety on the railway lines. When the Government sold off the rolling stock earlier this month for £1.3 million, they did not place it under the control of the Rail Regulator. Will the Secretary of State give an undertaking this afternoon to intervene to ensure that the rolling stock comes under the control of the Rail Regulator so that we can have proper investment in the railways in the future?

Sir George Young: I do not agree with the hon. Gentleman's allegations. The consumer now has two guarantees that he never had before: first, key fares will not rise in real terms in the next three years; and, secondly, the services spelt out in the passenger service requirements will not be withdrawn during a seven-year period. Those are guarantees to the customer that were never given by the Labour party.

Mr. Hawkins: Does my right hon. Friend agree that what we have heard from the hon. Member for Warrington, South (Mr. Hall) is the authentic voice of the trade union-dominated Labour party, which is far more interested in the concerns of the rail unions than in those of the travelling public? Opposition Members may suggest that things were good in the nationalised railway, but the Government have produced a customer and passenger-centred railway.

Sir George Young: My hon. Friend is quite right. Under Labour, rail fares rose by more than 22 per cent. in real terms. One may contrast that with our guarantee that, from January, there will be no increase in real terms in key fares.

Mr. Wilson: I was amused to hear the Secretary of State quoting earlier from the all-party Select Committee report on rail privatisation. Will he recognise now that the central finding of that report was that it would cost an extra £700 million a year to maintain the same level of service as exists at present—not one extra service or one extra train? Can the Secretary of State explain to the House—including his own increasingly sceptical Back Benchers—why on earth, when everything else is being cut, he is prepared in the name of dogma to pay an extra £700 million a year for no improvement in service? Before he does so, will he answer the question that he avoided earlier? Will he give an undertaking that no franchises will be let to failed double-glazers or anyone else in advance of the High Court ruling?

Sir George Young: As I am sure that the hon. Gentleman would expect, the Government will reply to the Transport Select Committee's report in the normal way. I will forward our response in the next day or so. It will then be up to the Select Committee to publish it in the normal way. The hon. Gentleman will then get a response to the first point that he raised. For the record, the Government have never accepted that figure of £700 million. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will explain at some point exactly what he meant in *The Daily Telegraph* when he said:

> "Nobody should be in any doubt about our commitment to a publicly owned and accountable national railway network."

There is considerable doubt on the hon. Gentleman's own side, among ASLEF and the RMT, as to whether that commitment means anything. Until we hear from Opposition Front-Bench Members what they intend to do to deliver their conference resolution to renationalise the railways, nothing that they say on the railways will be taken with any seriousness whatever.

Dr. Spink: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that the condition of British railways will be improved by the Government's comprehensive policies? Does he agree that it will be improved in particular by the policy to privatise rail, which will bring forward rolling stock orders, thereby helping the travelling public, environmentalists and our industry, and by the policy to stabilise and reduce rail fares, which will bring more passengers on to the rail service and bring in more income, which can then be used for investment?

Sir George Young: I agree with my hon. Friend, particularly about investment. Last week, I opened the RailTex exhibition at Wembley, at which there were more exhibitors this year than last. There were more new products and there was a real appetite among train operators and those in the railway industry for privatisation. They see it as unlocking fresh investment in an industry which is now ending decades of decline, and which will be revitalised under privatisation.

Transport (London)

11. **Ms Glenda Jackson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to improve the transport system in London. [653]

12. **Mr. Carrington:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what proposals he has for improving public transport in London. [654]

Mr. Norris: The Government plan a continuing high level of investment in London's transport system, with increasing benefits to passengers from greater efficiency and increased private sector involvement.

Ms Jackson: What confidence can any Londoner have in the Minister's reply? Since 1991, his Government have broken every funding promise that they have made to London Transport so that we now see in London a deterioration of services and a year-on-year rise in fares. What guarantee can he give to Londoners that they will not see yet another reduction in funding to London Transport in tomorrow's Budget?

Mr. Norris: I suppose I might offer to Londoners the fact that, at 1995-96 prices, investment in London in 1975 was £241 million. By 1979, it had grown to a staggering £257 million. It is now running at £1,085 million. That might be some reassurance even to Londoners exposed to a constant diet of misinformation from the hon. Lady.

Mr. Carrington: Will my hon. Friend review his Department's policy on funding the introduction of bus lanes? There is no doubt that, on the right roads, bus lanes are extremely beneficial, but in the wrong place they can cause serious damage to the local businesses in that road; that is particularly so in Fulham high street. Before he funds the introduction of any more bus lanes, will my hon. Friend seriously consider the cost benefits of bus lanes and in particular their impact on the local communities through which they run?

Mr. Norris: I am aware of the problem to which my hon. Friend refers. He has been assiduous in bringing it to my attention. As he rightly says, when properly installed, bus priority measures are at the heart of a more effective public transport system. However, it is essential for the local authorities, together with, in this case, the Traffic Director for London, to ensure that a proper balance is maintained between the interests of all parties, including the interests of frontagers, of shopkeepers, of those who want to walk along adjacent pavements and of the public who travel by bus.

Mr. Spearing: Does the Minister agree that there is considerable spare capacity on London's rail network inside the Greater London council area at weekends? Would it not be sensible to provide an even more economical overall ticket for adults and children on Saturdays and Sundays, thus making it possible for families who own motor cars to travel economically by public transport, which is not possible at the moment, and so to fulfil the Government's objective of reducing the amount of road traffic?

Mr. Norris: I look forward to the train operating companies recognising, when they are in the private sector, that one of the most important ways in which they will improve their profitability is to expand the number of people who use their services off peak—precisely at weekends, when they have all the infrastructure in place and want to do everything that they can to encourage more people on to their services. As for ticketing, the hon. Gentleman knows the present system very well. The off-peak travelcard arrangement is extremely useful around London and, if one is making more than a couple of journeys, particularly in the central area, already represents extraordinarily good value for money.

Mr. John Marshall: Will my hon. Friend join me in welcoming the investment of £1 billion in the Northern line and £25 million in the Morden and Golders Green depots by GEC?

Mr. Norris: I will indeed. The bringing forward of the Northern line trains by using the private finance initiative is a major step forward for London Transport. It gives us the opportunity to give the travelling public in London who use that line reliable and modern trains many years earlier than would have been possible if the private finance initiative had not been encouraged and brought forward by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State.

Mr. Tony Banks: Is crossrail going to go ahead?

Mr. Norris: I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on a particularly attractive outfit today. Quite what the black is intended to convey I shall leave to others' imaginations. The Government remain committed to the provision of effective infrastructure for London and recognise the value of the crossrail project.

A27

14. **Mr. Rathbone:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to publish detailed plans for major improvements to the A27 between Lewes and Polegate and around Polegate. [656]

Mr. Watts: The statutory procedures for the Polegate bypass scheme have been completed. We are looking very carefully at how to take those two schemes forward.

Mr. Rathbone: I welcome my hon. Friend's answer, but can I impress on him the need for a proper dual carriageway along that stretch of the A27 to cope with the traffic requirements not only of today but of tomorrow? For that road, tomorrow is 10 years or so hence.

Mr. Watts: My hon. Friend is assiduous in pressing the claims of his constituents for better road transport. I shall take full account of the points that he has made.

Ministerial Transport, M6

15. **Mr. Fabricant:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he last drove down the M6 past Birmingham in the rush hour in his official capacity; and if he will make a statement. [657]

Sir George Young: I travelled on the M6 near Birmingham on 13 October to attend the bus and coach show.

Mr. Fabricant: I am relieved to hear that and I hope that my right hon. Friend enjoyed the show, but was he caught in a traffic jam? If he was not, it was probably a rare occasion. Is he aware that people constantly come off the M6 at Stafford and drive through my constituency to get down to Coleshill? Is he also aware that the state of

traffic on the M6 is causing great deprivation to industry not only in the midlands but in the north-west? When will we get the Birmingham northern relief road and when will the widening of the M6 be completed?

Sir George Young: My hon. Friend will be interested to learn that I was not inconvenienced by any traffic on my journey to Birmingham, although I do not deny that there is congestion on the M6. As for the Birmingham northern relief road, the inquiry has just been completed, and it was quite long. The moment that we get the inspector's report, we shall process it as quickly as we can. It will be a joint decision for the Secretary of State for the Environment and myself. I cannot speculate at this stage on timing, but we shall try to decide as soon as we can.

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Does the Secretary of State know that the promoters of the Birmingham northern relief road conceded at the public inquiry that building the road would not relieve congestion on the M6 at rush hours? Is it not the case that the only way to do that is through a properly integrated public transport system that gets people in the west midlands where they want to go at rush hours? The Government do not seem to be behind the sort of policy that would deal with the problems on the M6.

Sir George Young: On the first point, the hon. Gentleman tempts me to anticipate the Government's response to the inspector's inquiry. I know that he would not want me to do that.

On the second point, it is not the case that we have neglected public transport in and around Birmingham. There were questions earlier about the west coast main line. I was in the west midlands relatively recently, turning the sod for the Midland Metro scheme. There is substantial investment in public transport in and around Birmingham, so people are not wholly dependent on the M6 to get around.

Airline Subsidies

16. **Mr. Mans:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps he is taking to ensure that further state subsidies are not provided by EU Governments to their state airlines. [659]

Sir George Young: The UK opposes subsidies which distort competition in aviation. We shall continue to press the European Commission to take tough action in line with the treaty rules on state aid.

Mr. Mans: Does my right hon. Friend agree that it makes no economic sense for subsidies provided by the Spanish and French Governments to be used simply to cut fares on specific routes to gain turnover rather than to turn subsidised monopolies into profit-making organisations, which is the intention with Air France? Does he agree that that has to stop, in the interests of all air travellers across Europe and particularly of companies, such as British Airways, which are already in the private sector and operating profitably?

Sir George Young: My hon. Friend is right. State aid shores up the inefficient airlines. The Government have made their position clear: we oppose any further aid to Iberia. State aid to Air France amounting to £2.4 billion seriously distorts competition. The right answer for those countries is to do what we have done and privatise their airlines.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Constituents' Facilities

29. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, representing the House of Commons Commission what progress the Commission has made in providing funding for better facilities for visiting constituents to the House. [681]

Mr. A. J. Beith (on behalf of the House of Commons Commission): On 12 July 1994, the House approved the first report of Session 1992-93 from the Catering Committee, which recommended that the area currently occupied by the Westminster Hall cafeteria should be converted into a visitors' centre which would provide light refreshments for the public, but that that should take place only when a suitable alternative had been found for the present lunchtime users. The Catering Committee is advised that, at present, there are not sufficient outlets for staff to accommodate the large numbers of users of the Westminster Hall cafeteria who would be displaced. It is therefore unlikely that the recommendations can be implemented until the opening of the new cafeteria in phase 2 of the parliamentary building plan. It remains the Commission's intention to proceed to implementation as soon as circumstances permit.

Mr. Skinner: Obviously, that reply from the Liberal Democrat Member of Parliament who represents the Commission on this occasion is not good enough. Is he aware that when disabled people come to Parliament—there has been an increasing number of them lately, protesting about the Government's Disability Discrimination Bill and trying to get their own Bill through—there are no proper toilet facilities, with the result that private facilities costing several thousand pounds are engaged every time that there is a disabled lobby? The disabled have to use portable toilets, which cost money, in Star Chamber Court. Why is it not possible for the Commission and the Government to provide the money to ensure that when disabled people come to Parliament to protest and to lobby their Members of Parliament, proper toilet facilities are installed somewhere or other in the building? Surely, with all the money that they spend on the portable facilities, they ought to be doing something of a permanent nature.

Mr. Beith: The hon. Member raises a perfectly good point, about which there is a question further down the Order Paper. The Commission made it clear that it is ready to implement, and find the money to implement, whatever recommendations the domestic Committees bring forward to help disabled people.

Mr. Viggers: Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that there is no greater honour for a Member of Parliament than to show constituents around the House of Commons and that, generally, we have few complaints about the facilities available and nothing but praise for your staff, Madam Speaker, and the other staff of the House of Commons who make those visits possible? Does he agree that the real problem arises from mass lobbies, where the unreasonable expectation is given that they provide a good forum for dialogue between Members of Parliament and the public, and that that worthwhile dialogue is best achieved in the constituency or perhaps by hiring a hall outside the Palace?

Mr. Beith: I agree that it is a great honour to show constituents around the House and that they rarely have any complaint except that they often express a wish to have somewhere to go for a cup tea where they do not have to be accompanied by the Member who is showing them around.

On the issue of mass lobbies, there are obviously physical limitations on the ability of the building to allow a large number of people to see their Members of Parliament during an afternoon. Organisers of lobbies must recognise that, although they may wish to have the impact of bringing a large number of people here.

Staff Remuneration

30. **Mr. Janner:** To ask the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, representing the House of Commons Commission if he will make a statement on the remuneration of House of Commons staff. [673]

Mr. Beith: The House of Commons Administration Act 1978 requires the House of Commons Commission to ensure that complementing, grading and pay of staff in House Departments are kept broadly in line with those in the home civil service. For most staff, rates of pay are the same as those in equivalent grades in the civil service. Where variations have been introduced, they have been achieved through negotiation with the appropriate recognised trade unions.

Mr. Janner: Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that House of Commons catering staff do a superb job and should be paid on the same basis, receive equal treatment and be awarded the same pay increases as people in other Departments, and that those increases should have the same benefits? If so, why were average increases for non-catering staff 2.5 per cent. while those for catering staff were equivalent to only 2.05 per cent., which is rotten? Even if the difference were made up with a lump sum, it would not include pension allowances.

Mr. Beith: Refreshment Department pay rates are linked to those negotiated between the Treasury and the National Union of Civil and Public Servants. They involve a number of benefits that do not apply in other Departments of the House, and there is a separate pay structure. However, I shall arrange for the hon. and learned Gentleman's specific point to be looked at.

Mr. Fabricant: Is it true that a deputy chef in the House of Commons earns more than a Member of Parliament? As a Member of Parliament, I declare an interest.

Mr. Beith: I suggest that the hon. Gentleman looks at the Commission's annual report, where he will find just how many people are paid more than Members of Parliament.

Disabled People

31. **Mr. Cox:** To ask the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, representing the House of Commons Commission what further funding he will make available to improve facilities for disabled people who attend meetings at the Houses of Parliament; and if he will make a statement. [674]

Mr. Beith: The hon. Gentleman will recall the statement made by the Chairman of the Accommodation and Works Committee on 19 October this year, outlining improvements made during the summer recess to try to make this place more accessible to the disabled. By the end of this financial year, we expect to have spent some £688,000. Further expenditure will be authorised as necessary following any advice that we receive from the Accommodation and Works Committee.

Mr. Cox: I note that reply, but the right hon. Gentleman must be aware that the House has an obligation to help disabled people, many of whom are confined to wheelchairs, when they come here to see us. Is he aware that, when a lobby took place in Westminster Hall recently on a very unpleasant day, no facilities were available for those people to have a hot drink, or even a cold drink? We now have a sales kiosk in Westminster Hall, but when will priority be given to disabled people? They have a right to come and see us and we have a duty to make facilities available to them when they do so.

Mr. Beith: The Commission is sympathetic to the sort of argument that the hon. Gentleman makes and has sought at every stage to implement practical suggestions on how facilities for the disabled could be improved, including providing additional toilets, adapting lifts, and making a new entrance via Black Rod's Garden, which provides better access for disabled people to certain parts of the building. I shall ask the Commission to look at the point that the hon. Gentleman raises.

Sir Anthony Grant: To help the funding of facilities in the House, would it not be a good idea to place at each exit from the House a box, so that, quite voluntarily, visitors in their increasing numbers could contribute to improving those facilities? I am sure that the hordes of foreign visitors who increasingly come here would be only too delighted to help in that voluntary fashion.

Mr. Beith: The Commission has never discussed such a proposal but, if I may venture an opinion, I think that those who come here feel that they pay for this place out of their taxes and are entitled to have a look round.

Members' Facilities (Chamber)

34. **Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, representing the House of Commons Commission what proposals the Commission has for expenditure on additional facilities for Members in the Chamber. [678]

Mr. Beith: None, but I am sure that the appropriate domestic Committee would give careful consideration to any proposal that the hon. Gentleman may put forward.

Mr. Banks: It is not a question of proposals that I may put forward. We all know that the facilities provided to Members are appalling. This place is a cross between a gentleman's club and a public school. We have nowhere to sit and write while we listen to these banal questions and pathetic answers. Is it not about time that we pulled this whole wretched place down and started again?

Mr. Beith: Neither I nor the Commission are in favour of pulling down this fine and notable building. Quite a lot of improvements have been secured in and around it over the years. The Commission's view is that its job is not to invent new facilities for Members but to respond to

reasonable proposals, which have been carefully examined and, if they are major proposals, have also gained the approval of the House.

Mr. Carrington: Does the right hon. Gentleman occasionally need to phone outside the United Kingdom, on parliamentary business, through the House of Commons telephone system? If so, he will have discovered that it must be done through the House of Commons operator. Should it not be perfectly possible, given the computerised telephone exchange that the House now has, for Members of Parliament to dial abroad directly and for those calls to be billed to them from the PABX system without the direct intervention of the operator?

Mr. Beith: I imagine that it is, but I will inquire and write to the hon. Gentleman.

LORD PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

Parliamentary Procedures

36. **Mr. William O'Brien:** To ask the Lord President of the Council what plans he has further to reform the procedures of the House; and if he will make a statement. [683]

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Tony Newton): The House agreed to wide-ranging reforms in its procedures earlier this month. Proposals for further reforms affecting Scottish and Welsh parliamentary business will be announced shortly. If the hon. Gentleman has a specific proposal in mind, he might like to draw it to the attention of the Procedure Committee.

Mr. O'Brien: Will the Lord President of the Council consider allowing Members to debate significant and topical current issues, such as the "Panorama" interview with the Princess of Wales? Could we have the same facilities in the House as the Minister of State for the Armed Forces had on television debating that issue? If such facilities cannot be made available, what action will be taken against the Minister?

Mr. Newton: That question appears to be an attempt to rerun a number of exchanges that took place with me at business questions and, perhaps more importantly, with my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister at Prime Minister's questions last Thursday. As I said then, I have nothing to add to what has been said.

37. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Lord President of the Council what new proposals he has to improve the efficiency of parliamentary procedures. [684]

Mr. Newton: In addition to the procedural reforms to which I referred in my previous answer, we believe that the legislative work of Parliament can be improved by the publication of draft Bills when timing and other considerations make it practicable and appropriate. That practice has already been adopted for a number of Bills in the past two years. In the present Session, we intend to publish draft Bills on adoption, building societies and merchant shipping.

Mr. Flynn: The long-established procedures of the House make it clear that we are unable to discuss the conduct of the sovereign, the heir to the throne or the members of the royal family, except under a substantive motion. Will the Leader of the House make time available at least once a year so that we can discuss the future of the royal family and the funding of the monarchy?

Mr. Newton: It will not surprise you to learn, Madam Speaker, that I have no plans to proceed in that manner.

Mr. Harry Greenway: Will my right hon. Friend confirm his recent answer to me in a written question that he is in favour of retaining the use of opera hats for points of order during Divisions? Will he take steps to ensure that there is more than one hat in the Chamber—perhaps the Clerk to the House could keep a hat for the convenience of Members?

Mr. Newton: I think that I made some reference to that matter in an earlier exchange with my hon. Friend. If I remember rightly, I suggested that that was a matter that the Procedure Committee, the distinguished Chairman of which I am glad to see in his place, might care to consider.

Mr. Bennett: Will the Leader of the House accept that, while we welcome the move to publish Bills in advance, it would be better if the Government were agreeable to having Select Committee hearings on many Bills? Does he realise that the Procedure Committee originally recommended that that should become commonplace on most Bills? Two experiments were carried out and the process then fell into disuse. Will the Government reinstitute the process and ensure that we have Select Committee hearings on most Bills to improve scrutiny in the House?

Mr. Newton: Just as I said in respect of the draft Bills in my speech last Wednesday, all those matters need to be considered carefully in relation to particular cases. A number of other factors have to be taken into account, including the need to pass legislation speedily, the degree of controversy and therefore the likelihood of whether such proceedings would be helpful. I note the representations that the hon. Gentleman has made.

Mrs. Ann Taylor: Given the success of the Jopling experiment and the changes that have been incorporated into Standing Orders, the comments that the Leader of the House made at the end of the debate on the Queen's Speech and the fact that this Question Time is always very brief and there are many substantive arguments, such as that just made by my hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett), would it not be a good idea for us to hold a proper, well-informed debate on many of the suggestions that have been made by the Procedure Committee of ways in which we may make longer-term, more fundamental changes to our procedures so as to make Parliament work more effectively and efficiently?

Mr. Newton: As always, I am grateful to the hon. Lady for the constructive approach that she has brought to those issues, which has helped the whole House to make progress. I will therefore examine her suggestion carefully.

I should perhaps draw attention to the fact that the House has had a fairly substantial opportunity to debate procedural matters very recently, in the debate on the Jopling proposals, but I would not rule out the hon. Lady's suggestion. Specifically, there would be some merit in bringing the attention of a wider audience to the progress that we have made, not least in respect of the publication of draft legislation.

National Blood Service

3.30 pm

The Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Stephen Dorrell): With permission, Madam Speaker, I wish to make a statement about the organisation of the national blood service in England.

I have today accepted revised proposals from the National Blood Authority for the future of the blood service. The details of those changes are set out in a policy document, copies of which are available in the Vote Office.

The blood service is an essential part of the NHS. Modern medicine relies on the ready availability of blood and blood products, and the national blood service has an enviable reputation for providing a service that is safe, reliable and efficient. The changes that I am announcing today build on that reputation.

In this country, the blood service is based on a gift. Blood is given by voluntary donors, who neither seek nor receive payment. The blood service accepts two obligations in return. First, it accepts an obligation to provide donors with a service that is safe and convenient. Secondly, it accepts an obligation to ensure that their gift is used as effectively as possible.

The changes that I am announcing today will mean an improved service to donors. New information technology will mean that donor sessions are better planned; higher standards will be set for the premises that are used; and greater use of mobile units will allow for more local donor sessions. Those changes will be underwritten by the publication today of a blood donors charter, which will set out the standards that donors are entitled to expect, as well as a new complaints procedure to operate if those standards are not met.

Today's changes will also mean a better service to hospitals. Every hospital will continue to have its own blood bank. The blood service will continue to supply those hospital banks from its own network of 15 NBS blood banks. In addition, it will open two more facilities, in south Lincolnshire and central London. The addition of those two new facilities will, for the first time, allow the blood service to give every NHS hospital the assurance that emergency hospital supplies can be delivered within a maximum of two hours.

Furthermore, the blood service is increasing the resources that it commits to research and development. It has for the first time appointed a national co-ordinator of research and development, and it is developing centres of research excellence at Cambridge and Bristol. An extra £1 million will be devoted to ensuring that the latest developments in transfusion medicine are made available to hospital consultants.

It is important that every consultant whose practice relies on the effectiveness of the national blood service should be confident that it is able to meet his or her requirements. I have therefore decided to establish a national user group to monitor the service provided to hospitals by the blood service. It will report to me annually, and its reports will be published. I am delighted to inform the House that Professor Edward Gordon-Smith, professor of haematology at St. George's hospital, London, has agreed to be its first chairman.

As the House knows, I attach great importance to minimising unnecessary administrative and support costs in the NHS. When the National Blood Authority assumed responsibility in April 1994, the structure of the blood service reflected its history as the responsibility of 14 regional health authorities. There were 13 administrative centres, with computer systems that were not compatible with one another and considerable duplication of both administrative and specialist clinical support services. Those arrangements made it difficult to move blood stocks from one region of the country to another when the need arose.

The changes that I am announcing today will simplify those structures. A new computer system will allow blood stocks to be managed on a national basis, specialist clinical support services will be reorganised to make more effective use of the skills available and the administrative functions now carried out in 13 administrative centres will be concentrated at three centres in Leeds, Bristol and London. Those changes will release £7.5 million for patient care elsewhere in the NHS.

Furthermore, the organisation of processing and testing of blood supplies on a regional basis has led to a significant overcapacity and waste of resources. I have therefore accepted the NBA's proposals to concentrate processing and testing work in fewer centres. That work will cease in Lancaster by March 1996, in Oxford, Cambridge and Liverpool by December 1997, and in Plymouth by March 1998. Concentration of the work at the remaining centres will leave the blood service with sufficient capacity to meet projected demand, and will release a further £2.5 million for patient care elsewhere in the NHS.

The decisions that I have announced will be phased over the next three to four years, and will involve reductions in staffing levels over that period amounting to about 300 posts. That represents a 7 per cent. reduction over the period, and the management of the blood service will do everything possible to avoid compulsory redundancies.

Today's announcement brings to an end a period of substantial uncertainty in the national blood service. It is a reflection of the dedication and professionalism of the staff that they have maintained high standards of service throughout that period. These changes will bring significant service improvements to both donors and hospitals, while at the same time releasing a total of £10 million for improved patient care elsewhere in the NHS. I commend them to the House.

Ms Harriet Harman (Peckham): We welcome the Secretary of State's recognition that the blood service must be based on a gift. I hope that he will tell us that he will ensure that we have no more commercial gimmicks from the National Blood Authority. We welcome the introduction of a blood donors charter, and hope that it will achieve better enforcement than other aspects of the patients charter; I also welcome the Secretary of State's announcement of a new national user group.

Does the right hon. Gentleman, however, recognise the dismay that will be caused by his announcement that he will press ahead with the plan to take blood processing and testing away from Liverpool, Cambridge, Oxford, Plymouth and Lancaster? Does he not realise that those who work in the blood transfusion service, those who donate their blood and the doctors who use that donated

[Ms Harriet Harman]

blood have all made clear their opposition to the plan? They believe, as we do, that it will make the service more expensive, and less able to respond quickly to the need for blood.

Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that, although he claims that the plan to withdraw testing and processing from those centres will cost the NBA less, it will be a false economy? It will cost the NHS as a whole more. It will cost more in increased travel costs, and in wastage: blood that had been taken and stored in case it was needed will be thrown away. Local centres have always responded quickly to specific local demand. The plans will not produce the savings that the Secretary of State has promised.

Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that the plans threaten the very viability of the work that will remain at the five centres? Once the testing and processing of donors' blood has been removed, and only the testing of patients' blood remains, unit costs in the five centres will rise, and the Secretary of State will come to the House to tell us that those centres are too expensive and must close altogether. Does he admit that that will be the next step? Why has he not learnt from his last effort at trying to save money on the blood service? The decision to buy cheaper blood bags from Australia led to the infection of patients and to the withdrawal of the bags. That decision lowered safety standards and cost more in the long term.

Does the Secretary of State accept that he has failed to convince doctors that his proposals will improve the quality or availability of the blood that is so vital to the national health service? Hundreds of doctors, as well as donors and those working in the service, have registered their opposition to the plans which the Secretary of State has said will go ahead. Clinicians in Liverpool and Oxford, in particular, have said that, far from improving the service, the plans will put lives at risk.

Why has the Secretary of State brushed those concerns aside? Does he not recognise that those who work in the blood service have helped to transform the way in which blood is collected, processed and tested? Therefore, their opposition to his plans is based not on resistance to change, but on the belief that the plans are totally wrong.

Does the Secretary of State realise that his handling of the plans has had a demoralising effect on the blood service, and that staff have drifted away? We have the worst of all possible worlds: a long period of consultation and uncertainty, followed by a decision that shows that the Secretary of State has not listened to those whom he consulted. With the proposed new computer system to which the Secretary of State referred at least 18 months from completion, it will not be possible to move the work to those centres that are not staffed adequately.

Is it not ironic that today's announcement coincides with yet another blood shortage? Will the Secretary of State confirm that blood is being brought from Scotland in order to deal with the shortage in London? As the Cambridge centre did not appear in the original proposals about which the Secretary of State consulted, what plans does he have to consult those involved with that centre, who have learnt today that it is to lose blood testing and processing work?

If the Government trample the views of those who work in and use the blood service, they will never get it right. If the Government look only at the balance sheet and not at the patient, they will never get it right. Is that not yet another reason why the British people do not trust the Government with their national health service?

Mr. Dorrell: It is incredible that the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman), who usually chides the Government for not consulting enough, should now chide us for consulting for too long and then—to use her words—for "brushing the concerns aside". That is simply not true.

Clinicians from Liverpool, Oxford and elsewhere have expressed their concerns about whether the blood service would deliver the enhanced service that was described in the document and acknowledged as the ambition of the blood service. I listened to their views, and I responded by establishing the national user group—which the hon. Lady welcomed.

Clinicians working in the health service who rely upon the national blood service are concerned that that service should meet the standards that it set out in its document. I am grateful to the hon. Lady for recognising the importance of the national user group and of the donors charter, which sets out the standards that donors have a right to expect from the national blood service.

The hon. Lady took the side of those who argue that one cannot remove processing and testing work from blood centres without undermining their viability. Perhaps she has seen a copy of last week's *British Medical Journal*, in which Sally Davies, a widely respected consultant haematologist at the Central Middlesex hospital, argues the opposite case. She has experience gained from her own practice of doing precisely that which the hon. Lady says is impossible.

In the article, Ms Davies writes:

"Consultants at some teaching hospitals have suggested . . . that removing the processing and testing of blood from their sites will adversely affect their clinical services. The experience of teaching hospitals and specialist centres in London shows that this need not be the case."

They are not my words, but those of a consultant haematologist who practises in the national health service.

The hon. Lady said that she was anxious to remove unnecessary costs from the national health service. Why does she want us to protect a system which, as the document makes clear, provides overcapacity in processing and testing around the national blood service so that testing facilities are 48 per cent. overcapacity and grouping facilities are 59 per cent. overcapacity? Surely there are few better opportunities to use taxpayers' pounds to greater effect than to address overcapacity in a support service of the national blood service. That is why we are removing unnecessary overcapacity. It will not damage or undermine the viability and quality of the service that the national blood service provides.

It is true that, as a result of the consultation, we have changed the proposals for Cambridge to concentrate research functions—which we plan to expand—on the Cambridge facilities, and to ensure that the facilities at Brentwood are used to maintain the processing and testing capacity that we need. I have no doubt whatever that those decisions represent the use of the facilities at Brentwood, and the development of an opportunity for enhanced research and development at Cambridge. I hope that the hon. Member for Cambridge (Mrs. Campbell) will welcome that.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): Will my right hon. Friend accept my considerable relief and that

of the donors and the teams which serve them in Lancaster that they will receive an improved service? The rumour was that they would have to go to Manchester to donate. I never believed that was true, and I am delighted that that uncertainty has been cleared up. Will my right hon. Friend please thank the chairman of the National Blood Authority for the trouble he took to consult people? May I also cotton on to another point that he raised—improved facilities?

Madam Speaker: Order. The hon. Lady is very keen for other Members to ask questions. Perhaps I could now have one from her.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: If my right hon. Friend is aiming to improve premises, does he not agree that the facilities in Lancaster are not ideal, and that it would be infinitely to the advantage of donors and the teams which serve them if, in the fulness of time, he could provide a new purpose-built centre as part of phase 3 of the Lancaster royal infirmary? Then we really would be quids in, and it would be more convenient for everyone.

Mr. Dorrell: I shall certainly look at my hon. Friend's proposals for a specific improvement in facilities, but I can assure her that one of the benefits that will flow from the improved focus on the donors' perspective is that, around Lancaster, as in the rest of the country, we shall ensure that there are improvements in those facilities that do not match the standards that we expect when we encourage people to give blood.

My hon. Friend is absolutely right to stress that the statement represents an improvement and not a deterioration in the quality of the service that is provided to the donors on whom the national blood service relies, and an enhancement of the service to NHS hospitals. There will not be a diminution of blood donorship sessions, but an extension of local ready access to blood donorship. Every existing blood service blood bank will be maintained, and the provision will be extended to two more.

There will also be the development of a higher profile for the research and development function of the national blood service. Finally, I agree with my hon. Friend that Sir Colin Walker has played an important and distinguished part in delivering those important changes.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): As the proposals at the end of the consultation were the same as those at the beginning, will the Secretary of State undertake to release all the evidence, so that the public can see whether the decision reflects the weight of evidence? Can he assure the House that no hospital will have its emergency services delayed longer than now? I heard the assurance that it is two hours per hospital. Will any hospitals be worse off?

Does the charter that the right hon. Gentleman has announced mean that there will be no huge profiteering by selling on blood supplies, as revealed earlier in the year, or is it all about Tony Hancock proposals, such as making sure people can have sugar in their tea?

Mr. Dorrell: First, the hon. Gentleman said that the proposals are the same as when they originally went to consultation. That is not true. I have referred already to changes in Cambridge, and some important new safeguards which were introduced as a result of the consultations. The hon. Gentleman asked for evidence. The evidence submitted to such a consultation is the property of the people who submit it; if they wish to publish it, that is entirely their right. I do not intend to publish it.

I give the hon. Gentleman the absolute assurance that no hospital will experience a diminution in the time taken to replenish its blood bank. I also give him the absolute assurance that there will be no change in the directive to the national blood service, which is that it does not make a profit out of the act of donation of human blood.

Mr. Douglas Hurd (Witney): I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for the way in which he has handled this matter. Will he allay anxiety by assuring us that the Oxford hospitals—and, indeed, other hospitals—will continue to have the full and prompt range of services that they enjoy now? Will he further assure us that the Oxford blood centre and the other centres that will lose processing and testing will remain open and still have a worthwhile job to do?

Mr. Dorrell: I can certainly give my right hon. Friend both those assurances. Every hospital will continue to receive the same timely service that it receives now. The only change will be for those that experience improvements as a result of the development of the chain of national blood service blood banks announced today. The quality of service available to every national health service patient will continue to be built on the quality of reputation that the national blood service has built for itself. My right hon. Friend can have the absolute assurance that all 13 blood centres will continue to exist—what is changing is the processing and testing behind those blood centres.

Mrs. Anne Campbell (Cambridge): The announcement today will be met with utter dismay in my constituency, especially as the consultation has been carried out in what I believe to have been a very unfair way. Cambridge has had no opportunity to evaluate the effects of the closure of the Cambridge centre on services in Cambridge.

Does the right hon. Gentleman appreciate the profound effect that that will have both on the liver transplant programme at Addenbrooke's hospital, and on the heart and heart-lung programmes at Papworth hospital? They are world-renowned centres of excellence in their fields, and both place a high demand on the transfusion service for blood and blood component supports. Does not the right hon. Gentleman feel that simply leaving a fridge of blood at the Cambridge site is ludicrous in the extreme?

Mr. Dorrell: I join the hon. Lady in recognising and applauding the excellence of the service at both Addenbrooke's and Papworth. I can give the consultants and, more importantly, the patients at those hospitals the assurance that the national blood service will continue to deliver all the things that they have grown used to, with the important addition of an improved research and development function—which will be located in the hon. Lady's constituency and at Bristol. I had hoped that the hon. Lady might welcome that.

Mr. Roger Sims (Chislehurst): Will my right hon. Friend confirm that the demand for blood has increased steadily in recent years and continues to do so, and that it is therefore essential that there is an adequate number of donors? Will he assure the House that the reorganisation that he has announced today will not diminish the opportunities available to those who wish to give blood? To emphasise the importance of the service, would he care to set an example by giving a little ministerial blood?

Mr. Dorrell: I gave some ministerial blood last week, so I would not be welcome again this week.

My hon. Friend rightly placed importance on the act of donorship, on which the national blood service depends. That is why I placed stress on ensuring that we enhance the facilities available for blood donorship, that the act of donorship is properly respected, and that the arrangements made for donors are as convenient as possible. That is the purpose of the blood donors charter. I welcome the fact that that, at least, has been welcomed by the Opposition.

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley): The right hon. Gentleman will know that the Lancaster centre has been concerned throughout that the specialist services it provides could be put in jeopardy by his announcement this afternoon. Is that the position, or have there been changes to take account of its fears in that respect?

Mr. Dorrell: The changes that will be implemented at Lancaster are essentially the changes that were originally proposed: to maintain the blood centre, to stop processing and testing, and to ensure that the support services based at Lancaster take part in the national reorganisation that I have talked about. The effect will be to ensure that the specialist support services available from the national blood service respond to the demands made on them by NHS hospitals and are organised in such a way as to deliver the service as efficiently as possible.

Mr. Eric Pickles (Brentwood and Ongar): I thank my right hon. Friend for listening to the staff and the many supporters of the blood processing unit at Brentwood. Does he agree that the one area of the country that will have a growth in population is East Anglia, and that the decision to retain the Brentwood processing plant will guarantee blood processing within the East Anglia area for all future needs?

On a general point, does my right hon. Friend agree that, before the reorganisation of the blood service, if there was a shortage of blood in one part of the country and a glut in another, it was not possible to send blood where it was needed, and that sending blood from Scotland to London is therefore something that we should applaud rather than condemn?

Mr. Dorrell: My hon. Friend is quite right to stress the importance of regarding the blood that is contributed to the national blood service as a national resource, which we should be able to use as efficiently as possibly to meet national needs. That is one of the major purposes of the changes that I have announced.

As for Brentwood, my hon. Friend is right to stress the important role that it will now play in meeting the rising demand for blood in central London and in East Anglia. It is also important to underline the fact that the revised proposals for Brentwood allow the development of the research and development facility in Cambridge, whose function is an important part of the development of modern evidence-based medicine. That is an important part of the total package that I have announced.

Mr. Ken Eastham (Manchester, Blackley): May I ask the Minister for some details about the chairman? Will the job be voluntary, fulltime or parttime? Will the user group be a quango run from Conservative central office, and what salary will the chairman receive, if any?

Mr. Dorrell: There will be no salary attached to the appointment; it will be done as part of Professor Gordon-Smith's commitment to the NHS, to ensure that the NHS delivers a continuing improvement in the service to its patients. Several consultants expressed concern during the consultation about the standards of delivery of the national blood service. The national user group responds to that concern by inviting representatives of the users of the national blood service to form a group to monitor the delivery of standards, and that group's reports will be published.

Sir Malcolm Thornton (Crosby): I have listened very carefully to my right hon. Friend's statement. While I welcome the assurances that he has given about the service that will be provided, may I draw his attention to the regionally, nationally and internationally respected service provided by consultant haematologists in Liverpool? Has he taken into account in making his decision the fact that this could well jeopardise the wider research basis of developments in Merseyside, and will he consider that further if necessary?

Mr. Dorrell: I have certainly taken account of that view, of which I am well aware. As I said, there was an article in last Friday's *British Medical Journal* which demonstrated that, in the view of a senior and respected consultant haematologist, that argument does not hold water, and that it is possible to maintain high-quality clinical services, including research, without having a processing and testing base in the relevant blood centre. It is precisely in order to ensure that any concerns about the standards of service that are delivered are met that I have established the national user group to which I have referred.

I have also asked the medical director of the National Blood Authority to consult directly representatives of senior clinical opinion in Merseyside and in Oxford. She reported to me that, as a result of those consultations, she believes that all the clinical questions raised by that consultation were resolved. Of course, that is without prejudice to their right to maintain their opinions, but the clinical questions raised during that consultation have been resolved.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Does the Minister agree that his statement probably demonstrates more effectively than many just what makes this Government tick? They are prepared to play with the lives of millions of people throughout Britain by changing the whole system of dealing with blood in other parts of the country when advances in medical science mean that we need more blood. Why should anybody trust this Government to transfer blood from one part of the country to another, when they cannot even transfer water in the middle of November from one part of the country to another? As for this charter and this user group, God only knows what Tony Hancock would have done with that.

Mr. Dorrell: The hon. Gentleman obviously has to sort out his difficulties with his hon. Friend the Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) about the user group and the donors charter. But I did agree with one thing that he said—the changes that I have announced today show what makes this Government tick. To deliver high-quality service to donors and hospitals without waste and as efficiently as possible is what makes this Government tick, and I am very proud of it.

Mr. Barry Porter (Wirral, South): There was obviously great consternation on Merseyside about the proposals and, to begin with, some serious objections were raised by some clinical people. I was grateful for the very detailed and, indeed, interminable negotiations. As I understood it, we were given an assurance that, unless professional opinion was in favour of the proposals, they would not go forward. Has that support been received?

Mr. Dorrell: That is precisely why I asked the medical director of the National Blood Authority to engage in face-to-face discussions with representatives of clinical opinion on Merseyside. As a result, people maintained their points of view, but no clinical questions raised were left unresolved. In such circumstances, I believe that, if there is the opportunity to improve services to both donors and patients, and at the same time release £10 million for services available elsewhere in the health service, it is my task as Secretary of State to take that opportunity.

Ms Angela Eagle (Wallasey): But having a discussion with the director of medical services, who then takes a report to John Adey, the head of the NBA, does not signify the consent of clinical experts on Merseyside. I can tell the Secretary of State that there is no consent among clinical experts on Merseyside for this change. When my constituents in the Wirral and the population of the rest of Merseyside consider the results of this so-called consultation, they will realise that all that the right hon. Gentleman has done is go ahead with exactly what was proposed at the beginning, except for switching one of the most badly affected centres from Brentwood and Ongar to Cambridge—

Madam Speaker: Order. I have not yet heard a question from the hon. Lady. This is Question Time, so I must have a question to which the Minister can respond.

Ms Eagle: I began by asking the Minister whether he agreed that sending the medical director along to talk to clinical experts—this is a very important point in Merseyside—signalled that those experts agreed with the proposals. I can tell him that those experts do not agree.

Mr. Dorrell: What the medical director found when she talked to representatives of medical opinion on Merseyside, around Oxford, and, indeed, nationally—this is a national service—was that a number of clinicians had concerns about whether the blood service would be able to deliver the standards of service to which it was committing itself. It is because of that concern that I am setting up the national user group to monitor clinical standards, and to ensure that every NHS clinician who relies on the blood service has the assurance that it delivers the standards to which it commits itself. That is the assurance we can give. I believe that that resolves the clinical questions which arose during consultation.

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): People who live in rural areas such as Ribble Valley have to travel further to give blood. Will my right hon. Friend give an assurance that the mobile units and the service they receive will not be reduced? A number of people in my constituency have blood belonging to rarer blood groups, and are therefore asked more often to give blood up at the Lancaster centre. Will my right hon. Friend give an assurance that they will be able to do so in future?

Mr. Dorrell: The answers to my hon. Friend's questions are yes, and yes. There will be no diminution of the local collection service. Indeed, in many parts of the country, it will be enhanced. All the existing blood centres will remain open, as both donor centres and blood banks.

Mr. Andrew Miller (Ellesmere Port and Neston): Does the Secretary of State agree that, the smaller the number of processing centres, the greater the risk of cross-infection of blood products? Does he agree, therefore, with clinicians in Liverpool who believe that the closure of the service there has not taken into account all the issues that should be taken into account in the public interest?

Mr. Dorrell: If the hon. Gentleman's point had not been taken into account, I would agree that we had not taken account of everything that we should have taken account of. We have taken that point into account, and that is why, although the capacity is being reduced, we are continuing to plan for excess capacity—a safety margin—in every part of the country to accommodate precisely the uncertainty to which the hon. Gentleman refers. We are reducing overcapacity to release money to maintain patient care elsewhere in the NHS.

The hon. Gentleman asks whether it is true that we have taken account of the effect on the blood service of unforeseen circumstances in individual blood centres. The answer is yes.

Mr. David Congdon (Croydon, North-East): I welcome my right hon. Friend's statement and his determination to achieve value for money in such an essential service, thus releasing £10 million for additional patient care. What will the benefits be of the two additional blood centres, one of which will be in London? Will he confirm that, despite the uncertainties that have been alleged by Opposition Members, the daily collection of blood is up by 6 per cent. on the 1993 figure?

Mr. Dorrell: It is true that the daily collection of blood has been meeting requirements, and has been on an upward trend. The two new national blood service blood banks will be established in south Lincolnshire and in central London, so that every NHS hospital has the assurance that its own blood bank can be replenished within two hours. That is a standard to which the national blood service should work. In parts of the country, the service occasionally falls below that standard. The investment of extra resources in the two new blood banks will provide an assurance to every NHS hospital in England.

Mr. Peter Kilfoyle (Liverpool, Walton): Many of us believed that the Secretary of State would come to the issue with an open mind, and are bitterly disappointed that he has failed to do so. Does he recall a meeting with an all-party delegation of Merseyside Members of Parliament last month, at which the director was present? Does he recall that what she averred about the clinicians' position

[Mr. Peter Kilfoyle]

was flatly contradicted by Members of all parties? What has the Secretary of State done to satisfy himself—not the director, who had clearly made up her mind before she came to the meeting—about what the majority of clinicians believe should be done?

Mr. Dorrell: After that meeting, I asked the medical director to talk to all the leading clinicians on Merseyside and in Oxford to resolve the clinical questions that arose during the consultation.

Ms Eagle: They did not.

Mr. Dorrell: The hon. Lady says that they did not. The fact is that the medical director met senior clinicians on Merseyside and in Oxford. She addressed and resolved the clinical questions. Of course individual citizens are entitled to their views. My responsibility is to deliver national health service medical services to the highest standard possible and as efficiently as possible. That is the obligation which this statement discharges.

Mr. Michael Fabricant (Mid-Staffordshire): As a regular donor of A Rh-positive blood, I welcome this statement, which is more than any Opposition Member has done. *[Interruption.]* Opposition Members do not seem to give blood or, if they do, no one has mentioned it. Is my right hon. Friend aware that many people feel that there have been difficulties when they move home in terms of records not being transferred from the old area into the new one—a problem that I have experienced? Will that problem be alleviated with a new national blood service?

Mr. Dorrell: Yes, my hon. Friend is absolutely right. The existing structure of the blood service introduces unnecessary and anomalous divisions between different parts of the country. The establishment of a national computer system will resolve that problem, and my hon. Friend's records will be able to move freely around the country.

Mr. Andrew Smith (Oxford, East): This is a very sad day for Oxford and the other blood centres affected, and there has been a betrayal of the commitment and excellence of the staff in those centres. In addition, there has been a clear breach of the undertakings that were given, that the Government would proceed only with proposals which commanded clinical confidence. Does the Secretary of State accept that there are clinicians who remain opposed to the proposals? If things do not work out as the right hon. Gentleman expects, is he prepared to reconsider the matters before the functions are closed?

Mr. Dorrell: Better than that, Madam Speaker: I have set up a committee which is free to report if things do not work out as I have set out. If the user group reports that the service provided by the national blood service does not meet the needs of clinicians operating in the NHS, we will take the steps necessary to ensure that it does meet those standards. But since the management of the blood service believes that it can deliver an enhanced service for lower costs, I believe that the right thing for the Secretary of State for Health to do is to ensure that that higher quality of service is delivered, and to use the savings made to treat more patients in the NHS.

Points of Order

4.10 pm

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I wish to raise a point of order of which I gave prior notice to you, the Home Secretary, the Chairman of the Procedure Committee and the shadow Home Secretary.

On 21 November, the Home Secretary, referring to the Procedure Committee's recommendations relating to Standing Committees, said:

"In its second report in the 1989-90 Session, the Committee said clearly that the procedure was appropriate for Bills that were not controversial in party political terms."—[*Official Report*, 21 November 1995; Vol. 267, c. 555.]

On checking the Procedure Committee's recommendations, I found that it said:

"we recommend that it"—

the Government—

"should, starting with the 1990-91 Session, make a serious effort to ensure that a reasonable proportion of the legislative programme (and in particular those Bills which are not controversial in party political terms) is referred to Special Standing Committees."

Madam Speaker: Order. I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving me notice of the point that he wished to raise today. The matter has been raised endlessly in numerous debates on the Queen's Speech. I am afraid that I cannot help him in continuing his discussions with the Home Secretary about the interpretation of the reports of the Procedure Committee on the subject of Special Standing Committees, as that does not constitute a point of order.

However, I want to be helpful. I direct the hon. Gentleman's attention to Standing Order No. 61, in which he will see that it is open to any Member of this House to move after Second Reading of a public Bill that that Bill be committed to a Special Standing Committee. The House can then decide forthwith whether or not to agree to such a motion. Therefore, the bottom line is that this House itself determines whether a Bill will go to a Special Standing Committee or not.

Mr. Terry Lewis (Worsley): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. On 5 November, I tabled three parliamentary questions to the Secretary of State for Transport for answer under Standing Order No. 18(4), relating to priority written questions. In answer to the questions, the Roads Minister said that he would write to me. On 8 November, the Minister indicated in a three-line letter that the matter would be referred to the Highways Agency chief executive, Lawrie Haynes. Two days later, I received a letter from Mr. Haynes which answered one of my questions. However, two of my questions have still not been addressed.

I regard that as a total contempt of this House, and certainly a contempt of our Standing Orders. Further to the query about the roads programme, Madam Speaker, your position may have been compromised by Ministers, but I will not raise that matter in public until I have had an opportunity to speak to you. However, I would like the question of the contempt of this House by Ministers to be addressed.

Madam Speaker: Yes, indeed. If I understand correctly what the hon. Gentleman says, I have a great deal of sympathy with the point he makes. He is not

receiving the service to which he is entitled from Ministers. I remind him and Ministers that Ministers remain fully accountable for the work of their Departments, including that of executive agencies.

It is for the relevant Minister to decide whether to refer a question to the chief executive of an agency for a detailed answer, but it is also up to the Minister to see that any hon. Member receives a reply within reasonable time to questions that are put to him. I hope that those on the Government Front Bench are making a note of the comments that I have made, and will see that the hon. Gentleman and any other hon. Members who are not receiving the service to which they are entitled do so.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Could I raise with you, for perhaps the fifth time, the rights of Members in tabling questions to the Deputy Prime Minister?

When I last raised the issue, you asked me to approach the Chairman of the Procedure Committee. He has replied to me. Perhaps I can draw your attention to his letter. It casts the matter back into your court to some extent. He says:

"As I understand it, several oral questions that you have tabled to the Deputy Prime Minister have been transferred, despite the fact that in oral supplementaries he has responded on very diverse issues beyond the strict agreement of his declared responsibilities."

This is from the Chairman of the Procedure Committee. He continues:

"As you know, Ministers can transfer questions should they wish and only the Speaker can control the subject matter of oral supplementaries in ministerial answers. While it is evident that a problem does arise for an apparent mismatch between the scope of Mr. Heseltine's formal responsibilities and the matters which are raised with him in oral supplementaries, I"—

that is to say, the Chairman of the Procedure Committee—

"cannot see any scope for useful intervention at this stage by the Procedure Committee."

It seems to me that the responsibility has been put back in your court to rule on the matter.

May I make a suggestion? It is that, when the Deputy Prime Minister next answers questions at the Dispatch Box, the moment he moves out of his departmental responsibility, you intervene and ask him to take his place. Then we shall see—

Madam Speaker: Order. I am prepared to deal with the matter. It does not get us any further when letters of which I have not had sight are quoted at me across the Floor of the House. I should like to have had sight of the letter.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: I am sorry.

Madam Speaker: I cast no aspersions. I simply say that it uses up the time of the House to quote letters in full which I have not seen and on which I cannot give a ruling at this stage. If the hon. Gentleman will refer the whole matter to me, I will certainly take a look at it, bearing in mind the suggestions that he has put to me today.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. The next few days are engaged with the Budget on Tuesday and the debates which follow. As I understand it, our first opportunity to question the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland will be on Thursday week. Many of us are deeply concerned about the crisis in what one hopes will be the continuation of the peace process, and the possibility that it will be broken and terrorism will resume. In those circumstances, will there be an opportunity for hon. Members to question a Minister on Northern Ireland developments before Thursday week?

Madam Speaker: The Budget makes little difference to our procedures here. The hon. Gentleman is right when he says that Northern Ireland questions come on 7 December. Of course, there are opportunities to submit private notice questions to me. I understand the seriousness of the situation, and the interest which the hon. Member and many others in the House have during this period.

BILL PRESENTED

Humber Bridge (Debts)

Secretary Sir George Young, supported by Mr. Michael Jack, Miss Ann Widdecombe and Mr. John Watts, presented a Bill to confer power on the Secretary of State to provide that sums payable to him by the Humber Bridge Board shall not be so payable: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time tomorrow and to be printed. [Bill 6.]

Orders of the Day

Education (Student Loans) Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

4.19 pm

The Minister of State, Department for Education and Employment (Mr. Eric Forth): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second Time.

The Bill is about extending choice. For the first time, students will be able to choose a subsidised loan from a bank or building society. It is a short and straightforward Bill, and it will enable us to test the market to see whether a largely private sector loans scheme would work. There is no hidden agenda. What you see is what students will get—that is, choice and a better service. They can only gain through our proposals.

We are making substantial changes, while retaining key features of the current loans scheme, and I shall begin with our policy objectives for doing so. The Student Loans Company is the sole supplier of subsidised loans. It will continue, but there are few benefits to the consumer in a monopoly. We shall seek to add choice, diversity and competition through the banks and building societies.

Choice and competition will lead to direct benefits to students, in the short term through a better, more convenient and comprehensive service and, as the market develops, through a product better tailored to individual needs.

Mr. Tony Worthington (Clydebank and Milngavie): Having that extra choice sounds like a great deal for students. How many have asked for it?

Mr. Forth: Students are not notorious for coming forward with imaginative ideas in the public arena. As we have often found, it is for the Government to give the lead. Again, as has so often been the case, we have proposed an imaginative scheme, which will benefit students in the long term. I am convinced that the wiser students will realise that immediately and the rest as time develops.

The capital investment in loans is immense—up to £5 billion by the end of the decade. We want the private sector to find much or most of that and, indeed, to take on much or most of the risk. Personal lending at that level is not a natural activity for the Government. We do not have the experience or the expertise that the banks and building societies have. That is their business. They are better at providing a service and a range of financial products. They are better at developing and marketing those products.

Mrs. Anne Campbell (Cambridge): How much interest have the banks and building societies expressed in the scheme?

Mr. Forth: As has been made known, they have been engaged in discussions with Government officials for some time. The process is in the early stages. A draft tender document has been produced. If Second Reading is approved by the House, we propose to produce a tender document. The financial institutions will rightly want to see the fine print and how the matter develops. They will make their judgments on that basis, which is a perfectly normal aspect of the process.

Mr. Richard Tracey (Surbiton): I suppose that in this day and age I should declare an interest. Two of my children are receiving university education. I am sure that my hon. Friend is well aware that all the high street banks offer preferential rates for overdraft facilities for students. They are all extremely helpful to university students and I am sure that they will all be extremely interested in the Government's proposal and that, overall, the students themselves will welcome it. As on so many things, the Opposition, of course, are in the dark.

Mr. Forth: Yes. When my daughter was at university, I was always intrigued at the willingness of most students to take on bank overdrafts. That was their choice and they each handled it in their own individual way. We are offering students a further choice. They can go to the Student Loans Company or use existing arrangements provided by the banks, and we are now in the business of offering them yet further choice, from which I am sure that they will benefit. Students can see the benefits of the arrangements far more quickly than Opposition Members seem to be able to do. I confidently expect that, if we get the sort of ritualistic knee-jerk opposition from Labour Members today to which we have been used, in a few weeks or months—perhaps it will take them a few years in this case—they will come round to our point of view, as they have done on almost every aspect of education.

Mr. Robert Jackson (Wantage): Would my hon. Friend cast his memory back to the time when we introduced student loans and the opposition that we had from the Labour party and the Liberal Democrats? They declared that the effect of introducing student loans would be that no more people would come forward to be students. Since then, has there not been an enormous expansion of higher education and an increase in the participation rates of people from less privileged backgrounds, in spite of everything that was predicted by the Opposition?

Mr. Forth: Indeed. That intervention gives me the opportunity to praise the sagacity and foresight of my hon. Friend, who played such a role in the introduction of the scheme. He was right and Opposition Members were wrong. I hope that they will think carefully before they object ritualistically to this development in the market because even they would not want to be proved wrong yet again, although they must be getting used to it.

Mr. Mike Hall (Warrington, South): In 1989, we were told that the banks were interested in student loans, but they pulled out. What is different now?

Mr. Forth: Oh dear, the hon. Gentleman has not noticed what is different between 1989 and now. Surely he cannot have failed to notice the enormous increase and development of the higher education sector. He has obviously failed to notice that many hundreds of thousands of students have freely come forward, seen the benefit of student loans and taken them up. As for the financial institutions, they will make up their own minds as to what role they wish to play and how far they wish to take up the opportunities that are being given to them. This is an enabling provision and it is a matter for them about which they can make up their minds freely.

Mr. John Gunnell (Morley and Leeds, South): The Minister tells us about the number of students who have taken up loans. What comment has he on the number of

students for whom loans have been available but who have not taken them up? Why is it that 45 per cent. of students have not taken up loans?

Mr. Forth: Those students are obviously so well catered for that they do not need to take up the loans. Opposition Members cannot have it both ways, as the hon. Gentleman seems to imply. The loans are there for those who wish to take them up, but there is no obligation. As for those who can manage perfectly well without the loans, I say well done and wish them luck.

Mr. Cynog Dafis (Ceredigion and Pembroke, North): I shall mention this again later, but I have been speaking today to the welfare officer at the University college of Wales in Aberystwyth. He tells me that people from low-income families are fearful of taking up loans and are being forced into things such as part-time employment because of their anxiety about the debt that they will incur and the fact that they will cause difficulties for their parents as a result of taking out loans.

Mr. Forth: I understand the hon. Gentleman expressing a point of view having talked to someone directly involved with that small proportion of students who get into difficulties. That is, after all, the role of the person to whom the hon. Gentleman spoke. The overall picture, however, is quite different. The figures irrefutably show that the lower-income groups have come forward in ever greater numbers in the past few years to take advantage of higher education. Whether it is the taking out of loans—which benefits lower-income groups more—or the sheer numbers, the evidence is there.

I suspect that if the hon. Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North (Mr. Dafis) spoke to other Opposition Members and compared notes, he might well find that, depending on their background and the income available to them, students may or may not want to resort to the loan scheme. That is a matter of choice for them, but I do not believe that it creates any additional pressure. I am sure that hon. Members who have taken an interest will know that the average loan outstanding at the moment is some £1,400 and that the average repayment for those who have had a loan is about £18 per month. It is straining it a bit for anyone to suggest that that is particularly onerous or burdensome on individual students.

Mrs. Maria Fyfe (Glasgow, Maryhill): Will the Minister tell the House the amount of grant available to students in each of the past five years and the amount of maximum loan available in each of those years? Is it not the case that the figures clearly demonstrate that students have been forced into loans because their grants have been smashed?

Mr. Forth: No, the figures would demonstrate—I do not have them in front of me, but I can certainly provide them to the hon. Lady either later in the debate or perhaps in writing—what we have always said as a matter of stated policy: that we wanted to shift the burden of student finance, gradually and in a controlled way, from the 100 per cent. reliance on grants, which was the case in the past, on to loans.

I should be interested to hear from Opposition Members, perhaps from the hon. Member for Glasgow, Maryhill (Mrs. Fyfe) or her colleagues on the Front Bench, whether the Opposition would do things differently or reverse the process and, if so, where they would find the money. It is a legitimate subject for debate. We have laid our cards on the table. We have said over and over again that we ought to shift the burden from grant to loan. The Bill is a further development in that process.

In the longer term, there are other advantages in having the private sector more closely involved in higher education. We are encouraging education-industry links across the board. Those links mean better understanding. The resources and expertise of the private sector will become available to education. Education will therefore meet employers' needs more effectively. In that way, there is a co-operative approach that can only benefit both business and education. Providing subsidised loans, whether public or private, entails a cost to the taxpayer, but we seek to ensure that those policy objectives are realised in the most cost-effective way.

The expansion of higher education since the Government came to power in 1979 is startling. Student numbers have doubled. Almost one in three young people now enter full-time higher education, compared with only one in eight in 1979. The number of mature entrants has risen by over 150 per cent., a rate nearly as fast as for young entrants. There were 174,000 graduates in 1993—70 per cent. more than in 1979. Among European Union countries, only Denmark has a higher graduation rate. We spend more per higher education student than any other European Union country. We run a system that is both efficient and generous. We have transformed it from an elite system to one for all, which no longer caters for a privileged few supported by privileged families and the taxpayer.

Those important changes will last as long as anything that the Government have achieved. Opposition Members say that they support expansion, but this Government have achieved it. What we need to do now is pause and consider the next steps. We are consolidating the participation rate at some 30 per cent. over the next three years, to enable universities to concentrate on maintaining and improving quality in teaching and research, which is of the highest priority. It will give us an opportunity to conduct a wide-ranging review, which will look at the purpose, size and shape of higher education. It will also look at the contribution that higher education makes to the economy, and how it prepares young people for employment and prepares people throughout their working lives for the opportunities that they seek. Those issues require careful thought and we intend to issue a consultative paper in the new year.

In the meantime, however, it makes sense to press ahead with this Bill to improve the loans system. The landscape has changed rapidly since the House debated the 1990 Act. That may be an answer to the question put by the hon. Member for Warrington, South (Mr. Hall). At that time, all we heard from Opposition Members was that it would all end in disaster, students would not take out loans and students from poorer families would be denied access. That has all turned out, patently and demonstrably, to be untrue. Student loans are a great success. Many Opposition Members—I hope that we shall hear more of this during today's debate—now believe that loans are here to stay, in one form or other. It warms my heart that this is yet another example of Opposition Members eventually coming round to accepting an established Conservative principle.

The increase in loans has been dramatic. Some 180,000 were taken out in 1990-91, which means that they were taken out by 28 per cent. of eligible students. Some

[Mr. Forth]

517,000 were taken out in 1994-95, which means that they were taken out by 55 per cent. of eligible students. We believe that that growth will continue and we forecast a take-up rate of some 80 per cent. by 1997-98.

There is no evidence that loans are discouraging entrants from poorer families, as the hon. Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North tried to suggest a moment ago. That assertion was made in 1990, when Opposition Members opposed that Act. It made no sense then and it certainly makes none now. Loans—with handsome deferment rights linked to income—help the poorest students. An increasing proportion of higher education entrants come from less well-off families.

Mr. Worthington: This is very interesting, but the central reason for the Bill is completely separate. What contact has there been between the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Department for Education and Employment about the necessity to get student loans out of the public sector to lower the public sector borrowing requirement?

Mr. Forth: The contact between my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is close, harmonious and fruitful, as ever. The Government as a whole are happy and content with the thrust, direction and purpose of the Bill. They could scarcely be otherwise.

I was giving some background figures. Overall, the number of loan accounts has risen dramatically. In the first year, there were 180,000, and there were just under a million by the end of 1994-95. We believe that there will be nearly 2 million in two years' time. That represents a public sector success, but also a burden. I shall return to that point shortly.

Higher education is, of necessity, costly. The taxpayer, through the Government, has made substantial sums available—£4.7 billion in 1995-96, with a further £1.5 billion for student support. There must be a limit to what taxpayers can reasonably be expected to invest in higher education.

Given our generous student support arrangements, it is not surprising that the number of loans has increased so substantially. Outstanding loans—that is principal and interest—will total some £5 billion by the end of the decade. That is an enormous investment and why I believe it is right to seek to transfer the task of raising that capital to the private sector.

I should like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to the Student Loans Company. The Bill is not directly about the company, which has achieved a lot in a short time, remarkably efficiently. Less than 8 per cent. of borrowers were in default—two payments behind—at the end of the last financial year. A significant proportion of them will eventually correct the position. That is well below the 20 per cent. fantasy figure mentioned by the hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster) in the debate on the Address.

Mr. Don Foster (Bath): Given the high regard that the Minister clearly has for the Student Loans Company, can he tell the House what its view is of the proposals?

Mr. Forth: I would characterise the view expressed by elements of the Student Loans Company as being understandably typical of anyone in a monopoly position. There are some in the company who feel uncomfortable at the thought of having another player or players on the field. I do not blame them for that. I can assure the hon. Member for Bath, from the discussions that I have had with key figures in the company, that they accept the policy direction of the Bill. They will be more than equal to the task of making any adjustments necessary if financial institutions take up the opportunities offered in the Bill. In the Student Loans Company, there is a mixture of apprehension and a willingness to get on with the job. I am encouraged by that.

There have been a number of comments about the National Audit Office findings on the sums that will not be repaid to the company. Many have rushed to criticise us on the back of that report and we should be clear what it means. Much of the money will not be repaid because it is our policy that those who cannot afford to pay should not. There are borrowers who will never reach the repayment threshold. The critics must say what they would do. They should say whether we have to hound those borrowers or change the repayment terms. The figures have caused criticism because our repayment terms are sensitive and generous, and take full account of the needs and abilities of individuals.

The Student Loans Company has reduced its administrative costs from £48 to £14 per account over the five years of the scheme. The company has also put recent operational and staffing problems behind it. It will continue to play an important part in student loans, but it cannot provide choice and competition.

The fundamentals of our loans policy are sound and will remain unchanged. Whether public or private, we have no plans for subsidised loans for fees. I wish to make that clear. We have no plans to abolish grants. We plan to achieve broad parity between grants and loans in 1996-97 and then to maintain that parity.

Loans reduce the share of the burden falling to parents and the taxpayer. That must be fair. The main beneficiary should pay some of the costs. After all, many taxpayers earn much less than most students eventually will. Loans increase students' sense of financial responsibility and their stake in successfully completing their courses.

Loans will continue to be made on generous terms, whether public or private. Repayment could be deferred if income was less than 85 per cent. of average earnings. Interest rates are fixed to the retail prices index, and repayments do not begin until the April after graduation.

A lot of nonsense is talked about student debt. The implication of some who make those allegations is that we should be more generous. Those who say that should answer some questions. Who will pay? Should it inevitably be the taxpayer? Should it be the families of the students or the students themselves? Can they afford to pay? All those questions should be answered clearly and systematically by those who seek to criticise the present arrangements and the Bill.

Mrs. Anne Campbell *rose—*

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (Colchester, North): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Forth: I shall give way first to the hon. Member for Cambridge (Mrs. Campbell) and then to my hon. Friend.

Mrs. Campbell: As more people, particularly mature students, are coming back into higher education, it is

important that there are some facilities for part-time students. Can the Minister tell us whether the new student loans scheme will cover arrangements for part-time as well as full-time students?

Mr. Forth: I should like to take advice on that and give the hon. Lady a reply during the debate or when I seek the permission of the House to reply. I do not want to give an off-the-cuff answer that might mislead. It is a very important area.

Mr. Jenkin: My hon. Friend discussed the access funds and the important role that they play. Is not it important that we make more money available to the access funds, to help the very people whom the Opposition parties say that they are worried about? However, so that we may be able to afford to do so, is not it entirely right and proper that people should become more dependent on loans and less dependent on grants at the expense of the taxpayer?

Mr. Forth: My hon. Friend makes a very important argument, which I know has worried him and many other hon. Members for some time. We must constantly make very difficult judgments about the way in which necessarily scarce moneys in higher education are used. I shall take my hon. Friend's argument under advisement, if I may, and consider it to discover what can be done to help, but I warn him, as ever I must on such occasions, that, with necessarily limited total moneys, what is allocated in one direction must come from another. That is what makes it so difficult.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): Is there any possibility of giving help to the small number of students who must take a year out and then return to their studies, who at the moment find it extremely difficult, especially with the council tax and so on?

Mr. Forth: My hon. Friend has put a finger on an aspect that causes difficulty to some people. I undertake to consider that issue, to discover what help might be given, but I must repeat the health warning that I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Colchester, North (Mr. Jenkin) a moment ago—it is always a matter of balancing what is available with the severely competing needs.

Mrs. Fyfe: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his courage in giving way once again. Has he heard of a study published by the Scottish citizens advice bureau in August, entitled "Poverty by Degrees"? It referred to the fact that students have visited citizens advice bureaux because of the poverty that they experience; the CABs have had to refer them to charities providing free food. Does the Minister believe that taxpayers are so anxious to have their tax reduced by every penny possible that they want students to be in that condition?

Mr. Forth: Taxpayers might want to know considerably more about the circumstances of students who find themselves in the position that the hon. Lady describes. When I visit campuses, I am always impressed by the number of students occupying the beer bars and enjoying many of the other benefits of higher education. The truth is that, as is the case in so many other aspects of society, the vast majority of students manage their money responsibly and manage to get by very well indeed. Although it is absolutely right that we should give sympathy, understanding and support to those who cannot do so, I find it difficult to believe, as I believe the hon. Lady is suggesting, that all students are in hardship. It is the way in which individuals manage their resources that is the problem, not all students.

Mrs. Helen Jackson (Sheffield, Hillsborough): Given what the Minister said about the importance of mature students, under the new scheme that he is suggesting, will loans be available at the rates suggested for both women and men over the age of 50? It is often at about that age that women start to recognise that they have potential that they want to use, and that men, in cities such as Sheffield, who are skilled and well trained in industries such as steel and engineering, want to take up different careers.

Mr. Forth: In this country, unlike many other European countries, there is no upper age limit in the mandatory awards scheme. I can only say to the hon. Lady, and hon. Members present on both sides of the House, that as soon as one makes an understandable plea for one group of students, one must take the responsibility of identifying where the money would come from to fulfil that purpose.

Mr. David Blunkett (Sheffield, Brightside): Answer the question.

Mr. Forth: The hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) is muttering across the Dispatch Box. Perhaps he would ask his hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, Central and Royton (Mr. Davies) to say, when he speaks, whether Labour Members are prepared to answer those questions themselves. *[Interruption.]* There is no point in the hon. Member for Brightside laughing, because if he were ever to be within a million miles of government, he would find that it was almost entirely a matter of making very difficult choices.

Mr. Blunkett: I made difficult choices for seven years.

Mr. Forth: The hon. Member for Brightside is saying, from a sedentary position, that he made difficult choices for seven years, when presumably he bore some responsibility for running Sheffield's finances. If he is suggesting that we take his track record in running Sheffield's finances as his claim to be in government, God help us if it ever happens.

Mr. Blunkett: I cannot resist placing on record what the Audit Commission said about my time as leader of Sheffield city council, which was that we delivered the best public services in Britain, and Sheffield was a shining example.

Mr. Forth: At whose expense did the hon. Gentleman deliver the best public services in Britain? The rest of the country might well have something to say about that.

Mr. Robert Jackson *rose—*

Mr. Forth: I must move on.

We are already more generous than most other countries. Students with a mandatory award pay no tuition fees, which is not true of many other countries sometimes cited as paragons by those who criticise us. Our maximum grant is greater than that in France. Japan, often held up as a shining example in education, offers no grants. In some countries, interest payments are greater than inflation; in some, repayment is not income contingent. One would therefore have great difficulty in finding any country that is doing better than we are.

[Mr. Forth]

Our scheme provides a good balance between the needs of student, parent and taxpayer. I shall describe briefly the way in which our proposed system would work.

Private financial institutions would be invited to bid for the right to offer subsidised loans. That would probably be for a period of five years. Loans would be made on comparable terms to those offered by the Student Loans Company, and we envisage selecting up to four other lenders.

Students would then be able to choose either public or private loans. If they chose the private sector, they would choose between the successful bidders. If not, they could still opt for a public loan from the SLC. We shall make arrangements to ensure that students could not obtain a loan from more than one source in any one year.

In choosing a private loan, students would have access to a better, more convenient and comprehensive service through lenders' branch networks. They could link loans to other financial products and services.

I have no doubt that private sector competition will lead to more attractive products. What do students have to gain from the uniformity based on an equal minimum? I believe that we have moved on from that, and I believe that more and more students recognise that.

I shall summarise the Bill's provisions.

Clause 1 contains the main provisions of the Bill and specifically gives us the power to pay subsidies to private sector lenders. Subsection (1) amends section 1 of the Education (Student Loans) Act 1990 to add that power. Subsection (2) covers the Bill's schedule and makes consequential amendments to the 1990 Act and schedules. They reflect the fact that we would have twin public and private tracks for loans.

Clause 2 allows a similar provision to be made for Northern Ireland.

Mr. Harry Barnes (North-East Derbyshire): When the Education (Student Loans) Act 1990 passed through the House, it was opposed by people of all shades of political opinion in Northern Ireland, ranging from the Democratic Unionist party to—outside the House—Sinn Fein. The only party in Northern Ireland that gave any support to the 1990 Act was the Conservative party, which was of no significance in Northern Ireland.

As clause 2 would apply the measure before us to Northern Ireland by the negative procedure, should not that clause be changed so that the House has a chance to discuss, under the affirmative procedure for statutory instruments, whether the provision should extend to Northern Ireland, where there is absolute opposition to the student loans scheme?

Mr. Forth: My opinion now—although I shall check for the hon. Gentleman—is that, as he knows, that is the usual way of dealing with Northern Ireland in most public Bills. It is generally a satisfactory arrangement, but later in the debate or during my speech in reply, if I am given permission to do so, I shall specifically discuss that matter.

However, I am not sure whether, even in the case of Northern Ireland, one wants to start singling out parts—however distinguished—of the United Kingdom and treating them differently from others. I am aware of no reason why students in Northern Ireland should not receive the benefits of the Bill's provisions that students elsewhere will receive, but I shall return to that subject later.

Clause 3 contains financial provisions in relation to subsidy and administrative costs arising from the Bill. Clause 4 contains the citation provisions and extends the Bill's provisions to Great Britain.

The 1990 Act set a framework for public loans based on regulation. That system works well for grants and loans, but I do not believe that it is appropriate for the private sector. Instead, tightly drawn contracts would protect students: in particular, deferment rights and a retail prices index maximum on interest rates would have to be safeguarded. In other respects, I consider it sensible to employ a light touch.

Student loans share the costs of student support more equitably. That is why the system is right and successful. The proposals in the Bill would add the further advantages of choice and competition. It is a straightforward Bill with, I believe, no down side, and it ought to be supported by all who want a loan scheme that is fair to both students and the taxpayer. There are valuable opportunities for the private sector and for students, and I hope and expect that those opportunities will be taken. I commend the Bill to the House.

4.50 pm

Mr. Bryan Davies (Oldham, Central and Royton): Opposition Members recognise that the funding of students in higher education poses significant policy issues. We do not have a closed mind on those issues, but we believe in clear principles, on which the funding of such students should be established. We intend to test the Bill against those criteria.

First, any system of student funding must encourage, not discourage, access to higher education for people from all social backgrounds. Indeed, active measures should be taken to ensure that participation in higher education reflects the wider composition of society. Although the Minister pointed out that higher education opportunities had been expanded, he did not mention the fact that we have not succeeded in encouraging an increasing proportion of students from less well-off homes: the proportion of students from social classes A and B has remained relatively unchanged during the past decade, despite the changes in student numbers.

Secondly, student funding should protect, and aim to enhance, the quality of higher education, which is a vital national asset and should not be sold short.

Mr. Gyles Brandreth (City of Chester): The hon. Gentleman may have different information from that which I received from the Department. I understood, however, that the recent survey showed that in social grades A and B, the numbers taking part in higher education had fallen by about 6 per cent., but that there had been a corresponding rise in the proportion among the lower social groups. That, I think, contradicts what the hon. Gentleman said. I am sure that he will want to put the record straight.

Mr. Davies: The hon. Gentleman should recognise how marginal the changes are. Two thirds of higher education entrants come from relatively well-off homes, and that

statistic has scarcely changed throughout the period of expansion. It is clear that the Government's current system, and the system proposed in the Bill, do not significantly extend opportunities for access to higher education among many young people.

Thirdly, student funding should be equitable between different groups, rather than discriminating on the basis of, for example, modes of attendance. The Minister was unable to tell us whether the Bill would extend to part-time students. Given the issues raised by the current system, under which loans are available only to full-time students, I should have thought that such an important matter could at least have been clarified—to say nothing of the additional point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge (Mrs. Campbell) about mature students.

Fourthly, any system of student funding should be fair to both students and the taxpayer. That means that it must be efficient and progressive, and should set out to ensure that no student suffers hardship.

The Government's proposals meet none of those criteria. The Bill is ill considered and divisive; it is a pathetic response to the problems faced by higher education students, and to the global challenge that we, as a society, face to improve the performance of our education system. The Bill simply transfers to the private sector all the failings of the current student loans scheme. Instead of one good scheme, we shall have two bad schemes. Although the Minister set out to defend the existing scheme, the general experience of students, and of Opposition Members, is that it is already deeply flawed.

In fact, the scheme is universally condemned. It requires graduates to repay loans over a five-year period at the start of their careers, when their earnings are at their lowest. That places a considerable burden on graduates, and leads to high deferment and default rates. Some 43 per cent. of students defer repayments, and 7 per cent. are in default.

The system is unfair. It does nothing for further education and part-time students—unless, that is, the Minister is to announce an important new progressive stance. Such a change in his position has certainly not been heralded. We should like clarification of that before the end of the debate. Loans are concentrated among a minority of those in post-compulsory education, and only 55 per cent. of those people have taken advantage of the scheme. Students recognise its flaws.

A central plank of state support for students is simply not delivering. The scheme itself is inefficient, and the Student Loans Company has been plagued with problems. During the autumn of last year, 35,000 students experienced extensive delays in receiving their loans. There was administrative chaos. As the National Audit Office reported only last week, the company received more than 1 million calls in November 1994, but only 41,000 students succeeded in getting through. There was a complete breakdown in the company's ability to respond to students. Given the grant cuts that the Government had enforced, that meant that thousands of students were deprived of the resources that they needed to continue their studies. I recognise that the company—under its acting chief executive, Sir Eric Ash—has taken action to remedy the problems, and I welcome that; but it is not the same as tackling the problems of the scheme itself, for which the Government rather than the company are responsible.

The Government now propose to persuade the private sector to take a share of those troubles and difficulties. They have apparently not consulted anyone about their plans. Both the universities and the students deny that they have been consulted; they have simply been the unfortunate recipients of the Government's botched measures. Nor, it seems, was the company itself consulted. Its acting chief executive said as much on the radio recently. He also said:

"The message I'm getting from the banks . . . is that they're not really very interested."

That message is coming across loud and clear.

Mr. Forth: I suspected that the hon. Gentleman would pick up Sir Eric's slightly unfortunate remarks, and I arranged for the position to be checked very carefully. My officials had discussions with the Student Loans Company on the subject as long ago as early August. I have personally discussed it with Sir Eric on two occasions, and my officials have had discussions with board members on at least four other occasions between August and October. I am sorry if the hon. Gentleman has been misled, but I checked the record very carefully, and those are the facts.

Mr. Davies: I accept what the Minister has said: such a meeting undoubtedly took place. "Consultation", however, suggests that someone is listening when the contrary point of view is presented. It is clear from what Sir Eric has said that the Government's proposals do not enjoy his whole-hearted support—and we should not be at all surprised at that.

It is clear that the financial institutions also have their doubts. The Woolwich and the Abbey National building societies are already reported to have turned the Government down; the Co-operative bank cannot envisage becoming involved, and neither can the Royal Bank of Scotland. A spokesman for the Midland bank has said:

"This is a high risk venture and we see considerable problems in managing this book. It is not the most attractive proposition in the world."

You can bet your bottom dollar that it is not, given our experience of the Student Loans Company thus far. Barclays bank has said much the same thing. The House will recall that the banks pulled out of the last attempt to get them to participate in a student loans scheme. Perhaps that was a testimony to the negotiating skills of the then Chief Secretary of the Treasury, the present Prime Minister. A more charitable interpretation is that the banks predicted nothing but problems, and why should their views have changed?

Sir Christopher Johnson, the then chief economic adviser to Lloyds bank, advised his bank to have nothing to do with the last scheme. Last Friday he wrote in *The Times Higher Education Supplement* that the Government's new proposals made him "despair"—and who would disagree? He said:

"There is every sign that a half-baked idea has been launched prematurely to get it into the Queen's Speech in time. Haste born of financial desperation is not a good recipe for fundamental reform."

However, the most telling testimony is that of the governing party. The Conservative national policy group on higher education has described the current loans

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system as "inadequate" and "highly inefficient". Why should the banks become involved when the Tory party can muster no better recommendation of Government policy than that?

The proposals are unlikely to interest the banks. Student loans are an uncertain business and the repayment mechanism is not secure or efficient. If the banks are to be involved, they will clearly need huge subsidies from the public purse. Sweeteners will be needed to cover interest rate subsidies, default levels and administration costs.

Mr. Tracey: Will the hon. Gentleman give the House straight answers to some straight questions? Would the Labour party in government return to a complete grants system? In other words, does the Labour party envisage providing more than £3,000 per year to students? How would the Labour party pay for that? Perhaps the hon. Gentleman would like to comment on the idea of a graduate tax, which the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) has talked about.

Mr. Davies: The Labour party is engaged in a true consultation exercise: we are listening to what the wider community is saying. Whereas the Government's proposals are being roundly condemned by all relevant interest groups, our policy will be based upon a close appreciation of what will best serve the needs of education.

The legislation represents the Government's attempted solution and they are legislating in haste before they have concluded negotiations with the private sector. Can the Minister advance the name of any financial institution that is prepared to sign on the dotted line? If that is asking too much, can he name anyone who favours the proposals? I believe that he cannot, but perhaps the Minister will address those issues, and fill some of the gaps in his original contribution, if he seeks leave to wind up the debate.

The Minister wants Parliament to issue a blank cheque. The Government need something to interest the private sector as they have placed themselves at a disadvantage at the negotiating table. The Bill is already before the Parliament and, therefore, the Government have made a commitment to a policy that the private sector must underwrite.

The Minister claimed that his proposals will provide students with a choice. That should warm the hearts of Tory Back Benchers: a privatisation measure involving additional choice. Can one doubt that they will rush uniformly into the Division Lobby? However, if they ponder the facts, they will find that the measure will not give students a choice. The terms of the loan will remain basically the same. Students will have no effective choice—in fact, they will be placed at a disadvantage. The draft tender document suggests that the banks will be able to pick and choose to whom they will lend. They may even choose to negotiate a shorter repayment period. The banks can tie a bigger millstone around students' necks and the Government will call it choice.

Mr. Brandreth: I am delighted to hear the hon. Gentleman praise the notion of choice. In political terms, the electorate is faced with a choice. It is clear what the Government are setting out: £4.7 billion per year to be spent on our colleges and universities and a student loans scheme with extended opportunities. However, the hon. Gentleman has not made clear the Labour party's policy. Would £4.7 billion be sufficient? Would there be more money and, if so, how much more? What is Labour's specific proposal? The hon. Gentleman says that he likes choice; perhaps he can put a choice before those who are listening to the debate.

Mr. Davies: I am not surprised that the hon. Gentleman has intervened in my speech for a second time, as it is his last chance before tomorrow's Budget Speech to give the Chancellor some idea of where the nation's priorities should lie. He makes yet another attempt to cull from Labour answers to questions that the Government are manifestly failing to answer effectively.

As to the issue of choice for students, do the Government suggest that students will have real negotiating power when applying for loans from banks? How can a student, who is facing real hardship and who has no parental support to call upon, dictate terms to a major clearing bank? The idea is laughable. If the Government have their way, it is the banks that will choose. They will pick and choose between students. They will ask students questions such as, "What do your parents do and what do they earn? What degree are you doing? What career are you hoping to pursue?"

The Bill will create a two-tier system whereby well-off students and those with particularly good prospects will go to the banks and the rest will go to the Student Loans Company, which will be left to carry worsening default levels on its loans.

Mr. Barry Porter (Wirral, South): I am still rather puzzled. I do not blame the Opposition for not saying what they are in favour of, but I cannot work out what they oppose. Do they oppose student loans in principle, or the proposed mechanics of delivering those loans?

Mr. Davies: We oppose the proposals in the Bill, and that is why I shall ask hon. Members to vote against the Bill at the conclusion of the Second Reading debate. I am outlining why the Bill will not offer choice to students, will not create increased opportunities and will certainly damage those students who are less well off. Under a guise of choice, the Student Loans Company will become the lender of last resort. The Bill will do nothing to alleviate student hardship.

The Minister does not seem to recognise the hardship that many students face today. He said that he meets with students in bars—and presumably he drinks at their expense because he suggested that students are rather lavish with their resources. It may simply be that they are excessively generous—even to Ministers who are not concerned about their real needs.

When the Minister visits universities, does he not talk to those who distribute hardship funds? Does he not talk to ordinary students who are trying, for example, to cope with the fact that residential costs at many of our universities exceed the grant that the Government advance to students? I suggest that the Minister be a little less selective about the places where he meets students. When students are in a less generous mood and not so involved in socialising—which he seems to encourage from time to time—they will tell him a few home truths.

We must recognise the worrying signs, such as the increasing drop-out rates at British universities. In some cases, full-time students have become part-time students. Lecturers and students will confirm the extent to which students are working part time while studying.

Mr. Jenkin: Is the hon. Gentleman reluctant to explain his own party's policy on student maintenance simply because it has no policies? Is the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) once again in the unhappy position of being sat upon by the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown)?

Mr. Davies: The hon. Gentleman should recognise that the Bill was introduced by the Government whom he supports and that it is the issue on which we shall reach judgment this evening. He should also recognise that the Government are involved in an extensive consultation exercise on higher education. Why are they rushing to implement one particular measure when a whole range of higher education issues are part of a national debate to which the Labour party is proud to make a significant contribution? We shall continue to do so and we shall produce our policy in our own good time.

The Minister does not need to await the outcome of such a consultation process because his mind is made up, whatever anybody else has to say. In a modern democracy, an Opposition party shortly to take up the responsibility of government must adopt a different approach.

The Government have also withdrawn a whole range of student benefit entitlements. This year, they have cut the grant and, as my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) has said, they have withdrawn the mature students allowance so that, in the past year, discrete bodies of students have been suffering from policy choices by the Government.

To cap it all, the Government even overturned a High Court ruling that would have allowed students who temporarily suspend their studies to claim social security benefits. The judge ruled that if students have no entitlement to grants and loans when they temporarily withdraw, they must have some means of support. The Government did not agree and suggested that they should claim discretionary awards. What discretionary awards did they mean? Under the present privations of local government finance, the Government must surely recognise that discretionary awards have all but disappeared.

The real motive behind the Bill has nothing to do with advancing opportunities in higher education, providing adequate support to students or improving education provision. It is a way to generate public expenditure savings to pay for tax cuts in tomorrow's Budget.

Instead of seeking to lever in private finance to increase the resources invested in higher education, the Government are simply trying to divest themselves of responsibilities. Absolutely nothing in the Bill or in the Minister's speech suggests that the savings that will accrue from the privatisation of the loans will be used to tackle student hardship or to increase access to higher education. Indeed, we do not even know what the savings will be. How could we?

The financial effects of the Bill will depend on the arrangements with the private sector and the number of students who choose to take out private sector loans. Will the Minister tell the House what savings the Government expect to accrue and how? Will he guarantee that any such savings are destined to go back to higher education?

It is clear, however, that any savings will be short-term ones. In the long term, any loan scheme should reach equilibrium between inflows and outflows. It is only because the Government's original scheme proved to be such an expensive mistake that they are trying to shuffle it out of the PSBR.

The chairman of the Conservative party said that the Queen's Speech was intended to smoke out the Opposition, and that is another failure for the Government. Instead of setting out a programme to tackle the huge problems that we face in society, they are merely trying to garner each scrap of political advantage.

Mr. Jenkin: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Davies: No. I have already given way to the hon. Gentleman.

The Bill does not begin to address the huge global challenge that we face to improve our educational performance. The Bill provides for the privatisation of student maintenance but does nothing at all for education. It does not set out a framework for lifelong learning or for the sustained effort that we shall need to equip our people with skills and abilities for the next century; it merely builds on a scheme that is flawed and failing.

The Bill offers the Student Loans Company—itself the subject of a great deal of justified criticism—the desperate role of lender of last resort for those whom the banks reject. Far from addressing the acute problems of student hardship and the need to widen opportunity and promote a learning society, the Bill merely saves the Treasury money. It is all about diverting money to the short-term needs of the Tory party's election prospects rather than about long-term investment in our people. The Bill does not smoke out; it fiddles while Rome burns and I ask the House to reject it.

5.15 pm

Mr. Robert Jackson (Wantage): I hope that the House will forgive me if I begin with some ancient history that, I believe, will shed light on this welcome little Bill and provide a necessary introduction to the somewhat futuristic remarks that I intend to make in concluding my speech.

When I was appointed Minister for Higher Education and Science after the 1987 election, one of my principal tasks was to devise a way of fulfilling the Conservative party's election promise to introduce a system of student loans to compensate for the proposed removal of students' entitlement to social security benefits.

When I arrived at the Department of Education and Science, some of the groundwork for that policy had been done by my predecessor, my hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham (Mr. Walden), but his work had reached an impasse because the Treasury took the line that student loans should be introduced with no net increase in public expenditure. As the savings from student disentitlement to social security benefits were worth no more than a couple of hundred million pounds, that would have meant either the provision of student loans at a wholly nugatory level, incapable of justifying the administrative costs, or

[Mr. Robert Jackson]

an immediate move to the wholesale replacement of student grants by loans, which would have been hard to achieve politically.

For tactical reasons, so as to get the discussion going again, I decided to propose a scheme for student loans raised and provided by the private sector. My proposal was based on the premise that it would be possible for the Government to subsidise such private student loans and to treat the risk of default as an insurable risk, with the Government paying all or part of the premium for such insurance. On that basis, the social security savings could be used to pay the premium and to provide the subsidy, leaving the student loans system to be funded by the private sector, thus achieving the Treasury precondition of no net costs to public funds.

I had a further, strategic, motivation as well as that tactical motivation for proposing a private sector scheme and I shall return to that later. I am glad to say that my proposal had the desired effect of putting the Treasury on the defensive and reopening the blocked discussions.

Treasury officials had two objections. First, and rather absurdly, they argued that the student loans scheme should be publicly funded because the Government could always borrow more cheaply than the private sector—an argument for replacing all private investment by Government investment and proof of the inherently socialistic tendencies of the Treasury.

The officials' second line of argument was more interesting and more difficult to address: that even if there were only a small amount of public subsidy and risk insurance guarantee, the volume of funds from the private sector made available as a result of such subsidies and guarantees would necessarily have to count as a contingent liability and as part of public expenditure. That definition was presented as a fundamental proposition of Treasury metaphysics—one of those tablets-of-stone absolutes around which no progress can be made.

The exchanges gave me the basis for a serious discussion with Treasury Ministers and, after a tête-a-tête with Nigel Lawson, the Treasury gave up its insistence on no net additional cost, thus opening the way to the present student loans scheme, which I believe is currently costing an additional £1.3 billion of public money.

My purpose in reciting that ancient history is to draw attention to the Treasury doctrine on the way in which private sector funds, guided in a particular direction by public subsidy or risk insurance, should be counted in relation to the public sector borrowing requirement.

In introducing the Bill, my hon. Friend the Minister—and I am glad to welcome him to his position—described its purpose as being essentially to introduce an element of competition for the Student Loans Company in the provision of student loans and an element of choice for students. That is certainly very welcome, but I suspect that it looms less large in Treasury thinking than what I understand, reading between the lines, to be a further objective—to shift as much as possible of the burden of financing student loans from the PSBR to the private sector. If I am right in that understanding, it would appear that the Treasury has done some welcome rethinking about the doctrine with which I was confronted as an unrevisable absolute in 1987. I take it that the rethinking that has been occasioned by the private finance initiative now leads the Treasury to be prepared to consider as falling outwith the PSBR those funds that are generated from the private sector by an element of public subsidy and public risk guarantee.

I do not propose to press my right hon. and hon. Friends for further illumination on that point, but I guess that the critical issues will be the amount of the subsidy and the extent to which the risks will be shared. The danger will be that the Treasury's terms will be such that private operators simply will not take up the opportunities presented to them by the scheme. However, I want to stress that if the Treasury's thinking has indeed moved in that direction, whatever difficulties there may be at the start of the new scheme, it is good news and, in particular, it is good news for the universities. At first blush the universities may not recognise that, so I want to explain why I think that it is, in what some will no doubt regard as a futuristic account of the way in which I believe policy in these matters should develop in future.

I mentioned that I had a strategic as well as a tactical reason for trying, back in 1987, to press the case for a private sector student loans scheme. I promised to say more about that. My strategic concern was to promote the autonomy of the universities and to reduce the extent of their financial dependence on the state. It is a concern that I believe should be central to our higher education policies. I very much regret that it is a concern that is honoured rather by lip service from the Government, from the different parties in the House and, I sometimes think, even from the universities themselves.

I shall briefly state why I consider the financial autonomy of the universities to be important and then go on to show the link between that concern and the question of private sector loans to students. When the Government provided a measure of temporary financial support for the universities after the first world war, administered by a temporary University Grants Committee, they inadvertently laid the basis for the nationalisation of higher education. Over the years, we have reached a position where higher education costs the taxpayer some £8.5 billion a year—2.5 per cent. of total public expenditure.

In legal form our universities continue to be private corporations, but the reality of power in higher education is that the balance between the autonomy of universities and their role as the agents of Government policy has shifted steadily—and, in recent years, dramatically—against the principle of university autonomy. After a brief period during which the uncapped fee funding system, which I promoted within government, restored to universities their freedom to determine their recruitment policies, the overall size of each university is again effectively determined by Government agencies—the higher education funding councils—which fix the price that will be paid on behalf of each student and cap the level of student numbers from the United Kingdom and the European Union in each institution.

I am delighted that another policy that I introduced has survived in better shape—the separation of research funding from the funds for teaching and the more selective allocation of funds for research. That gives freedom to the universities to improve their research income from Government sources by improving their research performance. However, despite such welcome shifts, in general, over the years, the whole relationship between Government and the universities has become

more and more bureaucratic, more and more impersonal, less and less flexible and less and less supportive of the idea of university self-government and self-direction.

Mr. Forth: I am following my hon. Friend's well-thought-out and erudite analysis—as ever—closely and with fascination. I wonder whether he means to suggest to the House that, over a period of time, the Government have in any way transgressed on higher education's traditional academic freedom as opposed to the financial relationship between the taxpayer, through the Government, and universities. Or does he feel that the increasing attraction of private sector money—a very successful trend recently—ameliorates the process that he has described?

Mr. Jackson: It is my argument that there should be a great deal more private funding for universities and I shall develop that point later. It is a profound mistake to think that there is no connection between funding arrangements and academic freedom—they go hand in hand. Although there is no desire, will or evidence of any policy to infringe academic freedom, the fact is that the conditions in which academic freedom could be infringed are steadily being created by the nationalisation of higher education that I have been describing. We should do something about that. I believe that in the process of the bureaucratisation of the nationalised system of higher education, values of intellectual independence and academic responsibility, which are central to liberal higher education, are increasingly at risk.

Mr. Colin Pickthall (West Lancashire): Will the hon. Gentleman extrapolate from what he has just said, and comment on what my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, Central and Royton (Mr. Davies) said—that the banks that will administer the loans will have a say in the courses to which they prefer to give awards? Would not that be an infringement of the liberal education that he is espousing, and with which I agree?

Mr. Jackson: To the extent that there is a reliance on private sector funding, all sorts of influences will certainly come from the private sector. If a higher education system is funded from a variety of different sources, public and private, and those private sources are in turn diversified, the conditions for autonomy are maximised. What is undesirable is for the university institutions to be exclusively dependent on one source of funding—the Government. That is what I am arguing against.

The universities, faced by that position, have tended to cling to traditional constitutional and legal formulae to protect their position. It is time that they recognised that their approach is obsolete. It worked for half a century in the era of the University Grants Committee, when the size of higher education—and therefore the cost to the taxpayer—was still quite small. The growth of state spending on higher education to its present volume and the development in Whitehall of a less discriminating and more unsympathetic approach to accountability have simply made the old cosy structures unviable—the old system of lunches in the Athenaeum. The best way—I now believe the only way—for university autonomy to be secured is for the universities to acquire a substantial flow of income that is essentially independent of the state. I emphasise that by this I do not mean that I believe that the whole of the present taxpayer subsidy could or should be replaced from private sources, but rather, as with the American public university system, that there should be a partnership between public and private funding, with private funding at a level sufficient to give the universities the critical extra margin of financial manoeuvre necessary to safeguard their autonomy.

Mr. Jenkin: Does my hon. Friend agree that the sort of funding system that he is advocating would also lead to a revolution in academic salaries, which we really need in this country if we are to continue to attract the best and the brightest in university teaching and research?

Mr. Jackson: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. One of the most serious social trends in society over the past 20 years has been the pauperisation of the academic profession, which has profound implications for the future of our country. I believe that one of the causes of that pauperisation has been the nationalised bureaucratic system in higher education, which I am criticising.

Before I go on to explain how I think we could get that extra margin of manoeuvre for universities by using the mechanisms provided in the Bill—I am coming back to the Bill—let me say why I believe that objective should commend itself to all hon. Members.

One of the great themes in the constitutional debate that is increasingly at the centre of British politics is the desirability of greater decentralisation in Britain. This is not just a question of devolution to Scotland and Wales or of the relations between central and local government. The Government and the Opposition need to think deeply about the relationship between the institutions of national government in Whitehall and Westminster and the whole range of non-governmental institutions that make up the fabric of our society and our culture.

If the Government and the Opposition are serious about decentralisation, we have to think about how to restore powers not only to local government but to institutions such as universities, which have recently seen their autonomy and their capacity for self-determination increasingly eroded.

To my own party I would say that I have never understood how the creeping nationalisation of our universities, which we have promoted, can be consistent with any recognisable Tory philosophy. To new Labour I would say—

Mr. Barnes *rose*—

Mr. Jackson: I want to finish this point. To the new Labour party—the hon. Member for North-East Derbyshire (Mr. Barnes) is old Labour—I would say that I do not understand how sustaining and deepening the nationalisation of the universities is consistent with its new thinking about the need for a more decentralised political and civil society with greater scope and initiative for communities of which the universities are, or should be, a primordial instance.

Mr. Barnes: If the hon. Member feels that way, why did he usher through the House the original student loan scheme? According to his philosophy, that scheme was presumably a nationalised, centralised loan scheme, which is now being altered by the Bill.

Mr. Jackson: It was not the student loan scheme that I wanted. We wanted a loan scheme run by the banks, and it would have been much better if they had played the game and gone along with it. The principle of the student

[Mr. Jackson]

loan scheme, for reasons that I will show, is absolutely fundamental to the whole project of achieving greater autonomy for universities and greater decentralisation in higher education.

I shall assume that I have carried the House at least part of the way with these philosophical considerations about the need for decentralisation and university autonomy that I have outlined. My argument is that greater independence for universities cannot be secured by constitutional and legal devices alone, and that the best way to secure that greater independence is by giving them an independent source of funding. In my view—this is the answer to the hon. Member for North-East Derbyshire—fee income from students, supported by loans financed against their future income, is the only way to provide such significant independent financial resources for universities; and that brings me back to this little Bill.

A major defect in the Bill is that it does not address the central defect of the Education (Student Loans) Act 1990—against which I fought tooth and nail when I was a Minister but lost—by which the student loans scheme is limited to the provision of loans to support student maintenance only. The 1990 Act must be amended, perhaps by this Bill, to enable loans to be advanced to students to pay the fees charged by universities. Nevertheless, what is positive and significant about this Bill is that it opens the door to loans being advanced to students with private money and by the private sector. Let me explain why I think that is so important.

Even if the 1990 Act were amended to enable loans to be provided to pay fees, so long as the money being used to finance the loans was coming from the Treasury and counted against the PSBR, the Government would have a legitimate interest in limiting the overall funding provided for loans against fees. Because of the way things are in Whitehall and, indeed, in Parliament, that could all too easily turn into a Government policy on the size and shape of fees charged by universities. In that way, the top-up private fees would be not the instrument of the greater university autonomy which we should all be seeking but an instrument for a further extension of Government control of universities.

If, however, the loans to pay the fees were to come from the private sector, there could be no justification for the Government determining the fees policy of the universities, which would be private institutions deciding for themselves the terms and conditions on which they admitted their students. The strategic thought behind my initial proposal for a private sector loan scheme, which I described earlier, was precisely to give the universities that greater freedom. Although that thought came to nothing in 1987, I regard the Bill, and the relaxation of Treasury doctrine that it implies, as marking a potential step in what I consider to be fundamentally the right direction.

I believe that the Labour party is trying seriously to break away from its old image as the tax-and-spend party. In due course, that will oblige it to think more seriously about how the burden of public expenditure can be not only contained but reduced or more equitably distributed. I noted that the hon. Member for Oldham, Central and Royton (Mr. Davies) referred to the fact that so many students come from privileged backgrounds. He might like to reflect on the equity of the distributional effects that that fact poses. Meanwhile, against all its instincts and traditions, my party, in government, has been operating as a high-tax and high-spend party, but the debate is becoming increasingly serious.

Among the one-nation Tories—among whom I count myself—I notice that no less a figure than the Governor of Hong Kong has been pointing to the difference between the levels of public expenditure in the United States and Japan as compared with Europe, including Britain, and suggesting that there may be some connection between their lower levels of public spending and taxation and their greater competitiveness. The Prime Minister has recently made the same point. Can the new Labour party be far behind? I hope—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order. I hope that, having asked himself that question, the hon. Gentleman will revert to the Bill.

Mr. Jackson: I was about to do so and to conclude my speech. I hope that the Opposition are increasingly in a mood to recognise the force of the arguments about public expenditure.

If we are to reduce the burden of taxation and the level of public expenditure and bring them even part of the way towards the levels prevailing in the United States and Japan, it would be disastrous to do so merely by spending less on the public sector in its present shape. The result would be an unacceptable degradation in the quality of all collectively provided goods. Instead, we have to reconsider—in Europe and in Britain—which goods are collectively provided in the public sector as compared with the United States and Japan. On such a comparative list, higher education bulks large at 2.5 per cent. of public expenditure.

The United States and Japan both operate the kind of partnership system between private and public interests in higher education that I am advocating. Both have large private universities where full-cost fees are paid by students, and they include, in the United States, some of the best universities in the world. In addition, both have a huge network of public higher education institutions that are partly funded by private student fees. Incidentally, both countries have a higher proportion of their population passing through higher education than we do in Europe, combined with greater participation in higher education by people from relatively unprivileged social backgrounds.

We cannot continue with the present policy of maintaining higher education as a state responsibility while seeking to reduce the burden of taxation and public borrowing in the direction of American and Japanese levels. Under the present policy, the only way to square the circle is systematically to degrade the quality of a university system that is exclusively dependent on public funds. That would be a profound mistake, which could lead only to the progressive dismantling of one of our greatest achievements as a country, which is the culture in our institutions of higher learning.

The way out of the trap is outlined in the Bill—a private sector loan scheme, which, I believe, should be extended to cover fees. I am therefore happy to support the Bill as another modest step down a road that I hope we shall all agree to take in due course.

5.38 pm

Mr. Colin Pickthall (West Lancashire): The hon. Member for Wantage (Mr. Jackson) is always interesting on education. I am somewhat astonished, however, at his surprise at the Government's centralisation. He may remember saying that the possibility of students paying back student loans through the national insurance system was

"a very remote mechanism."

He continued:

"If we employ it, the fact of an obligation to repay something of the costs of undertaking their studies will tend to escape the attention of the student. But is this desirable?"—[*Official Report*, 20 October 1989; Vol. 158, c. 449.]

With that rhetorical question, the idea of payback through the national insurance system was dismissed. Had that question been considered at the time or since, many of the problems that I want briefly to address might have been solved.

It is also interesting to note that, in almost every other field, making borrowing easier and smoother for people seems to be the order of the day, whereas the hon. Member for Wantage seems to think that it ought to be made more difficult, in order—no doubt—to teach students the cost of everything.

The Bill is shabby and open-ended, and it demonstrates that the Government have no strategy for higher education—or further education for that matter—beyond cramming in larger numbers at lower unit cost. Student financial support should be straightforward. It should be adequate and available promptly, and should bear in mind the desperate need of the country to engage with three key needs concerning higher education. They are: the need, as my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, Central and Royton (Mr. Davies) has said, for more students from low-income backgrounds; the need for more students from groups which are not traditionally users—or are under-users—of higher education; and the need to help part-time adult students, who I believe, subject to correction by the Minister, are ruled out of the proposal. The Bill does none of those things. Indeed, its consequences might well worsen the situation.

At present, many students are struggling to balance a grant, which has been systematically reduced in level and availability over the past few years; access funds, which most students clearly consider a joke; Student Loans Company loans, which were in utter chaos last year and are—fortunately—slightly better now; parental contributions; part-time employment, which is needed by an increasing number; bank overdrafts, which many students have; and, for some, problems with grant cuts following semesterisation, when many authorities reduced grants, thinking of the semester as an old-fashioned term.

This new Government wheeze merely adds to the confusion rather than simplifying matters. My daughter, who started university this term, is, like many others, spending a great deal of her time and energy juggling her funding, and slowly embracing the virtues of debt when she does not have to. The advice from tutors at her university, like that from tutors at most universities and colleges, is to go for the loan whether it is wanted or not.

Although evidence is anecdotal, it may well be the case that students from wealthier backgrounds are more likely to take up loans at lower rates of interest, when—perhaps—they do not really need them. Students from many low-income homes often have a lively appreciation of the horrors of debt, especially since they face a future full of employment uncertainty.

Some undergraduates I know are taking out loans which they do not need at present, and are putting them into bank accounts where they earn a little interest, in order to save for a postgraduate course for which they otherwise would not be funded—whether they get on to that course eventually is another matter. Others, perhaps, put the loans aside for rather less admirable purposes.

My hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, Central and Royton referred to Christopher Johnson, the chief economic adviser to Lloyds Bank plc, who advised the banks when the student loans scheme was introduced to have nothing to do with it, which of course they did not. I, too, read the article in *The Times Higher Education Supplement* last week. I shall not repeat the quotation cited by my hon. Friend, as he has already put it on record, but will add to it. Mr. Johnson also described the Bill as "timid, incremental thinking", which sums it up.

Indeed, a whole string of bankers and representatives from building societies have said that, as far as they can see at the moment, they want nothing to do with the Bill. Sir Eric Ash, the acting chief executive of the Student Loans Company, raised the question of choice, of which the Minister made a great deal. Sir Eric said:

"the idea that this Bill introduces choice I think isn't worth examining".

Mr. Forth: Rather than just quoting Sir Eric with—presumably—approval, as if that were the end of the matter, will the hon. Gentleman expand on why he thinks that that comment was correct?

Mr. Pickthall: If the terms and conditions of loans are more or less the same, if the same people are going for the same sorts of loan, if the eventual funding provided by Government for the interest and the fall-out, and so forth, is the same, the choice is immaterial. One can go to the Student Loans Company, or one can go to one bank or another in the scheme, but the situation is still about the same for the student. There might be a marginal difference between one and the next—

Mr. Hall: There will not be any difference.

Mr. Pickthall: My hon. Friend says that there will not be any difference—perhaps that is not so. Clearly, however, there will be little difference.

It is clear that the student grant has deteriorated so dramatically over the past decade, coinciding with the increase in student numbers, that it will not be possible to restore grant levels to what they were 10 years ago. A loans or repayment system is therefore inevitable. However, that should not mean that Parliament should give the Secretary of State a blank cheque, as this Bill does, or that Parliament should ignore the impact on students in later life when they come to repay the loans.

One reason for the Bill may lie in the philosophy of the former Secretary of State for Education and Science, the right hon. Member for South Norfolk (Mr. MacGregor). He said that the fundamental reason for the introduction of student loans was that top-up loans would

"secure changes in student attitudes".

He thought that they would get rid of students'

[Mr. Pickthall]

"sense of dependency on the state",

and would promote

"a proper sense of self-reliance and responsibility."—[*Official Report*, 20 November 1989; Vol. 158, c. 381.]

That is social engineering. It is saying that the purpose of loans is to cause problems with repayments. But loans also increase the level of debt among students, especially among those who perhaps do not need to incur it. The Government seem to have espoused in their loans system—and are espousing again in the Bill—a social corrective in the form of the discipline of debt exercised on students as they leave universities. Of course, the only real reason for this extraordinary exercise must be to massage the public sector borrowing requirement, regardless of whether the institutions later take up the Government scheme.

Presuming, however, that the institutions do take up the scheme because the bribes—subsidies, sorry—from the public purse are sufficient, a number of questions need to be addressed, and must be addressed at this stage. First, will the direct debiting for the recall of the debt be limited to one account, as is the case with the Student Loans Company? Will the banks or other institutions involved be able to sell on the debt or move it about among their partners and their subsidiaries? Will the students be guaranteed that they can always go to the same account in the same bank to service that debt?

Will students who fall behind in payments find themselves being blacklisted by the creditworthiness system, so that they cannot take part in other activities, such as mortgage borrowing? I note that the schedule would prevent the selling of information about student loans for purposes such as junk mail or approaches from other companies, but I can detect no provision to prevent the misuse of information about students and their loans, which could affect their financial lives generally.

What are the implications for student borrowers of the link-ups and takeovers of banks and insurance companies? Barring crises and scandals, most people are reluctant to change banks during their lifetime as earners. The banks know that, and are anxious to secure students, as potentially stable if not necessarily high earners. Banks have always been anxious to attract undergraduates, not to alienate them.

I do not suppose that I am untypical in having opened a bank account for the first time with my first grant cheque. I opened an account in 1963—I shudder to think how long ago that was—and, despite quarrels with my bank, I have remained with it ever since. Clearly, banks are likely to be reluctant to tangle with potentially useful customers, just as students will be reluctant to risk their financial good name.

Banks will also be aware of the possibility of exercising discrimination which could give rise to bad relations with students. There could be discrimination in terms of the subject being pursued. As my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, Central and Royton said, there could be discrimination in terms of the stability of the student's family background and in terms of what sort of person banks judge him or her to be. They could discriminate in terms of interest rates, as well.

My hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, Central and Royton has made the case against this poor Bill very strongly. I add some thoughts about what the Bill could and should be doing. The Government should look at a payback system which is related to the ability to pay and which comes not through the mortgage-style system, as it has been dubbed, but through national insurance or the tax system.

The Government should not encourage the take-up of debt; students should go into debt only when it is essential for their needs. The Government should try to stabilise the grant element, rather than switching student income to loans, year by year. They should address the problem of funding postgraduate studies and the problem of funding part-time adult students—those that my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Hillsborough (Mrs. Jackson) mentioned, who want to get into higher education for the first time at the age of 50-plus. I have taught many such students in my time, and I found them some of the most exciting and interesting people in higher education. Although their working life afterwards may be fairly brief, they have a tremendous amount to contribute to this country.

Better still, the Government should initiate, as we have, a wide-ranging consultation on the funding of students. They should especially look at the funding of further education students, who are definitely the poor relations of the education system. FE students should not have to rely on discretionary awards, which are under intense pressure as a result of local government cuts year on year. The position will become worse if the Chancellor pays for his income tax cuts tomorrow by further huge raids on local government finance, as has been widely trailed in the press.

The changes in student and in institutional funding over the past decade have, willy-nilly, changed the whole ethos of higher education; that disturbs me perhaps more than anything else. I hate to sound as though I am talking about the good old days; I am not. I realise that old days, when old, are good. However, 20 years ago, there was an assumption that term time for a student was for exposure to ideas, for debate, for research, for analysis, for the production of assignments and for feedback from tutors and teachers. That was intended to lead to the creation of a cultured and rounded intellect.

Vacations were partly for work, to earn extra cash; in those days, part-time and temporary work was readily available. Vacations were also for an intensive slog on the subject matter and for research on dissertations. They were for wider and more intensive reading than there was time for in the day-to-day graft of the university or college term. All that has changed, not just because of lower funding and not just because of loans, but because of modular structures and semesterisation.

The struggle to keep heads above water financially by individual students and by the institutions is wearing away the learning process. Most students have to be turned round in less time and with fewer resources. The time for the production of assignments and for proper feedback on them has been eroded on many courses. Students complain, as they did not do a decade ago, that one assignment pounds on the heels of another, then another, then another.

Anxiety about having the cash to live a decent if frugal life, with far fewer opportunities to earn cash in the vacations, is forcing more students to moonlight, with a

palpable effect on their ability to study. As a tutor in higher education before coming to this place, I watched that process with dismay. It has been confirmed by research at Oxford Brookes university, which estimates that 250 graduates each year gain a class lower in their degree than would have been the case if they had not had to work in the evenings. I know students who work night shifts, to pay their way, and who then go to college in the day. In some cases—I do not want to over-generalise—standards are declining because of all those factors, which sometimes leads to adjustments in the way in which final grades are put together.

Higher education and individual students are infinitely adaptable, but they can adapt only so far before a decline becomes palpable and unstoppable. The Bill does nothing to address that trend, and it will almost certainly worsen the situation.

5.57 pm

Mr. Allan Stewart (Eastwood): What was interesting about the speech by the hon. Member for West Lancashire (Mr. Pickthall) was that he actually put forward a policy, in marked contrast to the hon. Member for Oldham, Central and Royton (Mr. Davies). After 16 years of deep thought and consideration, his policy is to say that the issues are complex. We all know that they are complex, but that hardly amounts to a policy. He was unable to tell the House whether a Labour Government would increase, maintain or reduce the total level of expenditure on higher education funding. He was unable to give the House any indication whether the Labour party in government would favour the continuation of a loan scheme, would abolish the loan scheme, would extend the loan scheme, or would bring in a graduate tax.

The hon. Members for Oldham, Central and Royton and for West Lancashire both said that they opposed the Bill. I am not yet entirely clear why. This is an extremely modest Bill. No bank or building society is forced to do anything. No student will be forced to do anything that he or she does not wish to do.

Perhaps I can help the hon. Member for Oldham, Central and Royton in his continuing consultation process by reminding him and the House of the essential case for student loans. It is really quite simple; higher education usually benefits society—although not when a student leaves the country—but it also benefits the student himself directly.

Suppose we take two 17-year-olds, one of whom—let us call him Algernon—wants to be a Labour Member of Parliament. The other, his friend Fred, wants to be a garage mechanic and owner. Under a grant system, Algernon does the obvious thing: he goes to college or university to study politics, philosophy and economics, or sociology. He then goes to London, rents a flat in Islington—to ensure that his career prospects are as bright as possible—and becomes a Labour Member of Parliament.

Fred, meanwhile, becomes a successful garage mechanic and owner. I wish to be charitable, and I will not differentiate between the benefits to society as a whole of Labour Members of Parliament and garage mechanics. Let us assume that both benefit society. But under a grant system, what in effect happens is that Fred subsidises Algernon through his tax payments. There is no social justice in that, and that is why I believe that there is a strong social justice argument for a loan element within the provision of finance for those in higher education.

Mrs. Fyfe: Does the hon. Gentleman think that there is a strong social justice argument for reducing the grant from £1,795 in 1993 to £1,257 in the next financial year? Have any of the hon. Gentleman's constituents complained to him that student grants are exorbitantly high? None of my constituents has done so.

Mr. Stewart: The point is that the Government have made it clear that they are aiming for a balance between the grant element and the loan element. Recent figures show that the average income of students with loans in 1992-93 was 31 per cent. up on the figure for 1988-89.

The Bill follows the Education (Student Loans) Act 1990. I was a member of the Committee which discussed the Bill, and I recall the arguments that were put again and again to the Committee. Student loans, we were told, would limit access, and would lead to lower numbers of entrants into higher education. As my hon. Friend the Minister of State has pointed out, the reverse is true. There have been steady increases in student numbers, both north and south of the border.

Hon. Members on both sides of the House have referred to the past difficulties of the Student Loans Company, and have stated—rightly and properly—that they believe that the problems are behind the company, which is located in Glasgow. I believe that that is the case, and I pay tribute to the staff working in the Student Loans Company, who have worked extremely hard.

The advantages to the student of the involvement of the banks and building societies in the loans system come from their branch networks and the possibility that the involvement of a bank gives a student to develop a relationship with a particular branch of a bank. That is an important potential benefit to students.

The House will be aware that the proportion of people participating in higher education in Scotland is higher than south of the border. It is therefore particularly important that Scottish banks, which have a well-developed branch network, are involved. I end by asking my hon. Friend the Minister of State for an assurance that he will bear in mind the special needs of Scotland, and that he will do everything possible to involve one or more of the Scottish financial institutions in the scheme when it is up and running.

6.4 pm

Mr. Don Foster (Bath): A few minutes ago, we heard a thoughtful and provocative speech from the hon. Member for Wantage (Mr. Jackson), and I had considerable sympathy with a number of his remarks. I certainly share his view about the need to reinvigorate the powers of local government, and I accept his argument about the need for a redefinition of the public sector borrowing requirement. The hon. Gentleman might be surprised that I agree that there should be no objection in principle to transferring some of the public debt and some of the risk-taking to the private sector. I do not object to the Bill from those particular points of view.

My objections to the Bill are rather that it fails to address the problems of student poverty and hardship, and fails to address the problems with the current procedures

[Mr. Don Foster]

for supporting students. The Bill does not even begin to acknowledge the concerns which have been expressed during the limited and somewhat desultory consultation process that is going on at present. The Bill simply tinkers around the edges without addressing the key issues affecting students and the higher education system today. Those problems are leading to a significant reduction in the quality of higher education provision.

That students are facing growing problems cannot be in doubt, and I hope to have an opportunity to discuss some of those points in more detail later tonight in the Adjournment debate. The problems centre on the growing level of student hardship and poverty, evidence of which is illustrated by the huge increase in the number of students suffering from stress—largely through financial worries—and seeking counselling and medical support. There has also been a huge increase in the number of students applying for access funds, designed for students with severe hardship problems.

The growth in the large number of students taking on term-time jobs has been mentioned and, sadly, the proportion of students dropping out of their courses and citing financial hardship as the main cause has grown to one in eight. All of those problems are, in part, responsible for the real concerns about the ability of students to gain the maximum benefit from their studies.

My biggest concern is the Minister's inability to respond to a number of points put to him during the debate. The Minister cannot begin to understand the problems of student hardship if he does not even know whether the Bill is, for example, designed to address the problems faced by part-time students. When the hon. Member for Lancaster (Dame E. Kellett-Bowman) raised a real concern about intercalating students, the Minister said that he would have to go away and look the matter up. When the hon. Member for Colchester, North (Mr. Jenkin) asked about the level of access funds, the Minister appeared not to know whether anything could be done about them.

Mr. Forth: The hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster) is exhibiting the charming naivety of those who have been in the political wilderness for many decades, but I do not hold that against him. The hon. Gentleman should think for a moment about the points he has made rather quickly. I replied to the questions by saying that they could be taken account of only against a background of the Government either redistributing the existing amount of money available in higher education or finding more. Before the hon. Gentleman says that his party would find more money for education generally—as I suspect he will in response to that point—will he tell us the amounts of money that he would allocate to pre-fives, higher education, school buildings and other matters, rather than skating over that as he usually does?

Mr. Foster: The Minister is right to say that he raised that particular point. My point about the Minister's response to his hon. Friends' questions is that in most cases he said that he did not know the answer and would have to take advice. He said that he would tell us later in the debate. A Minister who comes to the Dispatch Box without knowing whether his Bill will help or not help students studying part time or students who are intercalating has real problems with his Bill. I look forward to hearing his reply. I hope that people in the Box are preparing responses for him.

The Minister asks for a detailed breakdown of the finances of our proposals to provide more money for higher education. I am sure that you would rule me out of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker, if I went into detail. In fairness to the Minister, I promise that the detailed document that has been prepared will be in the post to him tomorrow morning for him to study. I also promise to send him, before he asks for it, a copy of our detailed consultation document on the future of higher education and how we would go about dealing with the very problems that we are discussing tonight. Both documents will be in the post to the Minister tomorrow, so he does not have to ask that additional question.

Mr. Forth: Along with the cheque.

Mr. Foster: We will explain where the finance will come from. I shall return to whether the Minister can say where the cheque will come from at the end of my speech.

The problems that are not dealt with by the Bill lie in the current system of support that is on offer. All that the Bill does is transfer the same flawed system into the private sector. No one can deny that the Student Loans Company has had its problems in recent times. Those problems have been referred to by hon. Members on both sides of the House. Reference has been made to the National Audit Office report. I will not repeat those points, but it is worth reflecting that even the Student Loans Company's own annual report published last week acknowledged what it described as unacceptable deficiencies in performance. Like the hon. Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart), I acknowledge that the company is now making an effort to resolve those difficulties. It is worth reflecting on what the acting chief executive has said about the Government's proposals. He has suggested that if the proposals go ahead, they will create further problems for the Student Loans Company. He fears that its unit costs will rise and that the company will end up playing the role of safety net for the banks.

It is perhaps also worth reflecting that the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals, which incidentally was not consulted about the proposals, is worried about simply transferring the current system to the private sector. While there are flaws in the mechanics of the current system, there are also flaws in the underlying principles. Those flaws will continue under the proposals.

The current approach to student support is neither equitable nor secure. To gain the confidence of all involved, a system of loans must be fair to the borrowers and secure for lenders. If the proposals had met those requirements, I might have had greater sympathy with them. Equity and security could have been achieved, for example, by basing repayments more closely on the ability to pay, using the national insurance system as the basis for collection. I am sure that the Minister will acknowledge that repayment through national insurance would have the lowest default rate of all repayment systems, even for the self-employed. Therefore, I am sure that the House would be interested to hear from the Minister whether, in developing the proposals, his Department asked the Contributions Agency to assess the feasibility and cost of using national insurance for collecting student loans for both the Student Loans

Company and the envisaged private sector schemes. If it did, what costs were quoted in cash terms and as a percentage of the total cost of running the social security deductions scheme?

In view of the problems with equity and security, it is hardly surprising that banks and building societies showed reluctance the last time that they were invited to join in such a scheme. Therefore, I shall be surprised if many are interested this time round.

The Government got the students loans system wrong last time. They are getting it wrong again. If we agree to the Bill, we agree to ignore the problems of student hardship and the huge deficiencies in the current scheme. The Government have not even worked out the details of their proposals. They have no idea who within the private sector will come forward and how much they will demand. So we are being asked to write a blank cheque for the Secretary of State.

The hon. Member for Eastwood described the Bill as modest. He was right. It has much to be modest about. It certainly does not deserve a Second Reading.

6.14 pm

Mr. Jon Owen Jones (Cardiff, Central): I shall follow the hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster) in arguing that the greatest difficulty with the Bill is that it does nothing to deal with the problems of the current student loans scheme. It will do nothing but exacerbate the problems of real student hardship.

I am privileged to be the Member of Parliament for Cardiff, Central, the constituency in which Cardiff university is based. In the past few years it has expanded the number of its students to about 13,500, the majority of whom live in my constituency. I believe that that gives me the honour and privilege of representing more students than any other Member of Parliament.

The increase in student numbers in the university that I represent, and in others throughout the country, has been general during the past decade. I acknowledge that the vast increase in student numbers means that we must reconsider the way in which we fund higher education. It is no longer practical to fund students in the same way as they were funded a decade ago, or even two decades ago when I was a student. However, the current arrangements place thousands of young, and sometimes not so young, people in real hardship. The value of their grants declined by 24 per cent. in the 1980s and now reaches only 18 per cent. of average earnings.

Not satisfied with reneging on their promise to freeze the grant until loans were at a comparable rate, the Government began in 1993 the process of cutting grants by 10 per cent. a year each year and projected on to the next year, until the loan levels reached the same as grant levels. The Bill does nothing to tackle existing problems. Student hardship is widespread. Drop-out rates are increasing and student indebtedness to friends, family and banks is at an all-time high.

The situation for mature students is particularly bad. They often have extensive financial responsibilities to their families. They often have mortgages and so on. They found student finances hard enough without the Treasury-led cut in the mature students allowance introduced this year. Well above half of full-time students have to get a job in term time to supplement their income. There is strong evidence that the extra demands on their time impact on their studies.

In the long summer holiday, students have no grant to cover them, but they no longer have the traditional safety net of benefits. They have to struggle through the vacation and try to get a job in the season when the market is flooded with school leavers also looking for jobs.

Last year we saw a fiasco when the Student Loans Company tried to introduce a fast-track renewal system for repeat loans. The forms were sent to students' term-time addresses over the summer. Of course, students move house every year. Most of them go home for the summer.

The result was absolute chaos, with only 19 per cent. of the applications sent out being processed by the start of term. Thousands of students were left without their loans and several who had still not managed to get their grant by Christmas came to my surgery. Because of the number of students involved and the limited number of telephone lines, it was nigh on impossible for anyone to get through, including the students union welfare officers who were trying to help. I got through and sorted out some of the cases only because I managed to find an internal number.

The Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals noted that about 40,000 students left their courses during 1992-93, which is a rise of 25 per cent. over the previous year. Some may return later, but that represents a 5 per cent. drop-out rate in the total student population. Although 15,000 may have left for academic reasons, 25,000 left for other reasons—a growth of 30 per cent. in one year, which is twice the rate of growth in student numbers. Although there cannot be any accurate data to calculate what percentage was due to financial hardship, anecdotal evidence strongly suggests that financial difficulties are responsible for much of that increase.

Many students turn to part-time work to see them through. In Cardiff, students run job clubs, which help to get students through when they cannot afford to do it any other way. I am sure that that work interferes with their studies. We have heard of students who have to work night shifts to get through. Even the Government party admits that the loans scheme is not working. In one document, it was suggested that the current loans scheme is highly inefficient, unlikely ever to recover its original investment and in danger of collapse.

Perhaps it is with that in mind that the Government have introduced their latest idea and intend to run down the loans company and get the banks to take over completely. Making graduates pay back loans over a fixed five-year period when they start to earn 85 per cent. of average earnings is extremely problematic and acts as a disincentive for students to take up the loans, hence the low take-up in the first few years of operation. Present take-up is much higher, but that is an indication of necessity and desperation on the part of students.

The organisation of the loans company has been appalling. Last year, it was a total shambles. So much so, that the chief executive was sacked in March. Eight months later, however, a new chief executive has not been appointed, although I believe that an appointment is imminent.

Mr. Forth *indicated assent.*

Mr. Jones: I am glad that that is the case.

[Mr. Jones]

The great concern about these proposals is that they would create a two-tier system, with the banks creaming off the good prospects and others having lesser access to funds.

The Government's attitude to student funding is certainly questionable, as has been shown by a Tory think-tank document featured in *The Times Higher Education Supplement* a few weeks ago, which the Secretary of State was said to be considering. It stated:

"Student numbers should be free to find their own levels with students making more rational choices about the benefits of higher education, as they bear a greater proportion of the cost."

That statement is not about choice, but about voluntary selection on the basis of wealth.

We oppose the Bill and will vote against it because it makes no provision for measures to improve access to higher or further education. It does not help to secure greater social equity in participation or alleviate student hardship. The present student loans scheme is inefficient and places graduates under a considerable burden of repayment at the start of their careers. Those flaws will be maintained under the provisions of the Bill, which is divisive and ill considered.

I hope that hon. Members on both sides of the House will consider the chaos of the present system and realise that, as the hon. Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart) said, this Bill is very modest. It will do nothing to answer the serious hardship that exists.

6.24 pm

Mr. Gyles Brandreth (City of Chester): The hon. Member for Cardiff, Central (Mr. Jones) was long on criticism, but short on any prescription for what he and his colleagues would suggest to replace the student loans scheme, which they apparently find so unsatisfactory.

In my brief contribution I want to welcome this brief Bill, which seems straightforward, sensible and simply designed to enable students to take out private subsidised loans from banks and building societies as an alternative to public loans from the Student Loans Company.

Most, if not all, subsidised loans could and should eventually come from the private sector, but the choice should rest with the student. Personal lending is not one of the tasks that should fall naturally to the state. We are talking about a huge capital investment and I hope that it is one which, in due course, can be largely taken over by the private sector.

We have touched on the difficulties that faced the Student Loans Company in its early years. I was interested and reassured to hear of the improvement in its operation more recently. Long may that continue.

Thanks to the Bill, I trust that we shall be able to give students the opportunity to go for a private sector loan. I hope that they will be able to choose from a variety of different types that will be offered by different institutions.

Lending is not naturally an activity that belongs to Government. We must bear it in mind that the huge capital investment of which we are talking will be about £5 billion by 2000. The Opposition must deal with that and come up with some positive suggestions.

Through private sector lenders, students will have more choice and can only benefit from that. I was particularly interested in the contribution to the debate made by my hon. Friend the Member for Wantage (Mr. Jackson) about the balance between the private and the state sectors in the management of universities. Much of what he said is worth taking very seriously indeed.

Despite the opposition, no evidence has been put forward to suggest that the introduction of student loans five years ago has deterred students from going on to higher education. On the contrary, the numbers are higher than ever before. I think that I am right in saying that the Minister referred to the fact that one in three young people are now entering higher education, compared with one in eight 15 years ago. There are 1 million students on full-time higher education courses. Many of the most fortunate, of course, are at Chester college in my constituency.

I should be grateful if my hon. Friend the Minister could confirm the figure that I quoted in an intervention on the Opposition spokesman, the hon. Member for Oldham, Central and Royton (Mr. Davies). I suggested that, contrary to the talk of cuts—the mantra of Opposition Members—public funding for English universities is at record levels. I quoted a figure of about £4.7 billion for the coming year. I think that I am right in saying that another £1.5 billion is available for student support.

When my hon. Friend replies to the debate, will he also confirm that, when the maintenance grant was first introduced more than 30 years ago, it was envisaged that no more than about 170,000 students would receive it? By the end of the 1980s, 400,000 students were receiving mandatory awards. The cost to the taxpayer in real terms has increased over that period by about 250 per cent. There has been a massive expansion in higher education and a massive extra commitment by the taxpayer.

The Government were wise in 1990 to introduce the new system of student support involving loans, which has several advantages. While easing the financial burden on taxpayers and parents, it allows the Government, on behalf of the taxpayer, to use the extra resources made available by the introduction of the loan scheme to fund more places. It makes more money available for students.

Loans also encourage students to spend their resources responsibly. That is a delicate area to wander into if, like me, one has three children of college or university age. They rather pull faces when I say that it is important to learn to use one's resources responsibly. I know that it is controversial, but I believe that learning about responsible financial management should be a key element in a student's life. I should like more to be done at school, and certainly at university, to encourage young people's understanding of financial management

I was struck by a recent lecture given by Jon Westling, the president elect of Boston university in Massachusetts. In his lecture, Mr. Westling talked about a range of forms of political correctness that are creeping into American academe. He highlighted a student who had sent him a letter saying that she was concerned because she was having difficulty

"in the area of auditory processing".

This young lady, who is called Samantha, warned him that she might fall asleep in his classes and that he should be prepared to fill her in on any material that she missed

while she was dozing. He explained that she had suggested that seriously. He answered that students must learn to overcome some of the challenges that face them. He ended his speech with a rousing cry that I take quite seriously. He said:

"We need to return to students—and to all the members of our societies—the thrilling sense that they are responsible for their own lives."

That is part and parcel of making students and young people realise that there is a price to be paid for a quality education and that that price has to be paid by active citizens. That is one of the incidental reasons why I welcome the measure.

Of course, I am concerned when there is real hardship, but I do not believe that there is any solid evidence that less well-off students are being deterred from entering higher education by student loans. The hon. Member for Oldham, Central and Royton peddled that line again and when I questioned it, he did not have much to say, except to acknowledge that I was right that the evidence suggests that the proportion of students from social grades A and B has fallen since the introduction of student loans, while there has been a corresponding rise in the proportion of students from C1, C2, D and E backgrounds. It was extraordinary that he referred to that as differences at the margins. I suppose that the Opposition do not take seriously the notion of making education—and quality education at that—accessible to all.

I think I am right that 18 out of the 24 Labour Front-Bench spokesmen were offered their education at grant-maintained, grammar or public schools.

Mr. Gunnell: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Brandreth: I will when I have finished this flourish. Given that they are people who have climbed the ladder of opportunity and are ready to kick it away so that others cannot benefit from it, I am not surprised at their line on student loans.

Mr. Gunnell: The hon. Gentleman talks about the marginal differences mentioned by Labour Members. In considering the figures for social classes, should he not look at the difference that remains between people in social classes A and B, who have access to higher education, and those in social classes D and E? When we talk about differences at the margins, we are talking about eroding the very large gap that currently exists.

Mr. Brandreth: I want more students, from an ever-broader base, to take part in further and higher education. We can agree on that. I salute the fact that my hon. Friend the Minister and his colleagues are coming up with practical suggestions to deal with the real situation.

It is appalling that the Opposition have had an opportunity today to make some alternative suggestions, but have offered us nothing at all. It is not clear where the Opposition stand. I know that three years ago, at the time of the previous general election, the Labour party was quite clear that it would replace the student loans scheme with a new system for student grants and would offer targeted help for housing and for students during vacations. That was three years ago. I imagine that that commitment has fallen by the wayside.

A year ago, the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett), in an interview in *Education Magazine*, stated:

"student debt. . . needs sorting out"

and suggested:

"Imagination will be needed to find the best way through."

A year later, his imagination has been at work and it appears that he and his colleagues have not found a way through, unless they are still toying with the idea—certainly they were in the past year—of some form of graduate tax. I know that the hon. Member for Brightside has said that he is

"interested in a tax related to income which is progressive"

and that he is exploring it. Perhaps the time for imagination and exploration has ended. If we are to ask people to make a choice in an election in the next 18 months or so, students will want to know exactly where they stand. At the moment, they do not.

Students know where they stand with regard to the Liberals and all credit to them for explaining that they are not in favour of the loans scheme. Their penny on income tax is being stretched ever further, rather like the Labour party's windfall tax. We have an idea of the policy of the Liberal party. It adds up and I look forward to getting the document in the post. We do not know what the Opposition's policies are, so they cannot add up. We know exactly what my hon. Friend the Minister and his colleagues have in mind. The Bill seems to me sane, sensible and concise and I welcome it.

6.36 pm

Mr. Cynog Dafis (Ceredigion and Pembroke, North): It would be remiss of me not to speak in this debate because I have two universities in my constituency. It would also be remiss of me if I did not emphasise the crucial issue of the severe predicament of students from low-income, unprivileged backgrounds, which has already been mentioned but about which I want to be specific.

Such students from unprivileged, working-class backgrounds were the sort of students whom the University college of Wales in Aberystwyth was set up to serve. It was a college established largely with small, individual contributions from working-class communities. It is for just that category of student that the university was set up, and those students are now subject to severe pressures. Such students are subjected to those pressures because of the reduction in grant, the introduction of a loan system that requires repayment in the first five years of employment and because of their inability to call upon support from their families.

The maximum total income available to a student from both grant and loan amounts to only £3,270. In Aberystwyth, up to £1,753 per annum goes on accommodation fees. That means that about 44 per cent. of students' income goes on accommodation compared with the average citizen's expenditure on accommodation of only 33 per cent. Most of the grant goes on paying for accommodation.

If parents, as many do and as I did for my children, pay for students' accommodation and provide an allowance for them—and there are many students in that situation—there is no problem. Those students are able to live a reasonably comfortable life and get on with their studies without much difficulty. Such students, as has been

[Mr. Cynog Dafis]

emphasised, are able to obtain loans with equanimity. They can do that without having to worry about it, but for those who are not so privileged, the situation is really desperate, especially as such people are deeply anxious about taking up loans in any case.

I have spoken today not only to the welfare officer of the university at Aberystwyth, but to Ann Rhys, a consultant psychiatrist seconded to the university from the Ceredigion and Mid-Wales NHS trust for 50 per cent. of her time. The evidence that she has given to me is eloquent about the painful reality experienced by unprivileged students.

Over the past four years—she stipulated in her conversations with me that it was the past four years—Ann Rhys has noticed a great increase in the incidence of stress disorders. She listed them to me: eating disorders; panic attacks; serious anxiety symptoms; self-abusive disorders; and what she called secondary depressive illnesses. She emphasised that she was talking not about some kind of superficial psychological difficulty but about deep psychiatric illness, which was becoming much more common. As a member of a students health association, she told me that that was happening throughout the United Kingdom. That well-known fact has already been mentioned.

Ann Rhys had no doubt that all those problems were linked to the financial position of students and that that was the primary cause. In that regard, anxiety about debt is crucial. Many of those students come from families where borrowing is not part of the social culture. If borrowing occurs, it is seen as a sign that people are getting into financial difficulty. Ann Rhys finds in her conversations with students that they experience a great deal of anxiety about their parents. Many of them come from a home where the father is unemployed and the mother is overburdened by low-paid employment, as happens in many south Wales valley communities. She may have not one job but a number of part-time jobs. The option not available to such students is to ask for support from their families. Indeed, they are the kind of people who even avoid sharing the anxiety with their parents because they recognise that their parents, too, suffer from anxiety and face financial difficulties.

The majority of those students take part-time employment. They work in supermarkets or bars, often for less than £3 an hour. They work long hours, which leads to fatigue. Other hon. Members have mentioned students who work night shifts. Many of those students often work late at night. Ann Rhys pointed out that, as well as fatigue, those students suffer further anxiety because they find it more difficult to cope with their essays and the tasks set for them, and they become anxious about falling behind with their studies. She tells them that they should not go to work as they are not well enough and it is too much for them. Sadly, they are not in a position to choose. Although work exacerbates the psychiatric disorders from which they suffer, they have no choice: if they do not work, they will get deeper into debt.

Ann Rhys sometimes refers students to the psychology unit at Bronglais hospital, but the waiting list there is increasing. The waiting time is now some six to eight weeks. She claims that the length of that waiting list is, to a degree, the outcome of that very phenomenon. Thus the hospital system finds it increasingly difficult to cope, and the hospital has now devised opportunities for group therapy rather than individual consultation and treatment for those various disorders.

Those problems are bound to be a disincentive for people from working-class and less privileged backgrounds to take up higher education. If that fact has not yet begun to feed through into the statistics, it will soon do so. We heard this evening that the proportion of higher education students from the working class or social classes C and D has increased. That merits some investigation and analysis, but it is clear that a range of factors may cause such an increase, such as changes in the pattern of employment, or the reduced availability of employment in many working-class areas and therefore an aspiration to seek better occupational opportunities through higher education, which is often bitterly disappointed.

There is bound to be a disincentive, which will become increasingly evident if the picture that I am describing is true. It is small wonder that Aberystwyth university has a drop-out rate of 13 per cent. That is particularly high, which probably relates to the fact that Aberystwyth is a small town, and a huge majority of the students come from far away and a small proportion live locally. I am told that that leads to a loss of fees of some £250,000 and it can lead to reduced funding from the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales which, like all funding councils, emphasises the outcome in determining the amount of funding.

My main concern tonight, however, is the misery imposed on that category of student and the injustice perpetrated. It is particularly ironic in relation to Aberystwyth, and it must be tackled. It is unlikely to be tackled, however, when the conventional wisdom these days, as we have heard more than once tonight, is obsessed with reducing public expenditure. I do not share that obsession.

I support the demand, which comes from various directions, for an urgent and thorough review of the funding of students in higher and further education. That, rather than the privatisation of student loans, should be the priority.

6.45 pm

Mr. Mike Hall (Warrington, South): I oppose Second Reading because, if enacted, the Bill will do nothing to improve the financial resources available to students in higher education. The Minister has confirmed that in his speech this afternoon.

It is a great pleasure to follow in this debate the hon. Member for City of Chester (Mr. Brandreth), who gave us a lecture on financial probity. Given that his track record in business is one of bankruptcy and of a business collapse, taking with it huge amounts of taxpayers' money, it was an extremely interesting lecture.

Before I explain why I oppose Second Reading, I should be grateful for a little leeway briefly to mention the results of the first opt-out ballot to take place in my constituency. Lymm high school is a successful school. Its pupils achieve excellent results, it has great facilities and its future is very secure. Over the past month or so, the parents of pupils at Lymm high school were balloted on whether they wanted to opt out of the local authority. The Minister will be delighted to know the result: 322

parents voted in favour of opting out; and 1,293 voted against. That was an emphatic rejection of opting out and an overwhelming endorsement of staying in the family of local education provision. I congratulate the parents of pupils at Lymm high school on their common sense. I thank you for your indulgence, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in allowing me to say that.

The arguments in favour of a Second Reading of the Bill are a repetition of those expressed on 5 December 1989, when the Second Reading of the current Act was debated in the House. The then Secretary of State for Education told the House that the Education (Student Loans) Bill was a scheme that would "benefit students". Some 435,000 ex-students have now had the benefit of a student loan debt: 187,000 of those have deferred the starting date of repayments and 44,000 are already in arrears on their repayments. Some £1.3 billion is now owed to the Student Loans Company and 147,459 graduates now owe £36.1 million; 11,296 students are in default as of 31 March 1995, which is 7.7 per cent. of the total.

That puts into perspective the comments of the then Secretary of State for Education and Science, the right hon. Member for South Norfolk (Mr. MacGregor), when he said that student loans were

"intended to reduce students' sense of dependency on the state and promote an awareness of self-reliance and investing in their future".

The effect of the student loan scheme has been to transfer a considerable part of higher education costs from the Department for Education and Employment to individual students. The effect of Tory education policy has been to turn our undergraduates into debt carriers throughout their university careers and early into their years of employment.

When the student loan scheme was introduced in 1989, the House was informed that loans would top up the maintenance grant paid to students. Evidence now shows that those loans will soon supersede the maintenance grant as the main part of student funding. So much for top-up loans and the concept of loans designed to assist students during their time in higher education.

What is the purpose of the Bill? In 1989, the Government wanted to involve the high street banks in the loan scheme and the then Secretary of State for Education stated:

"all we have asked the banks to do is to assist in the administration, on a contractual basis. We have done so for two good reasons. Those banks have the branch network and experience of lending . . . Our aim is to ensure that the scheme is likely to be underpinned by a broadly based network of institutions, the services of which will be available to students. That will also be to the benefit of students."—[*Official Report*, 5 December 1989; Vol. 163, c. 175, 182-83.]

Unfortunately, the Secretary of State then had to inform the House that Lloyds bank, and five other high street banks, had pulled out of the scheme.

During the Second Reading of the Education (Student Loans) Bill in the other place, Lord Caithness said:

"We saw some advantages in making the expertise and the branch network of banks available to help with administration of the scheme; but the banks decided that there was no commercial benefit for them."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 27 February 1990; Vol. 516, c. 604.]

Those words will come back to haunt the current Minister as he seeks to introduce the new scheme. On 17 November, the Minister issued a press release in which he said:

"The expertise and experience of the private sector would mean a better loans system overall and a better deal for students."

He almost repeated the argument used in 1989.

I intervened in the Minister's speech to ask what had changed. Why are the Government now trying to resurrect a failed policy of six years ago? They are like dogs returning to their vomit, and they should avoid that at all costs.

Six years ago, the Government promised to cover the loss of interest payments, pay administration costs and cover default costs, but still the high street banks did not feel able to participate, because the scheme did not suit their commercial interests. If the high street banks are now interested in such a scheme, they must have been offered a better deal. How much more money—additional sweeteners—will the Government throw at the banks to resolve the problem?

A spokesperson for Midland bank recently said of the Bill's proposals:

"This is a high risk venture and we see considerable problems in managing this book. It is not the most attractive proposition in the world."

Sir Eric Ash—perhaps the Minister will tell us whether he is to be appointed as the chief executive of the Student Loans Company—has been consulted on the Bill's proposals and has said:

"The message I'm getting back from the banks that I've spoken to already . . . is that they're not really very interested."

The explanatory and financial memorandum to the Bill notes that the extent of any overall reductions in public expenditure depends on the precise arrangements that are made with the financial institutions and the number of students who take up loans with the private sector.

The Minister must tell us how much more money and additional sweeteners the Government will offer to attract high street banks into the student loan business. The answer to that fundamental question underlines the purpose of the Bill. How much money will the Government pay to make the student loans scheme attractive to the high street banks when those banks refused to participate six years ago, despite all the guarantees offered to them? The Minister may want to intervene to answer that question, because it has been estimated that it will cost an extra £1,500 per student loan to attract the high street banks. I notice that the Minister has not got up to deny that figure at the Dispatch Box.

If the Government are prepared to spend resources on subsidising the high street banks, that money would be better spent on improving current student grants. If the Government can afford to pay £1,500 to subsidise the loans offered by high street banks, they can afford to give that money to the students direct. Instead, the Government have come up with a plan that involves the high street banks taking all the profits while the Government shoulder all the risks and the costs. The Government must consider seriously the ethics of using public money to subsidise private money lending.

What has the Minister got to say about the ethics of using taxpayers' money to bankroll high street banks? While he contemplates that question, he may be interested to hear what Lord Beloff said during the debate on the Loyal Address in 1989. On the specific issue of student loans he said:

"I warned the Government that if they were trying to act through a consortium of banks, they would find the banks very reluctant to co-operate. That has been borne out by their experience. After all, a fishmonger sells fish; that is his business. A banker lends money;

[Mr. Mike Hall]

that is his business. One does not have to bribe a fishmonger to sell fish but apparently the Government have to bribe the banks to lend money. Could we get further into absurdity?"—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 23 November 1989; Vol. 513, c. 186-87.]

The extra cost involved in getting the high street banks to participate in the student loans scheme is yet another example of where the Government are prepared to spend more and more money on administration and bureaucracy to feed their ideologically motivated policies.

The Government have asked the House to give the Bill a Second Reading, but they have not consulted on the issues involved. They have not offered the House any costings of the new scheme, and therefore they are asking the House for a blank cheque. The House must resist those moves.

The Government have also tried to seduce the House with arguments about choice. The Minister has claimed:

"Students can only benefit from the choice, diversity and competition that these changes would bring."

He has also said:

"Private loans would be available from the beginning of the 1996/97 academic year. In due course we would expect most loans to be private ones."

The Government claim that the Bill will widen the choice available to students by giving them an option of where they get their loans from. In the same breath, they tell us that, eventually, they want all loans to be provided by the private sector. In his press release, however, the Minister made it clear that the value of the loan, whether provided by the Student Loans Company or the private sector, will be exactly the same. It is therefore clear that there will be no choice and no incentive provided to students to opt for loans. That reveals, once again, the gap between the rhetoric and the practice of the Government.

It is most deceitful for the Government to talk about extending choice when it is plain to everyone that the Government want to transfer loans to the private sector. The Government will simply end up creating a two-tier system of student loans, providing the banks receive a big enough bribe. That will happen despite the Government's promise, given on Second Reading of the pervious Education (Student Loans) Bill, that

"students will not be excluded on the basis of their financial record and there will be no means-testing."—[*Official Report*, 5 December 1989; Vol. 163, c. 178.]

It is clear that the Bill gives discretion to the banks to give loans to whomever they want. The problems that that will cause have already been outlined by my hon. Friends.

The introduction of the Bill signals the Government's intention to force more and more students to take up loans from the private sector. The Bill shows the way forward for the Government to pay huge amounts of taxpayers' money to the high street banks. It shows the way to force more and more students into debt during their years of higher education and early years of employment.

The Bill is ideologically motivated through and through, and does not address the problems facing either undergraduates or the Student Loans Company. It will do nothing to encourage students from less well-off backgrounds to enter education. It does not deserve to receive a Second Reading.

6.58 pm

Mr. John Gunnell (Morley and Leeds, South): If evidence were needed that the Government have run out of steam and ideas, and are out of touch with what the British people need, it is provided by the Bill.

We are discussing the Bill on one of the first legislative days of the new Session, during which the Conservative Government will, presumably, suggest to the electorate that they should be re-elected to power and should continue in office. All the Government have so far offered to attract the electorate is a mechanism for shifting the responsibility for the failing system of student loans to the private sector. The nature of the Bill is demonstrated by the number of Conservative Members who are present to defend it, let alone to speak about it. They do not want to speak to it because there is little to say.

The Minister made no real case for the Bill, and it was left to the hon. Member for Wantage (Mr. Jackson) to make out a case for it. Unfortunately, his argument about the Bill was not in the Minister's speech because the Minister did not agree with it. The Minister did not share the hon. Gentleman's vision of universities as independent institutions, which would be freed up by the private sector and by the way in which those loans would be offered. Indeed, I am sure that the way in which the system has been structured makes it impossible for the hon. Gentleman's vision to become reality.

This is an unworthy start to a year in which, if the Bill before us is typical, unwanted legislation will be introduced. The Bill is largely irrelevant to higher education and is of no interest to private sector financial services companies. My hon. Friend the Member for Warrington, South (Mr. Hall) has just said that, as the financial services companies were not interested previously, if they are interested now, they must be interested only because of the bribes that are not made explicit in the Bill but are implied by it.

The Bill is of no interest to students; it is an attempt to pass the buck. It is uncosted and unwanted. As many hon. Members have said, the Bill has been introduced solely as a result of the effect that the student loans scheme has had on the public sector borrowing requirement. The Bill is an attempt to transfer as much as possible of that responsibility in the year to come.

We must ask who has demanded the change that the Bill will bring about. Has it been suggested by current recipients of loans? Have the universities asked for it? They have not asked for it, and they say that they are not interested in it and do not believe that it is the way to proceed. Have the banks suggested it? Have the building societies, with their increase in powers and their acquisition of banking powers, asked for such a scheme to be introduced? The answer to each of those questions is no. The reaction of the people who are most involved is, at best, apathetic and, at worst, hostile.

The change does not appear to be wanted by anyone except the Conservative party, and the Minister made out a very poor case for it. He spoke about the fact that it would encourage partnerships between universities and the private sector, but the way in which the tendering process has been set up means that that will not happen. No relationship will be set up between a bank and an individual university institution.

The other case that the Minister made out for the Bill was that, as the banks have branches in every high street, it will be easier for students to use the system. An entire piece of legislation is introduced because high street banks are in range of universities and can do dealings with them easily. That is not a sufficient reason for legislation that is a mechanism for debt transfer. It will not make any difference to our higher education system. The Bill has an especially empty ring because higher education is important to the nation. Other hon. Members, such as my hon. Friend the Member for West Lancashire (Mr. Pickthall), have said what the priorities should be.

Higher education fails many students at present. The hon. Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North (Mr. Dafis) clearly demonstrated that access to university continues to be determined in good measure by wealth and social background, and that those people who have the least access to resources are especially likely to be affected by the Bill.

It is wrong for the hon. Member for City of Chester (Mr. Brandreth) to suggest that that is not so, and it is a misuse of the statistics, which continue to show that access to university depends on social background, however people—especially the Labour party when in power—have tried to erode that relationship. However, other work must be undertaken, and obviously it is not the measure before us.

We know that a great gap confronts those who have been in employment and want to return to further study. The Bill is not designed to help them. The argument that the Bill does not do what it was intended to do might be regarded as a poor criticism, but we must consider the plight of many mature students nowadays. As a result of the loss of the older students allowance, there is a widespread feeling that it has become a significant hardship for people who are in one career to pursue the means to enter an alternative career.

As other hon. Members have said, and as I experienced when teaching in university, mature students have a dedication to their task—a dedication that is often very heartening to teachers—and they turn in extremely good performances. It is especially disappointing that the Bill does nothing for those aspects of real need.

There can be few hon. Members who have not been asked to help in appeals for discretionary awards. During the current year especially, and in recent years, there has been a continual decrease in the amounts of money available for discretionary awards. In entire subject areas, it is almost impossible to obtain any grant for training. For instance, it has been said several times in the House that it is impossible to obtain a grant for the dance training that is available to people who have sufficient resources. The Bill does nothing for the range of students who are handicapped by the virtual disappearance of the discretionary grant scheme.

On the tendering process in the Bill, we should persuade the Minister to tell us more about the criteria on which he will award the contracts to four financial institutions in each region. We have said that it is unlikely that any institution will be enthusiastic about winning the contracts that go with the scheme. To ensure genuine competition, the tendering process must cause people to be anxious to bid and to win the contract. Banks and building societies have demonstrated no interest in the scheme, so the likelihood of the Minister being able to choose between a series of institutions that have made competitive bids is minimal. There will be no loss leaders.

One institution will have responsibility for the loans in England and Wales, another in Scotland and another in Northern Ireland. In those circumstances, the relationship is not with the university but with the person who takes out the loan. Therefore, partnership arrangements similar to those that exist in the United States of America will not develop in the United Kingdom as a result of the measure.

The partnership arrangements in the USA exist because there is a plethora of universities—public and private—and many universities have direct links with a specific institution. Those arrangements work well in places such as Stanford university, California, and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, where various successful companies are involved and strong relationships have developed.

However, similar arrangements will not develop as a result of the scheme proposed in the Bill. If it comes about, the scheme will be composed of arrangements between banks and a mass of borrowers. However, for the reasons given by my hon. Friend the Member for Warrington, South, obviously the enthusiasm does not exist to create a competitive position. That will lead to special hardship for those students who are least well off.

Let us consider the table that was recently supplied in the annual report of the Student Loans Company. It is interesting to note that the proportion of students deferring was 43 per cent. in the first year, 54 per cent. in the second year and 60 per cent. in the third year for which they should be making payments. Deferments will be considerable, and banks will be reluctant to take on such a scale of debt.

In returning to the issue, why have the Government not noted the fact—made clear in his memoirs—that if Kenneth Baker had known—*[Interruption.]* I am sorry, Mr. Deputy Speaker; I should have referred to the right hon. Member for Mole Valley (Mr. Baker), but I know that corrections are made in the record. The right hon. Member for Mole Valley made it clear that he would have persevered with a system directly involving the Inland Revenue. Why does the Minister pour scorn on the Australian system, which seems to work much better? Why do we not introduce a system aligning students' repayments with the resources available to them, enabling them to repay their loans as they progress in their careers? Given that it would involve much lower administrative costs, why do we not adopt a system that would genuinely help students?

This is a disappointing Bill, which offers nothing to the higher education system or to individual students, and which has clearly been rejected by the universities.

7.11 pm

Mrs. Maria Fyfe (Glasgow, Maryhill): As has already been pointed out today, the subsidy from central Government to the banks that is proposed in the Bill would require £1,500 for each private loan. The Minister has not denied that. It is absurd: as I pointed out earlier, the basic grant for the next financial year will be only £1,257. We are giving more money to the banks' shareholders than to individual students. I would rather give the money to the students, and I do not think that

[Mrs. Maria Fyfe]

any Opposition Member disagrees with me. It is incredible that the basic student grant should be so low. A student living away from home, moreover, is expected to cope on a grant of £1,812, plus a maximum loan of £1,380—a total of £3,192. Only weeks ago, the House had to take action to deal with certain Members who had asked parliamentary questions. The cost of the time and trouble taken to table three such questions would have put £3,000 in a student's pocket straight away.

Earlier, I mentioned the report about student poverty in Scotland that was published in August by the Scottish citizens advice bureau. The Minister said that he had seen students in beer bars. Must every student beer bar in the country close before the Minister accepts that there is such a thing as student poverty? The report demonstrated conclusively that, for all the Government's denials, student poverty exists and, indeed, is widespread. Students who are perfectly capable of achieving their degrees and diplomas are having to give up because of mounting debts.

In Scotland, there is a four-year honours degree course, because the first year is the equivalent of an A-level course in England. That means that Scottish students experience even more debt. Students who become ill fall foul of a system that does not allow for any such human frailty: grants are refused to students who wish to repeat a year because of ill health. Students have been known to leave courses because delays in getting grant cheques to them have left them with no money to live on.

According to the report, a student in Grampian sought advice from the SCAB about bankruptcy because—as a 19-year-old first-year student—he owed a total of £2,000 to the bank, the Student Loans Company and the university for accommodation. The SCAB has observed a general increase in the number of student clients seeking debt counselling. That may not be altogether surprising, but it should shock us that the bureau has had to send students to charities that provide free food.

The fact is that students are probably the only category of people who can end up with literally no income. They have no access to emergency funds, such as a crisis loan from the social fund. Grants and loans combined amount to less than the average weekly benefit. That exerts an unacceptable pressure on young men and women. We should ease their path towards higher and further education, rather then making it an obstacle course.

Conservative Members have said much about fairness to the taxpayer. No one objects to that, but I do not think that any fair-minded taxpayer wants to be unfair to students. The amount of grant currently available to students is a disgrace in a country that claims to want to encourage young people to participate in higher and further education. I look forward to my party's introduction of a scheme that will ensure that no student in the land is deterred from entering such education because of the fear of poverty or debt.

7.15 pm

Mr. Tony Worthington (Clydebank and Milngavie): As many hon. Members have said, this is a strange Bill. There has been no demand for it from students, universities or the Student Loans Company—or, I suspect, from the Department for Education and Employment. I do not believe that the Bill has come from that Department; I believe that it has come from the Treasury. If we could debate it on that basis—on its merits, indeed—the debate would have some reality, but the Government are afraid to admit that the Bill concerns the transfer of money from the public sector borrowing requirement.

I am told that the Bill is about choice, but none of the people I have mentioned asked for it. They exercised their choice: they did not want it. The private sector, too, has exercised its choice, saying, "We want nothing to do with the Bill." The Government have said, "We will try a little sweetener. Here is a bit more: then perhaps you will exercise your choice." Public money is involved in this public Bill, whose purpose is to subsidise the private sector so that it will enter the arena.

We are to gain the expertise of the private sector. I thought that we gained that when Mr. Ronald Harrison was appointed to run the Student Loans Company. Mr. Harrison, however, was dismissed last year, after bringing the skills and expertise of the private sector to the company, and wrecking it.

I do not share the Government's respect for the banking system—their view that expertise exists and that we are not tapping into it. If we ask which sector should now be concentrating on its proper job of investing in British industry, the answer should be the banks. If we could persuade them to do that, rather than trying to entice them into using their skills, they would be doing their job.

I find it odd that, having established the Student Loans Company a few years ago in Glasgow—the jobs in Glasgow are very welcome—the Government should seek to create unemployment in that city. As the Bill states, if it succeeds, the company in Glasgow will be scaled down, and people working there will cease to be employed. That is one of the Bill's central purposes. In a policy that no one wants, the Government are seeking to endanger 3,000 jobs.

The Minister shakes his head, but it is in the explanatory and financial memorandum:

"The number of staff employed by the Student Loans Company will be reduced as a result of the Bill".

Fewer jobs will be lost if the Bill fails.

Mr. Forth: I thought that the hon. Gentleman was above the kind of irresponsible scaremongering in which he is now indulging. To the extent that loans would be provided by the banks instead of the Student Loans Company, it is self-evident that SLC staff numbers would be reduced. There can be no doubt about that. Equally, the Student Loans Company must continue to exist, as the Government have given a guarantee that we shall always provide an alternative. Is the hon. Gentleman suggesting that it is beyond the professional expertise of the management in Glasgow to administer change?

Mr. Worthington: The Minister does not contradict what I have said. Does he deny the memorandum, which says that the legislation will lead to an increase in the number of staff employed by the Department for

Education and Employment to administer the subsidies to the private sector, but to a reduction in public sector employment as fewer people will be employed by the Student Loans Company? The stated purpose of the Government's Bill is to increase the subsidy to the private sector and to run down the Student Loans Company.

Labour Members base their assertions on the evidence that they are given about student poverty. Inevitably, that is not the best-quality evidence: it tends to be anecdotal evidence from student welfare officers, for example. A defect of the Student Loans Company is that it has no responsibility for researching the consequences of its actions, and the Department for Education and Employment has also shrugged off its responsibilities in that regard. If the Government were serious about their policy, they would conduct thorough-going research into the consequences of their measures to create student support. However, the Government will not do that.

I have examined the sums of money involved. My hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Maryhill (Mrs. Fyfe) referred to the cost of a Scottish degree. I have examined the cost of taking a Scottish degree and going on to teacher training, which involves five years of study.

This year, a student loan is just less than £1,400. So the cost of becoming a teacher in a Scottish school is a minimum of £7,000—five times £1,400. Students must pay back that £7,000 over five years—which involves a weekly payment of £27—as soon as they receive a salary of £15,000 per year. It cannot be fair that, when a Scottish schoolteacher receives a salary of £15,000 and begins to settle down with a family, buy a house and establish a career, he or she must pay £27 per week in a totally inflexible manner. Is there any legislation to address that problem? No, we have only this nonsense legislation that does not tackle the basic issues.

The Bill does not address the quality of education in Northern Ireland. The Northern Ireland peace process is in a fragile state. As Northern Ireland has more students and fewer university places than anywhere else in the United Kingdom, 44 per cent. of Northern Ireland students must travel to mainland Britain to take up university education. For reasons associated with the troubles, many of those students do not return to Northern Ireland from mainland Britain.

It is a serious problem: 44 per cent. of higher education students leave the Province, and, overwhelmingly, they do not return. That is a serious educational consequence, but the Bill does not explore how more students from Northern Ireland could study in that country.

The Bill also fails to deal with the consequences of the fact that more Northern Ireland students come from poorer backgrounds—about 34 per cent. of students from Northern Ireland are from social classes D and E, compared with 29 per cent. in England and Wales. More students from Northern Ireland than anywhere else are recipients of full maintenance grants, and they also face the additional cost of travelling from Northern Ireland to the mainland.

Those are serious student maintenance issues, but the Bill does not address those problems; it simply enables public subsidy to go to private financial institutions. I charge the Government with being flippant: at a time when students face serious problems, the Government have introduced a Bill that is driven by dogma, and is irrelevant to students' needs.

7.24 pm

Mr. Edward O'Hara (Knowsley, South): My hon. Friend the Member for Warrington, South (Mr. Hall) talked at some length about the supposed element of choice in the Bill. Let us judge the legislation by the Government's own terms: what choice does it offer? We have already exposed the concept of the choice that is offered to parents of schoolchildren: they may exercise a preference of school for their children, but they have no real choice—it is the schools that exercise choice.

Under the proposed student loans system, students may prefer to go to a finance house—perhaps because of the inducements that such an institution may offer them—to apply for a loan. However, any choice in the matter will be exercised by the finance house. It will be a case of selection according to creditworthiness. I assure hon. Members that a typical student from my constituency would have no choice at all.

We are talking about the proposed introduction of a two-tier system of student loans: those students who can do deals, and those who cannot; those who have the power, and those who do not. The supposed choice and diversity in respect of schools has led to divergence and division, and it is the same with the proposed dual-track system of student loans. Students will have no choice, and there will be no real diversity: there will be only divergence between those who will have the opportunity to pay off their loans at preferential rates when they start working, and those who will begin their working lives with fixed mortgages around their necks.

As my hon. Friends have said, the purpose of the Bill is to fiddle the public sector borrowing requirement and to massage the figures down. It is an exercise in creative accounting, and it will be achieved at a price. The basis of the Bill is flawed, and no less flawed are the procedures that the Bill allows the Secretary of State to follow in order to implement the new system by September 1996. The Bill gives extraordinary powers to the Secretary of State to incur expenditure when negotiating terms with finance houses. It literally offers a blank cheque, and that is a disgrace. It is necessary from the Government's point of view because, by presenting the proposal in this manner, they have passed the negotiating whip hand to the finance houses. They have loudly signalled their lack of interest, and their interest will be aroused at a price. That is not surprising, when one considers what the finance houses must risk: unpredictability of demand, risk of default and the loss of good will among valuable student clients.

Not only the finance houses, but the students and the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals, reject the proposal. They recoup only half the cost of managing the present system, and they envisage an added administrative burden from managing a dual loans system.

In short, the Bill is not just mediocre: it is tawdry in its conception and in its purpose. It is unloved by both the agents and the clients of the proposed system. It is irrelevant, and it does nothing to address the faults of the present system of student financing, which is complex, confusing and inequitable, and the cause of much student hardship. Above all, the present scheme exposes the Government to the accusation that they are rationing higher education at a time of retrenchment, and are wasting a pool of national talent.

[Mr. Edward O'Hara]

The system is complex and confusing because students are trapped in a maze of grant, loan, access funds, parental support and part-time employment. I know that certain Conservative Members believe that to be a good thing—a virtuous initiation of students into the realities of finance, self-reliance and responsibility. There is, however, another way of looking at it. There is good evidence that enforced preoccupation with financing their studies leads to many students worsening their academic performance because they cannot keep up with their studies, dropping out or deciding not to enter higher education in the first place.

The Government would have been far better occupied in undertaking a close analysis of the shortcomings of the present system and producing a Bill that attempted to address them instead of the tawdry measure that they present to us today, and that I hope will be rejected.

7.30 pm

Mr. Stephen Byers (Wallsend): We have had an instructive and informative debate. There has been a consensus: all hon. Members recognised that, at least on public policy for student maintenance, there are no easy answers to what are difficult questions. The rest of the debate identified a gulf between the political parties on that issue.

Conservative Members believe that privatisation of the loans system will somehow, as if by magic, remedy the present weaknesses and deficiencies, whereas the Opposition regard the measure as simply tinkering with a failed and discredited system in a cynical attempt to fiddle the public sector borrowing requirement for party political purposes.

Five years ago, when the Education (Student Loans) Bill was before the House, the then Secretary of State for Education and Science, the right hon. Member for South Norfolk, (Mr. MacGregor), said that the aim of the Bill was

"to share the cost of student maintenance more fairly between the taxpayer, students' parents and students themselves."—[*Official Report*, 5 December 1989; Vol. 163, c. 174.]

After five years of the operation of the student loans system, it has become clear that it provides little fairness for the taxpayer as £1.3 billion of public money remains outstanding on the loan account. The National Audit Office report on the operation of the Student Loans Company, published on 24 November, concluded that £142 million borrowed from the public purse would not be repaid. Where is the fairness to the taxpayer in that regime?

The 1988 White Paper that led to the introduction of the Education (Student Loans) Act 1990 stated that the spending outlay would not be recovered until the year 2015, when savings would start to be made. That calculation assumed a deferred repayment rate of between 10 and 15 per cent., but the National Audit Office calculated that at 31 March 1995, 45 per cent. of all borrowers had been granted deferment. Given that extremely high rate of deferment, when do the Government believe that net savings will accrue from the student loans system?

It is a great irony that a scheme that costs so much public money is supporting a system that is deeply unpopular with students. The take-up rate of eligible students is running at 55 per cent. after five years of operation. That is far lower than the Government's original prediction. The loans scheme, coupled with the withdrawal of benefits and successive reductions in the value of the grant, has resulted in many students being pushed into poverty and debt.

The Minister spoke of students swilling beer in college bars—that may be true of the few students whom he meets—but many Opposition Members know that the reality is quite different. The speeches of my hon. Friends the Members for Cardiff, Central (Mr. Jones) and for Glasgow, Maryhill (Mrs. Fyfe) illustrated the nature of student poverty. According to university vice-chancellors, the main reason for the dramatic increase in the student drop-out rate is financial stress. In the latest year for which figures are available, 40,000 students dropped out of their university courses—a 25 per cent. increase on previous years. The Bill needs to be judged against that backdrop.

All those most closely connected with higher education have been strongly critical of the Government's present approach. There is a broad consensus on the need for a fundamental review of student maintenance. The president of the National Union of Students, Jim Murphy, said:

"We want an urgent review of the system of student financial support and proper consultation.".

That statement was supported by the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals. Its chairman, Professor Gareth Roberts, called for

"a fundamental review of the funding of student maintenance".

The committee also

"expressed their disappointment that the Government failed to consult them"

on the proposals before the House.

The Bill seeks to allow the private sector to enter the student loans market. In considering that proposal, we must briefly consider the effectiveness and efficiency of the Student Loans Company. As my hon. Friend the Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Mr. Worthington) said, the Bill will cost jobs in Glasgow, where the unemployment rate is already well above the national average.

Hon. Members will be aware of the deficiencies of the Student Loans Company over the years, but there has been substantial improvement. The National Audit Office report concluded:

"Our findings show that many initiatives are now in hand to improve performance. In particular, flaws in the Repeat Application Procedure, which caused the difficulties in 1994, were fully addressed for the re-launch of the initiative in 1995 and, as at 31 October 1995, the revised procedure was operating well. More generally, initiatives have been taken to improve the clarity of business and financial performance reporting and . . . the Company's performance targets have been made more rigorous and precise."

Those of us who make a habit of reading National Audit Office reports can confirm that its conclusion is a strong and positive statement of support for the conduct of the Student Loans Company.

Whatever reservations we have about the scheme, it is now clear that the Student Loans Company, in difficult circumstances, is on the right track. Much of the credit for that must go to Sir Eric Ash, who should be congratulated on the way in which he turned the company round.

Throughout the company there is clearly now a commitment to reduce costs, improve efficiency and offer a quality service in the public sector. The problems encountered by the Student Loans Company occurred because of the failings of the previous chief executive, who was recruited from the private sector, but that is the direction in which the Government now wish to proceed.

Why do the Government wish to privatise the student loans system now? When the Bill was published, the Department for Education and Employment issued a press notice stating that the Bill is

"designed to allow private sector financial institutions to enter the student loans system as major players."

Yet there is little evidence—there certainly was none in the Minister's speech—of demand from the private sector to become involved in the making of loans to students.

What we now know, which we did not know before, are the terms that were available to banks in 1989 to encourage them to take part in the scheme. They were drawn up by the consultants, Price Waterhouse. At the time they were not made public because they were regarded as "commercial in confidence". Since then, and since the banks' withdrawal from the scheme, they have been published. They reveal that as part of a package of measures to encourage banks to take part, the Government said that loans would be kept off the balance sheets of participating banks, that start-up and running costs would be recouped in full from the Government—the taxpayer—and that the scheme would be funded in full by the Government, including any default liability.

That was on offer in 1989, but the banks turned their backs and walked away. What the Minister should tell the House this evening is what is on offer in 1995 to change the approach of the banks, the building societies and the credit institutions. As my hon. Friend the Member for Warrington, South (Mr. Hall) said, referring to the excellent speech by the Conservative peer Lord Beloff, if the fishmonger sells fish, that is his business; if a banker lends money, that is his business. One does not have to bribe a fishmonger to sell fish, but apparently the Government have to bribe the banks to lend money. Could there be greater absurdity? The Minister, in being honest and open with the House this evening, needs to disclose what further absurdities and what bribes will come from the Government.

The measure has little to do with tackling the problems being experienced by students and by the higher education institutions. The Government are setting up a two-tier system—not for students, but for its operators. The Student Loans Company will act as a lender of last resort, covering students who are not deemed to be desirable by the private sector. There will be no choice for students and there will be no diversity for students. The choice will rest with the private sector and the diversity will be in who runs the operation. There will be no benefit to students.

The private sector is in a favourable position, which may be the difference between now and 1989. It will have the Student Loans Company to pick up the pieces. It will be able to pick the cherries—it will offer loans only to students from suitable backgrounds who are no financial risk. If that is coupled with a subsidy from the taxpayer, the Government will hope that many banks will be prepared to say yes.

The Minister should answer the specific points made in the debate. My hon. Friend the Member for West Lancashire (Mr. Pickthall) referred to the possibility of part-time students being covered by the loans scheme. Will that be so? The hon. Member for Lancaster (Dame E. Kellett-Bowman), in an intervention, asked whether students who interrupt their studies for a responsible reason could benefit from the scheme. We hope to have a answer from the Minister on that point. As my hon. Friend the Member for Morley and Leeds, South (Mr. Gunnell) said, we need to know what savings in the PSBR the Government expect to accrue as a result of the measures in the Bill.

The Bill is a further example of this Government's lurch to the right, which is probably why the Minister is so keen to promote it. Extreme policies are being introduced in a increasingly desperate attempt to placate the demands of the right wing, both within the Cabinet and on the Back Benches. The only beneficiaries will be the Government because the privatisation will remove billions of pounds from the PSBR and give the Chancellor further room for manoeuvre. The other beneficiaries will be the banks and finance houses, which will profit from student poverty, debt and misery.

The Bill fails the taxpayer by increasing the contribution from the public purse. It fails students by promising them more but giving them less. It fails our country in that it will not open up access to higher education. It places a mortgage on knowledge and a debt charge on learning. As a result, student poverty will increase, aspirations will be frustrated and opportunities will be denied. It represents a triumph of political dogma over reason. That is why we shall vote against Second Reading.

7.45 pm

Mr. Forth: With the leave of the House, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I welcome the hon. Member for Wallsend (Mr. Byers) to the Dispatch Box, in his first contribution to these matters. I hope that he and I will be exchanging views for a long time to come—in our present capacities, of course.

The hon. Member for Oldham, Central and Royton (Mr. Davies) said that he thought that the chairman of the Conservative party had revealed that our legislative programme this year was designed to smoke out the Opposition. If that is true, I am afraid that the debate has failed to do anything of the sort. It became increasingly obvious throughout the debate, in all the speeches of Labour Members, that we would be told nothing about what the Labour party would do in this crucial area of policy. It is not good enough for Labour Members to make the sort of comments and accusations that they did about the Bill and higher education policy generally when they have not a single policy idea on how they would conduct such a crucial area of education.

We still do not know, even after the debate, whether the Labour party approves of loans as a matter of principle to supplement grant. We do not know whether it would continue with loans or whether it would abolish them and return to grants. We do not even know something as basic as that. We do not know in detail what it would do with a loans scheme. We do not know its attitude towards the participation of the banks. Some Labour Members seem to be afraid that the banks will participate, while others deride the scheme and allege that the banks would not touch it with a bargepole. They cannot have it both ways. They either fear that the banks will participate or they are

[Mr. Forth]

confident that they will not. It should be one or the other, not both. There was a very mixed message throughout the debate.

What I want to know—and I am still waiting—is whether the Labour party, as a matter of policy, would abolish loans and return to grants. What would it do about the benefits that some Labour Members say are being denied to students? Would it restore those benefits? We did not hear anything about that. We heard no undertakings about part-time and further education students, despite the fact that some Labour Members tried to make great play of the fact that some of those students were disadvantaged. Unless the Labour party is prepared to tell us what it would do, its criticism is of no import or substance. Labour Members did not say what they would do about lower-income students or alleged student poverty.

There was a hint from some Opposition Members—I think even from the hon. Member for Wallsend, and certainly from the hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Mr. Worthington)—that they regard the Student Loans Company as a job scheme for the people employed in it. Whatever else we are doing, we certainly are not designing the Bill simply to run down the Student Loans Company as a matter of policy. I tried to explain that the Student Loans Company will continue to exist and that its existence is an integral part of the whole thrust and philosophy of the Bill. To the extent to which the opportunities open to the banks were taken up, there would have to be some reduction in the number of people employed at the Student Loans Company, but the reduction would be gradual and would take place over a period of time. It would certainly always leave the Student Loans Company as a major provider of loans to students. That has been made perfectly clear.

I think that we must conclude that Labour Members have not yet had permission from the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) to say anything whatsoever about education policy, higher education policy, student funding or anything else of the kind. We will have to adjust their criticisms accordingly.

I should like to give credit where credit is due. The hon. Member for Wallsend said at the beginning of his speech—this gave us some idea of the problem that he and his colleagues have—that, in this sphere, there are no easy answers and a number of difficult questions. That must certainly be so because he and his colleagues have come up with no answers at all—easy or difficult.

Mr. Blunkett: When will the Minister answer some of the difficult questions that we have put to him?

Mr. Forth: I do not know what the hon. Gentleman categorises as difficult questions. Labour Members have made a number of allegations, one of which was that the drop-out rate is increasing. I know of no evidence to support that allegation because, broadly speaking, the drop-out rate, which is difficult to define satisfactorily, has remained fairly constant. It has fluctuated somewhat over a number of years but has remained fairly constant for a long time. Indeed, it is very much lower in this country than in most of the comparable countries with which we compete.

Labour Members frequently made that point. They also made allegations about student poverty. The hon. Member for Glasgow, Maryhill (Mrs. Fyfe) made that allegation on the basis of conversations that she had had with a branch of the citizens advice bureau.

Mrs. Fyfe: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Forth: I shall give way in a moment. I yield to none in my admiration for much of the work done by many of the people who work in the citizens advice bureaux, but I do not think it is wise to generalise on the basis of a very small and self-selecting sample of students who felt unable to deal with their financial circumstances, for whatever reason, and state that somehow all students are suffering from poverty.

Mrs. Fyfe: The Minister must avoid deliberately misunderstanding what I said. The Scottish CAB produced a report in August because it was concerned about the scale of student poverty in Scotland. It was not dreaming; it was not making it up; and it was not drawing on just a few examples. Poverty was widespread enough for it to feel that it had to produce a report on it. Is the Minister accusing it of dreaming or lying?

Mr. Forth: I am accusing it of nothing; I am simply saying that the hon. Lady is generalising from a very narrow sample. I have yet to hear a policy response from the Opposition to what they believe to be the problem of student poverty. I do not accept the accusation that there is student poverty, but some Labour Members believe it exists so I am waiting for them to say what they would do about it, were they ever to form a Government.

Another source of schizophrenia among Labour Members was the Student Loans Company. I am aware of the criticisms of the company made by the National Audit Office but I am also aware of, and pay tribute to, the substantial improvements in its performance. I was happy to hear the hon. Member for Wallsend say that the Student Loans Company is now on the right track—I think that they were his words—but his colleagues do not seem aware of that fact. They seem to be stuck in the circumstances of a year ago and have completely ignored the progress that has been made. Labour Members must be clear among themselves: has the Student Loans Company made significant progress and sorted out its problems of a year ago, or are they are stuck in a groove and unable to acknowledge the company's improvements?

Mr. Bryan Davies: The Minister will recall that one of the main points of the debate has been to ask him whether, under the Bill, there is to be any extension of the category of students who might benefit from access to loans. Particular reference was made to part-time students. He was directly asked such questions several times: will he answer them?

Mr. Forth: Yes, I shall. The Bill is not designed to alter the qualifications for or the rights to student finance. It was designed to increase the choice of sources of finance to those who currently qualify. Labour Members have made terribly heavy weather of that question and have not answered it themselves. I have made the position perfectly clear—it was not the intention behind the Bill—but I am waiting for the hon. Member for Oldham, Central and Royton or any of his colleagues to answer the question that they have asked.

Mr. Robert Jackson: I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will in due course extend access to loans to students on part-time courses. Meanwhile, has he taken note of the fact that the Opposition regard it as a benefit that should be extended?

Mr. Forth: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. That illustrates yet again the utter confusion among Opposition Members, who have no clear policy on the matter and no conception of what to do in this sphere. That is the one thing that has been achieved in their contributions to the debate.

I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Wantage (Mr. Jackson) who has, typically, thought through these issues clearly and carefully and made his usual well-thought-out contribution to the debate. He will understand that I cannot give a detailed response to the points that he made, but I shall certainly want to examine them carefully and consider whether they can inform the development of future policy. I hope that when we produce our further consultation paper on higher education early in the new year, my hon. Friend will reply to it. I suspect, however, that he could do no better than send a copy of the well-thought-out and worthwhile speech that he made today.

I was told several times that our policy had somehow led to a reduction in the number of students from less well-off families entering higher education. That is simply not so. The latest survey information available to me suggests that while the younger students entering higher education from less well-off backgrounds were in the minority in 1988, they are in the majority now. Our figures show that the number of students from social classes 4 and 5 accepted for undergraduate courses rose by more than 50 per cent. in just three years between 1991 and 1994. Therefore, the loose accusation repeated by the Opposition—that our regime of balancing grants and loans has disadvantaged students from lower-income families—is not true. There is no evidence to support such an allegation.

The hon. Member for West Lancashire (Mr. Pickthall) asked about direct debits. I can confirm that a student who borrowed from more than one loan provider would indeed have more than one direct debit. That is logical. The banks may assign or sell on debts, and any information available on those who have taken out such loans would, as in the normal way, be made available. I cannot for the life of me see why not; it is a perfectly normal part of the general lending regime.

This debate has been about a Bill designed to broaden the choice available to students—to set them free from the current public sector monopoly provider and to introduce important choice and new players to the market. We are in the early stages of our deliberations, but eventually this enabling Bill will allow us to carry forward an important development in policy and to seek to provide a much wider choice of loans to students. It is a sensible and modest measure, thoroughly consistent with the direction of our policies in the past, and I commend it to the House.

Question put, That the Bill be now read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 285, Noes 250.

Division No. 4] **[7.59 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Atkins, Rt Hon Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Budgen, Nicholas
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'shr)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Rt Hon Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hamilton, Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Sir Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Birm E'sth)*

Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lightbown, Sir David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Major, Rt Hon John
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Rt Hon Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Sir Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'ter V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Derek Conway and Mr. Simon Burns.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Cabom, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomery)*
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Dafis, Cynog
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Chris *(L'Boro & S'worth)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Henderson, Doug
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley North)*
Howells, Dr Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hutton, John
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Sheffld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Jane *(L'pool Br'dg'n)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian

Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Mike *(N Wkshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooker, Jeff
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Chris *(Islton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smyth, The Reverend Martin
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Walley, Joan
Wareing, Robert N
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mrs. Bridget Prentice and Mr. Eric Clarke.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill read a Second time, and committed to a Standing Committee, pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of Bills).

EDUCATION (STUDENT LOANS) BILL [*MONEY*]

Queen's recommendation having been signified—

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 50A(1)(a),

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Education (Student Loans) Bill, it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of—

(a) any sums required by the Secretary of State for paying subsidy in respect of private sector student loans, and

(b) any increase attributable to the Act in the expenses of the Secretary of State under the Education (Student Loans) Act 1990.—*[Mr. Wells.]*

Question agreed to.

Teachers Superannuation (Contracting Out)

8.15 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment (Mr. Robin Squire): I beg to move,

That the draft Contracting Out (Administration of the Teachers' Superannuation Scheme) Order 1995, which was laid before this House on 15th November, be approved.

The order will allow my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment to authorise a private sector company to administer the teachers superannuation scheme in England and Wales. An executive agency in my Department, the Teachers Pensions Agency, administers the scheme at present. The TPA provides a good service to members of the scheme and the Government have never argued otherwise. The TPA has also achieved its key efficiency targets.

Administering the scheme, however, does not come cheaply. It is a huge scheme with almost 1.25 million members who are, rightly, increasingly interested in their pensions. The TPA's running costs last year were more than £15 million; that is big money. We owe it to the taxpayer to see whether we can make savings in those running costs.

I therefore announced on 1 November that the Government were inviting six private sector companies to tender for a contract to administer the scheme. All six companies judged that they could administer the scheme for less money than it would cost the TPA and to at least as high a standard. Inviting them to submit tenders will allow them to show whether they can do so.

Mr. Peter Kilfoyle (Liverpool, Walton): The Minister has mentioned the six companies that were invited to tender. How did the Government decide on those six companies from the original 14 that had shown an interest in the privatised scheme?

Mr. Squire: The hon. Gentleman may recall that we invited expressions of interest and that we received a significant number. The companies were then invited to complete a 50-page questionnaire and inquiries were made, in the case of the six companies, with clients to establish their reputations and bone fides. As the hon. Gentleman knows from the names of the companies, either they are large companies or they have significant assets.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): I do not have a direct interest now, but I contributed for 23 years to the teachers superannuation scheme. I was always hugely satisfied with it and, like many teachers, I am extremely worried about any possible change. Can my hon. Friend assure me first, that teachers will lose nothing in pension entitlement as a result of changes in administration and secondly, that the new administration arrangements will be even more efficient than the current ones? If they are to be more efficient, they will have to be extremely good.

Mr. Squire: I assure my hon. Friend that the answer to both his questions is an unqualified yes.

Mr. David Blunkett (Sheffield, Brightside): How?

Mr. Squire: To take up a sedentary comment by the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett), we

[Mr. Squire]

have made it clear that we shall let a contract to administer the scheme only if we are satisfied that it will deliver better value for money. I want to leave the House in absolutely no doubt about that. No improvement in value for money will mean no contract. Equally, if a contract could deliver better value for money, we shall want to let one.

Mr. Blunkett: Will the evaluation of "value for money" be similar to that of Yorkshire Water, which is that the customer does not get water but the company gets increased profits?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order. That was not in order.

Mr. Squire: I sense that if I were to pursue that avenue—or is it lake?—you would pull me up, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Members of the scheme naturally want to know what letting a contract would mean for them, and my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway) made that point clearly. I should like in turn to make several points of clarification, because there have been some misconceptions with which I have sought to deal in correspondence outside the House. I shall be happier still to make those points clear for the benefit of the House this evening.

First, there is no question of privatising teachers' pensions and, of course, there never has been. Any contract would be for the administration of the scheme only. Whether we let a contract or not, the scheme itself will stay in the public sector. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment will remain responsible to the House for the scheme, and she—not any contractor—will retain control over decisions affecting entitlement to benefits under the scheme or the amount of those benefits.

Secondly, letting a contract would not affect the size or safety of a teacher's pension one iota. Indeed, it is impossible for it to do so, not least because the scheme does not have a real pension fund. The pension contributions go straight to the Exchequer, which guarantees the payments to which members of the scheme are entitled. Those payments therefore cannot be at risk. Since a contractor would not be managing a pension fund, he could not make a profit from it. To quote King Lear,

"Nothing will come of nothing."

If we proceed, however, we shall pay the contractor an agreed fee for administering the scheme.

Thirdly, we will not allow the standard of service to fall. Any contract would require a standard of service and performance that will be at least as high as that which the TPA would provide. We shall make sure that any contractor meets that standard, and all six companies intend to do so.

Fourthly, we are absolutely committed to ensuring that the scheme continues to operate smoothly and without interruption. We shall expect—

Ms Hilary Armstrong (North-West Durham): What will happen at Darlington?

Mr. Squire: I will come to that matter, if the hon. Lady restrains herself for a moment. We shall expect the contractor to deliver good service from day one of the contract. We are satisfied on the basis of the evidence we have seen so far that all six companies are reputable organisations and have access to substantial financial resources, and that relations between their staff and management are sound.

Mr. Kilfoyle: Why are the Government seeking to introduce the measure at this particular time? A next steps feasibility study was carried out in 1990 which investigated the proposal that agency status be given to what was then the pensions branch of the Department of Education and Science. The conclusions of the study were a complete contradiction of what the Government are now saying. What has happened in the intervening five years to change the Government's opinion on the privatisation of the service?

Mr. Squire: We commissioned a report by KPMG, which we received in December 1994. It claimed—among other things—that the scheme could be operated with significant savings. We owe it to the taxpayer to ensure that if significant savings can be made—I have covered the quality of service angle—we should explore those. I should have thought that the hon. Gentleman would support the Government in that.

Mr. Kilfoyle: I am sorry to labour the point with the Minister, but the KPMG report was sought on the basis of only one option, which was the contracting out of the administration of the scheme. I repeat my question. Why did the Government change their mind in the intervening five years? What changed so markedly to lead the Government to commission that report on the basis that there was no option other than privatisation?

Mr. Squire: I can add little to what I have said to the hon. Gentleman, beyond reminding him that the Government seek to make savings to the taxpayer whenever and wherever we can. The size of the pension scheme would alone have given justification for us to return to the matter periodically, and the hon. Gentleman will be aware that the TPA expects to make savings of some 7.5 per cent. in a three-year period.

Mr. Harry Greenway: Just so it is clear beyond peradventure, am I to understand that the administration of the scheme—currently based in Darlington—is to be paid for by the taxpayer? Is the administration not financed out of the scheme itself, and therefore paid for—directly or indirectly—by teachers?

Mr. Squire: I have sought to make a distinction between, on the one hand, a pension fund with all that that might imply and, on the other hand, the simple fact that teachers' pensions are paid, year in year out, by the agency at Darlington. I concede, in light of the sad events of the past decade, that there is the possibility of a pension fund or part of such a fund going astray, but that possibility does not exist in this case. The cost of the teachers' scheme is a straight charge on the taxpayer. Teachers themselves are taxpayers, and if the cost of administering the scheme can be significantly reduced, it is self-evidently in the interests not just of teachers but of taxpayers in general.

Fifthly, we would not allow a contractor to advise teachers whether to join or leave the scheme. Teachers would need to consult an independent financial adviser if they were in doubt, as they do at present.

Sixthly, we would not allow a contractor to use data on teachers for purposes other than administering the scheme. All six companies have declared that they will keep data concerning members of the scheme confidential.

Mr. Don Foster (Bath): Will the firm which obtains the contract—if any of the six do so—be allowed to seek to persuade members of the TPA to opt for their own personal pension scheme through that company?

Mr. Squire: I shall come back to the hon. Gentleman during the debate on that, as I do not want to give him a wrong answer. If he will wait a short while, I shall answer him.

Seventhly, we would require a contractor to have effective arrangements for considering complaints from members of the scheme. A contractor would have to have an internal complaints machinery. If this failed to resolve the problem, a complainant would have the right to appeal to the Secretary of State. Members would also be able—as they can at present—to seek redress through the pensions ombudsman. There will be at least as much scrutiny of the administration of the scheme in the private sector as there is now.

Ms Armstrong: One of the current problems with the pensions ombudsman is that each of its reports is secret and is not available for public scrutiny because the ombudsman is accountable to the pensions industry. As this is a public scheme, will the Minister undertake that any complaint to the ombudsman will be published and be open to public scrutiny?

Mr. Squire: I shall consider what the hon. Lady says and come back to her at the end of the debate. It is a serious suggestion, and I want to give it proper consideration. Incidentally, the hon. Lady previously made some reference from a sedentary position to Darlington. She may not have picked up on the point that all six companies have confirmed that they would intend to make Darlington the core centre of their operations.

Ms Armstrong *rose—*

Mr. Alan Milburn (Darlington) *rose—*

Mr. Squire: It looks as if I have started a competition. I know that the hon. Lady will understand if I give way to the hon. Member for Darlington (Mr. Milburn).

Mr. Milburn: The mention of Darlington is my cue, as the Minister knows. Could he define what core administration means?

Mr. Squire: No, not in the context of the debate. Not simply because the companies have already made it clear that they see Darlington as a key part of their operations but in view of the skill and expertise of the Darlington staff, logic suggests to me that a significant proportion, if not the entirety of the operations, would be based in Darlington.

Mr. Edward O'Hara (Knowsley, South): As all six companies seem interested in the advantages of the facilities at Darlington, can the Minister assure us that no sweeteners will be offered to any company which takes on the scheme in the form of a cheap handing over of existing facilities?

Mr. Squire: I willingly give that assurance to the hon. Gentleman. Nor would sweeteners be necessary. I am not sure whether he heard my earlier comments. All six companies believe that they can run the operation at least as efficiently, if not more so, and for a reduced cost. There is no question of sweeteners.

Ms Armstrong: Will the Government make it a condition of the contract that the core administration continues in Darlington? Our experience has been too frequent that a commitment is given in the beginning and three or four years later is reneged on.

Mr. Squire: That issue was raised by the hon. Member for Darlington in a recent meeting that I had with him. I am advised that under European Union law, it would probably be illegal to do as the hon. Lady asks. We are not able to specify a particular place. I reassure her inasmuch as I can that, as all six companies have volunteered—they were not required so to do—the information that they would wish to site their operations at Darlington, in a sense her question is unnecessary. We can look at the reality of the thing, but as I know the hon. Lady will accept, we have to stay within the law.

Mr. Milburn: If the Minister says that legally the Department cannot make it a condition of any contract that Darlington should be the location of the business operation of a privatised Teachers Pensions Agency, and if he says that he cannot define core administration, are not the assurances given by the six companies about staying in Darlington meaningless?

Mr. Squire: I understand, and the whole House understands, that the hon. Member for Darlington is in a special position. When he looks at the standing of the companies and the names behind some of them and when he considers the self-interest of the companies in using the expertise currently available at Darlington, he will see why his comment, in fairness, is wide of the mark.

Lastly in my list of details, I confirm that we have no plans to allow a contractor to impose new charges on members of the scheme or their employers for services provided under the contract.

I trust that not only those hon. Members present in the Chamber but people who may subsequently read the report of the debate will accept that the eight points that I have made—eight of the best—allay the unjustified worries that I have heard expressed. I submit that if we let a contract, all parties would stand to benefit. Let me briefly explain why.

First, the taxpayer would benefit, because it would cost less to administer the scheme. There is sometimes a tendency to forget the taxpayer. We should not do so. Everybody is a taxpayer, so everybody, including teachers themselves, benefits if we can deliver public services more economically. There is scarcely an argument there.

Secondly, teachers and retired teachers would benefit. There is every prospect that they would receive not only as good a service as the TPA provides, but a better, faster, more responsive service. We have invited comments on a draft statement of the service that a contractor would have to provide. That draft provides for higher standards than the TPA achieves now. The six companies would expect to exceed even those higher standards over time—again, I submit to the House, a benefit.

Thirdly, the staff of the TPA would stand to benefit from the new opportunities offered. They would transfer to the contractor—if such a contractor were appointed—

[Mr. Squire]

on their current terms and conditions of employment. All six companies have said that they intend to keep the core administration of the scheme at its current location. All six companies see possibilities for introducing new business. That, if it happened, could only be good for jobs and good, in particular, for those currently at Darlington.

I know that change can be unsettling. When things are working fairly well, it is always tempting to leave them as they are. In such a case, the good can so easily become the enemy of the better. I do not believe that we can or should allow that to happen. We must build on the TPA's success. Our current work is designed to do just that. I commend the motion to the House.

8.35 pm

Mr. Peter Kilfoyle (Liverpool, Walton): I thank the Minister for taking the trouble to read out the letter that he sent to hon. Members on 10 November. He has added nothing to what he had to say in the letter. He read it extremely well. Perhaps it is a recommendation for literacy campaigns at primary school level.

The teachers superannuation scheme is one of the largest occupational schemes in the country. Currently it has 550,000 contributing members—mainly teachers—258,000 members with preserved benefits—mainly former teachers, including those driven out of teaching by Government policy—and 350,000 pensioners—retired teachers or their widows and children. The key difference between the scheme and other schemes is that it is administered not by the 3,500 employers involved but by the Department for Education and Employment, through the Teachers Pensions Agency.

Teachers, practising or retired, look to the scheme to provide them and their dependants with security in retirement, protection from misfortunes such as enforced early retirement due to ill health or redundancy—there have been a lot more of those in the past six or seven years—and protection for their dependants if they die in service or after retirement. Together with that security, they expect those administering the scheme to deal promptly, fairly and sympathetically with their problems and queries, many of which are of an extremely sensitive nature. They also expect high standards of integrity from those administering the scheme and a response which, within the regulations of the scheme, gives first priority to meeting the members' needs.

While organisations representing teachers receive complaints on occasion about the current scheme, they tell me that complaints about the quality of service from the TPA are rare. Even those rare complaints are resolved promptly and satisfactorily. Indeed, the Minister said that everyone acknowledges what a good scheme it is.

Ms Armstrong: I intervene to declare my interest. I think that my pension, or part of it, is still with the TPA. I am aware that I did not declare that interest when I intervened earlier. I support what my hon. Friend says about the quality of the scheme.

Mr. Kilfoyle: Well said. Teachers were originally apprehensive when the scheme was transferred from the pensions branch of the then Department of Education and Science to the Teachers Pensions Agency. However, in all honesty, it has to be said that in the main those fears proved to be groundless. The teachers believe that the agency has improved the service and dealt efficiently with the proliferation of employers caused directly by the Government's policy of atomising education provision.

Since the TPA was launched in 1992, it is a matter of record that it has performed well. During 1993-94, it was set a target of a 2 per cent. saving in running costs. It achieved 5 per cent. Some 95 per cent. of all written inquiries received a substantive answer within 15 working days. In 99.2 per cent. of cases, retirement awards were processed by the payable date or, if applied for later, within 30 days of receipt of the application. Similar results were obtained for pension calculations. In other words, there is a high quality of service. That is not just my subjective opinion. It is well documented in last December's publication of the fourth annual review of the next steps agencies, which detailed the TPA's performance for 1993-94.

One can always make the case, as the Minister has, for yet further improvements, but only on the basis of further investment in the required resources, as opposed to the transfer of administrative responsibilities. Sadly, that latter option is the only one that the Government examined. I put that point twice to the Minister when he spoke, but he could not give a substantive answer as to why that was the only option to be entertained. The Government's only proposal to KPMG was that the administration be left to a private sector company, according to the consultants, on the supposition that major benefits would result.

The Minister's first argument was that it was feasible for the teachers superannuation scheme to be administered by a private sector contractor. Of course, feasibility is not necessarily synonymous with desirability. Lots of things are feasible, but that is no reason for doing them. The proposal is that the administration should be let out to a private sector company on the supposition, according to KPMG, that major benefits will result, despite the fact that 128 out of 131 organisations originally consulted refused to endorse the proposal. It received only three positive endorsements, but the Government still went ahead with it.

The Government say that it is viable for the teachers superannuation scheme to be administered by a private sector contractor. I accept that, but they do not provide any evidence. The only evidence provided is the vague references in the KPMG report to discussions with unidentified organisations and the fact that there are those who are prepared to undertake the task. How can that assertion be tested against such scant evidence? One can assume only that the whole idea is based more on ideology than on objective analysis.

Secondly, the Government insist that the technical means exist for the transfer. That may well be the case, but that does not mean that it will lead to improvements. The Government insist that it will lead to improvements in the efficiency and effectiveness with which the superannuation scheme is administered, but where is the evidence of, as KPMG asserts,

"a general expectation that cost savings in the order of 20 per cent. or more ought to be achievable over a period of five or seven years"?

Will those savings come from the imposition of new charges for services that are free? The Minister says no, but if they are to come from new information technology equipment, why has that hitherto been denied the Teachers Pensions Agency?

The Government argue that private contractors will somehow benefit the TPA, yet it has exceeded its performance targets. On what criteria do the Government base their claim that commercial disciplines will have a positive effect on the quality of service? I can conclude only that that is doublespeak for lower-quality service and the introduction of charges for services that were previously free, which the Minister has denied.

As for the staff employed at the TPA in Darlington, what do the Government claim as the benefit of privatisation? The claim appears to be based on the chimerical notion that financial incentives for the staff will improve efficiency, effectiveness and profitability. I contend that those perceived advantages for the staff will come only from reductions in pay and worsening conditions of service, at least for those who keep their jobs. There is no guarantee, however, that the same number of jobs will be maintained, for the reasons of commercial discipline already adumbrated. Indeed, the then Department for Education staff bulletin of 16 June said that further "possible staff surpluses" had been identified in Darlington. Volunteers for redundancy have been sought from 1995-96 onwards

"aimed at avoiding compulsory redundancy".

That is hardly a vote of confidence that the work force can take to heart.

The Minister might argue, of course, that the improved IT will lead to fewer jobs and improved efficiency. If that is the case, I wonder whether he will answer some questions that I tabled for written answer, as to why the Hoskyn's project, aimed at introducing new information technology into the Teachers Pensions Agency, failed and at what cost. I understand that that is a matter of some legal dispute at the moment, but there was an attempt to introduce IT to a very complex scheme through the private sector. It failed miserably. As I understand it, the contract was terminated. What has changed so dramatically that other private sector companies will be able to make similar provision that will work?

Mr. Robin Squire: The hon. Gentleman will find that the answer to his question will be published in either today's or the next day's *Hansard*. The answer is too complex for me to give him chapter and verse now, although it is not germane to his central issue, which seems to be that, if there has been any private sector involvement and it has gone wrong or has not performed, that of itself eliminates any possibility of considering private sector partnerships anywhere else.

Mr. Kilfoyle: Far from it. I do not suggest that the one naturally follows from the other. What I am saying is that the experience of the agency with the private sector leaves a lot to be desired. It is not merely a question of what happened with Hoskyn's, which subcontracted to an organisation known as UPSI the attempts to update information technology at the TPA. There have been similar, well-documented problems involving the Prudential insurance company, which was contracted to administer the additional voluntary contributions scheme on behalf of the teachers superannuation scheme. That too has been a failure. I am trying to point out that there is no room for confidence in the Minister's assertions that the introduction of IT in itself will necessarily benefit the scheme envisaged.

I also want the Minister to consider the fact that there are nine miles of manual files in the Darlington headquarters. What analysis has he made of the cost of computerising that hoard of information, and how does it accord with his view of increased efficiency and the savings envisaged and, incidentally, the promise in the letter of 10 November, which he read out in lieu of a speech and which was sent to hon. Members on both sides of the House? He said that he is

"absolutely committed to ensuring that the Scheme continues to operate smoothly and without interruption".

Despite the Hoskyn's failure, according to KPMG—the Government's consultants—

"all of the firms interviewed saw substantial scope to introduce improved IT systems".

Will the Minister guarantee that those firms will be able to deliver what KPMG promises? Somehow, I doubt it. Both the KPMG report and the now famous letter to Members of Parliament of 10 November suggest that the promise is a combination of vague assumptions and terminological inexactitude, which give a totally misleading impression of what is possible in terms of computerising the system overnight without any disruption to the TPA.

In fairness—the consultants were given a very limited brief within which to operate—KPMG listed a series of obstacles to the privatisation proposals. From the Government's perspective, the statutory constraints are the easiest to deal with. That is why they have produced these proposals, using the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act 1994 to supersede the Superannuation Act 1972. However, the House will need to be convinced about the other four areas of concern that KPMG pinpointed. The first was the

"quasi-monopoly position of the TPA"—

a certain red rag to this bull of a Government, I am sure, unless the monopoly is a privatised one. KPMG argued that the contributors

"need protection against unacceptably low standards of service".

We have heard from the Minister and other hon. Members that the service is of a very high quality. Where are those low standards of service? If the thing is not broken, why do we need to mend it? The Minister must answer that.

KPMG and, presumably, the Government are convinced that there is not

"any category of private sector contractor which would be obviously unacceptable".

That is a naive view. Frankly, such a claim from the Government is risible. Are we to believe that the private sector is jam-packed only with models of probity and fair play? Have the Government learnt nothing from past experience of what happens when some of these sharks from the City involve themselves?

Mr. Squire: I do not need to comment on the hon. Gentleman's last rhetorical question, but would he claim that every public sector action, local government or national, has invariably been carried out without any fraud or misfeasance?

Mr. Kilfoyle: The question at issue is whether the proposal before the House will do anything to enhance the teachers superannuation scheme. The fact is that it will not. That is the considered view of the 128 organisations out of 131 that refused to endorse the original proposal.

[Mr. Kilfoyle]

The KPMG report puts across strongly the idea that the proper use of the database of teachers' records is sacrosanct under the Data Protection Act 1984 and the Financial Services Act 1986. Like the Minister in his view on private sector companies coming into the public arena, I have my own area of naivety, and I must confess that this is it. I would love the Minister to enlighten me as to whether those nine miles of manual records are covered under the Data Protection Act 1984. I understand that manual records are not covered; only material kept on computer is covered.

The third concern, even to KPMG, is the potential risk of failure. One option postulated in the report is that there might, in such circumstances, be a smooth transfer to a new operator. The other option is to revert to the control of the Department for Education and Employment. From that, KPMG tautologically declares that such a provision would do nothing to deter prospective bidders, as they would bid only on the expectation of succeeding.

That is absolutely true. Presumably that is why the confidential pre-tendering discussions took place with the anointed six companies. They cannot lose. They set out their terms in private, set the parameters for tendering with the Government and know that if all else fails, the legislation will ensure that someone else—presumably the Government, or rather, the taxpayer—will pick up the tab if they get it wrong. That will all be at the expense of members of the scheme.

Mr. Squire: It will not.

Mr. Kilfoyle: I am willing to allow the Minister to intervene to explain why it will not. If the scheme fails, who picks up the tab? That question must be answered.

KPMG discounts the chances of large numbers of members opting out of the teachers superannuation scheme. Indeed, in the magic letter of 10 November, the Minister said:

> "We would not allow the contractor to advise teachers whether to join or leave the scheme."

I accept his word on that, but what of the contractor's agents or the position of consultants who perhaps deal with a contractor who does deal in personal pension plans?

What about the experience of many teachers who have gone into personal pension plans? As the Minister will know, some 8,000 have opted to go back into the scheme because it is so successful. How will the Government guarantee that such second parties will not be able to circumvent the Government's intentions? I do not believe that they can.

We oppose the proposal on the following grounds. It has not been subject to a comprehensive review. Only one option, that of privatisation, has been considered. Both preservation of the status quo and reversion to the DFEE have been ignored. I do not say that they are preferred options, but to have a comprehensive review, all the options must be examined—not just one.

Secondly, the proposal will lead to job losses in Darlington. The people of Darlington and my hon. Friend the Member for Darlington (Mr. Milburn) are in no doubt about that, because only through the shedding of jobs can the putative savings be made. There is no other way in which it can be done. The proposal ignores the cost-effectiveness of the scheme as it now operates, even given the Government's own criteria for successful appraisal. By their standards, the scheme is successful, yet they still want to dismantle parts of it.

The Government's proposal would put a huge and successful scheme on the slippery slope to total privatisation, far beyond that of its administration alone. I do not believe that this is the end game; it is the start of opening up the scheme as a whole to privatisation. I accept that the Minister has said differently. I shall wait and see what eventuates if the Government have their way. The one fortunate thing is that we expect to be in government before that day comes.

The Government's scheme has no support beyond the ideology of the Government and their money-grubbing City friends. It pays no regard to the views of the members of the teachers superannuation scheme, the employees of the Teachers Pensions Agency or the employers of contributors. The Government are so contemptuous of the interests of those groups that they agreed to meet their representatives on 30 November—three days after tonight's debate—when the die will already have been cast. For those reasons, I urge the House to reject the proposal.

8.56 pm

Mr. Alan Milburn (Darlington): As the House will be aware, the teachers superannuation scheme is run from Darlington by the Teachers Pensions Agency. Therefore, much that I have to say will reflect concerns not only of agency staff but of the whole community in the town.

The Minister is well aware of my concerns, as I have met him and his officials on a number of occasions to voice them. I am grateful to him for the time and trouble that he has always taken. I am also grateful for the support that I have had from my hon. Friends the Members for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Kilfoyle) and for North-West Durham (Ms Armstrong), and my right hon. Friend the Member for Bishop Auckland (Mr. Foster).

As the Minister is aware, the 375 civil servants who work at the agency in Darlington have faced months of what I can describe only as demoralising uncertainty as they contemplate the potential impact of the handing over of their work to the private sector. It is right at the outset that we should dispose of one issue immediately. What the Minister politely calls contractorisation is in fact privatisation. That is so for a simple reason: virtually all the work of the Teachers Pensions Agency is to do with the administration of the teachers superannuation scheme. Let us not beat about the bush: we are debating privatisation this evening. That is what is before us.

Staff in Darlington are concerned that their jobs will go the way of countless thousands of other jobs, most notably in the privatised utilities, whose workers know what privatisation means for employment; 160,000 workers have lost their jobs since the former public utilities were privatised. If that were to happen to the Teachers Pensions Agency in Darlington, the effects would be serious indeed.

Already, as the Minister is aware, there is grave concern in the town about the impact on employment at the Department for Education and Employment headquarters at Mowden hall arising from the merger of

the two Government Departments. However, the biggest fear is that a successful bidder for the teachers superannuation scheme could decide to relocate work away from the agency's headquarters in the town.

I have not been at all reassured by what the Minister thus far has had to say from the Dispatch Box. He was not able to define core administration, or, apparently, enforce a condition on any of the bidders that they retain employment in Darlington. Staff will draw their own conclusions about what the future may hold.

Mr. Robin Squire: I shall not interrupt the hon. Gentleman persistently, but I hope he will address the question why, should the contract go to the private sector, any contractor would wish to overlook its main asset, which would be the quality of the staff at Darlington.

Mr. Milburn: There is no argument about the quality of the staff or the expertise of the people who work at the agency in Darlington, but it is clear from the names of companies that have expressed an interest and been invited to bid that many are large financial institutions. They may well take the view that it would be cheaper, if not beneficial, to move work away from Darlington. That is our concern.

Darlington borough council has estimated that, if 400 posts were lost, an 8 per cent. increase in unemployment would be generated, in a district that already has more people out of work than anywhere else in County Durham. Darlington simply cannot afford to lose the high-quality employment that the agency offers. The agency is a key employer, which is valued by the whole community.

Ministers say—we have heard it again this evening—that all six firms that have been invited to bid have said that they will retain their core administration in the town. That should come as no surprise to anyone. What else could they be expected to say, particularly at this stage in the bidding process? Naturally they want to send out the right noises, because they want to win the contract.

In any case, as we have already heard this evening, "core administration" does not amount to a guarantee that work will not be relocated away from Darlington. The Minister has confirmed that the Department has not made it a condition of bidding that such guarantees are given by each of the six firms. The Minister cannot have it both ways: he cannot say that all the private companies that are bidding are giving guarantees, and then be unable to define what those guarantees mean. But that is what has happened this evening.

It is not surprising that staff at the agency feel deeply despondent about how they have been treated. After all, the Teachers Pensions Agency, in providing a high-quality service for 1.3 million teachers and more than 3,000 employers, has met all the key performance targets that Ministers set for it.

My hon. Friend the Member for Walton outlined some of the targets that the TPA has succeeded not just in meeting but in surpassing in the past few years. He did not mention, however, that the accuracy performance of the agency's staff has now exceeded the 95 per cent. target set for them by Ministers. It is now at 96.8 per cent. That has been achieved against a background in which the number of establishments being dealt with by the TPA has risen dramatically by 42 per cent. during the past year or so.

On anyone's calculations, those are substantial achievements. They have been made by a dedicated and hard-working staff, who have made efficiency savings of 5 per cent. per annum. Obviously, they accept that further improvements can be made in the future, and they are committed to making those improvements if they are given the opportunity. The crucial issue is whether they will be given that opportunity. Their good performance, however, has counted for nothing against the absolute determination of Ministers to force through the privatisation of an agency that seems, in their minds, almost too successful to belong in the public sector. Let us consider the evidence. When it was established as an executive agency in April 1992, staff received an absolute assurance from the then junior Education Minister, my predecessor, Michael Fallon, that there was no intention of moving the agency out of the public sector.

Mr. David Jamieson (Plymouth, Devonport): A broken promise.

Mr. Milburn: My hon. Friend is right—three years on, and another Government promise has bitten the dust and gone the way of so many before it.

The KPMG report, on which this order is ultimately based, argued for the privatisation approach, but did not even consider the status quo as an option. Thankfully, others took a different, more measured and considered view.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Walton said, the result of the public consultation exercise undertaken by the Department revealed that only three organisations or individuals backed privatisation. However, my hon. Friend did not say that one of those was a potential contractor, which is hardly a ringing objective endorsement of the Government's proposal to hand over the agency's work to the private sector.

By contrast, the 107 organisations that expressed a preference opposed privatisation. Included in the 107 were four petitions, containing 911 names. I should have thought that a vote of 1,000 to three—or 1,000 to two, if one discounts the vested interest—was a clear verdict. I should have expected a reasonable Minister to listen to it, not least because it reflects the views of the agency's customers.

The Minister was right to remind us that the agency's customers are also taxpayers. They are teachers, employers, schools and local education authorities, and they too have an interest in ensuring the running of a well-ordered, well-administered scheme.

Once the consultation had ended, I would have hoped that a Government who were genuinely committed to consultation, prepared to listen and to put common sense above political dogma, would take stock. I would have hoped that the Government would at least pause for thought. Instead, they decided to push ahead with the privatisation exercise, because they dismissed the results of their own consultation exercise.

According to the Department's response, the Government dismissed the views of those consulted on the ground that

"Their objections to contractorisation are not well founded."

The real conclusion to be drawn from this farce is not that the consultees were ignorant, as the departmental document seems to suggest, but that the consultation exercise was a sham from start to finish.

[Mr. Milburn]

The agency's customers are not the only ones on the record as opposing privatisation. The Minister appears to have a short memory, because, as my hon. Friend the Member for Walton reminded him, just five years ago, in 1990, the Department's next steps feasibility study also concluded against the contractorisation option. We are confronted by an unholy alliance of former members of the Government's Front Bench, teachers, local education authorities and employers who are united against this proposal.

My hon. Friend the Member for Walton asked the Minister what has changed in the past five years, but he received no answer. The answer is simple: in 1995, the lurch to the right by the Government has jettisoned all talk of consensus. The opinion of agency staff, teachers, employers and even that of former Ministers has been jettisoned in the headlong rush towards privatisation. In the Government's mind, there is a simple equation that brooks no opposition: public is bad, private is good—"two legs bad, four legs good".

The triumph of right-wing dogma is being taken to excess in the way in which the privatisation of the agency is being handled. Not only are six companies being invited to bid to run the TSS, in the teeth of considered opposition, but they are being invited to help frame the terms on which they bid.

The Minister has seen a copy of a memo sent to all the staff at the Teachers Pensions Agency in Darlington by P. F. Owen, a senior official in his Department. He explained how the Department is now progressing with the bid process. He said:

"We shall shortly invite the representatives, teachers and their employers to comment on a draft statement of the services that any contractor would have to provide administering the scheme."

So far so good.

"Similar invitations will go to the staff of the TPA"—

an excellent idea—

"to staff in other parts of the department who have been involved in drafting sections of the text"—

that seems sensible—

"to the trade union side"—

and finally—

"to the six companies that we are inviting to tender."

In other words, those six firms are to be given the not inconsiderable advantage of shaping the yardstick against which their bids will be judged. They are having their cake and eating it.

I would be delighted to give way to the Minister if he could tell me why on earth those six contractors, who threaten to steal work from civil servants at the agency, are being allowed to shape the very terms of the contract for which they will bid.

Mr. Robin Squire: I will ignore some of the emotive words that the hon. Gentleman has used, because they do not assist the debate. The answer is that, not least in order to clarify and to avoid any area of doubt, it seemed an excellent idea that the consultation exercise should involve not just the staff but putative tenderers. The Secretary of State retains the final decision on the form and content of the contract. That is clear and unarguable.

Mr. Milburn: Does not the Minister accept that the process of involving the six firms that are prospectively in the frame to receive that contract, in the shaping of the terms and conditions under which they will bid, at the very least calls into doubt the impartiality and integrity of the process? It appears to speak volumes for Ministers' determination to force through that privatisation, come what may.

Ms Armstrong: I wonder whether my hon. Friend would like to ask the Minister whether he will publish the comments that were received from the six companies, so that we are able to judge precisely the effect that they have on the subsequent contract.

Mr. Milburn: My hon. Friend's idea is welcome, and extremely sensible. If the Minister were prepared to accept it, it would help to dispel some of the doubts. I hope that, if the Minister has an opportunity to catch your eye again, Mr. Deputy Speaker, he will answer the question asked by my hon. Friend.

However, I now reach the crucial issue. We have heard much about value for money for the taxpayer. We have heard that the people who currently run the agency, and who, the Minister acknowledges, do so successfully, have been denied the right to bid against the private sector for that work. How is it possible to compare like with like, when the people who currently run the scheme are not allowed to bid? The result of excluding the staff from bidding is that the taxpayer is denied a fair comparison between what the private and public sectors can deliver.

Finally, the TSS is a complex scheme, which relies for its success on the scale and expertise of the agency's staff, and the faith of its customers in their integrity and impartiality. Handing the scheme over to untried but commercially interested private sector organisations risks losing both. In my opinion, it is a risk not worth taking.

The TPA is a public sector success story. Instead of privatisation, agency staff in Darlington should be allowed to build on their considerable record of achievement. That is what they want; it is what teachers want; it is what employers want. I hope that the Minister listens for once.

9.11 pm

Mr. Don Foster (Bath): Recent Government legislation in respect of pension schemes has attempted to increase the power that is given to pensioners and deferred pensioners. Therefore it is perfectly appropriate, in a debate such as this, that we, in deciding which way to vote, take special notice of the opinions of those people who are the customers of the Teachers Pensions Agency. I am sure that many hon. Members have received as much correspondence about that issue as I have. The overwhelming majority of the people who have written to me have expressed considerable anxiety about the proposals that we are debating.

I hold very much to the view, "If something ain't broke, don't fix it," yet the Government are attempting to meddle with something that definitely is not broken. Indeed, Sir Peter Levene, the Government's adviser on privatisation issues, recently said that if a private sector company achieved 85 per cent. of its objectives, it was performing excellently. As the hon. Member for Darlington (Mr. Milburn) said, the TPA is already achieving all its targets and is outstripping its objectives by more than 95 per cent. Indeed, the Teachers Pensions Agency, set up, as

Members will recall, as long ago as 1992, has met and/or exceeded all the efficiency targets set for it by Government.

Several hon. Members have mentioned the report produced by the consultants KPMG, and some have said that that report suggested that it might be possible to make savings of approximately 20 per cent. However, that report, as those who have read it will testify, gives no evidence to support that view except unsubstantiated claims made on behalf of the various private companies that have been consulted, many of which may be involved in the process of attempting to take over the administration of the scheme. Incidentally, it seems a little unwise to be considering administrative changes at the very time when the TPA will be dealing with numerous requests from part-time teachers for retrospective membership of the scheme.

I said at the beginning of my speech that we should take account of the users of the scheme. Indeed, as the hon. Member for Darlington said, we should take much more note than the Government are of all those—including users of the scheme—who were consulted about the proposals. As we know, 131 organisations were consulted, 128 of which refused to support the privatisation; more than 100 directly opposed it. Only three organisations supported it, one of which—as has been pointed out—was a potential bidder for the contract. Moreover, teachers' organisations are unanimous in their opposition to the move. They do not want the scheme to be run for profit by a private contractor. It is also opposed by employers, teachers, civil service trade unions and—importantly—the staff of the TPA.

As we know, in 1990, the Department rejected the notion of letting a contract for the administration of the scheme—no doubt sharing the view that the TPA could make all the improvements that a private sector contractor could make. The whole consultation has been a sham. I noted that, from a sedentary position, the Minister denied a suggestion that he is to meet teachers' representatives in three days' time to consult on the plan; perhaps he would like to confirm that.

Mr. Robin Squire: Let me tell the House—for purposes of clarification alone—that we are discussing an enabling order. I have already made it clear that any decision is still months away, and during that time I want to continue to meet staff members. In that context, I look forward to the meeting to which the hon. Gentleman has referred.

Mr. Foster: Surely that illustrates the concern that many of us feel. Yet again, the Minister has openly admitted that this is enabling legislation—when the Government have not the foggiest idea what the details of their proposals will be. The Minister is seeking the House's permission to go ahead and develop the scheme with a blank cheque, and—as he admits—he still has not engaged in detailed consultation even with the representatives of teachers, who are those most likely to be affected.

The Government's White Paper "The Civil Service: Taking Forward Continuity and Change" stated categorically that there should be a five-year period between reviews after the creation of an agency. As hon. Members will recall, the agency was created in 1992, only three years ago. That is yet another example of rapid changes in Government thinking.

Many who have expressed concern about the proposal have done so because they believe that management in the private sector will create a number of risks. Many are anxious about, for example, the possible loss of an independent and impartial role. The Minister may wish to confirm, or otherwise, that the TPA currently has powers to determine whether members of the scheme should receive benefits in certain defined circumstances, such as ill health, and how much they should receive in those circumstances. If the agency indeed has those discretionary powers, there is a danger that a contractor may decide to say no simply because an increase in the amount of work would result, reducing the profit.

It is also feared that the work involved in letting the contract would be expensive, and that transferring administration of the scheme to the private sector would lead to a loss of continuity and experience. Many people are concerned about their ability to seek redress in the event of poor service or maladministration. The Minister has said that it will be possible to appeal to the Secretary of State or to go to the pensions ombudsman. I hope that the Minister will respond to an earlier query about whether inquiries made to the pensions ombudsman and the handling of such inquiries will be made public.

People are also concerned about the possible mis-selling of personal pensions. I acknowledge that, in his letter to all hon. Members, the Minister gives an assurance that the Government will not let that happen. However, I hope that the Minister will give greater comfort to those who are worried by explaining how he would prevent mis-selling and what action he would take if the firm, its agents or subcontractors attempted to use the database of TPA members as the basis for selling on various personal services, including personal pension plans.

Other hon. Members have questioned whether the 20 per cent. saving that the consultants allege may be possible in a five to seven-year period will be delivered. There is no clear evidence in the KPMG report that it will. Perhaps the House should recall that the TPA has plans to cut its own costs by 7.5 per cent. each year for the next three years. In three years—not five or seven years—that would result in the savings that the KPMG report envisages.

Mr. Squire: There is no argument between the hon. Gentleman and me on that point. He has my assurance that we are anticipating savings over and above those that are built in.

Mr. Foster: I am very glad to hear it, because we can then go a step further. Those working for the TPA have made it absolutely clear that, if the Department were to give them the financial support to enable them to introduce the level of information technology equipment that undoubtedly will be used by the private contractors, they, too, could make or better the savings that are envisaged by the private sector.

I believe that this is a privatisation too far. *[Interruption.]* I shall give way if the Minister wishes to intervene. I believe that it poses a real threat to quality and to impartiality. The private sector companies will seek to profit from the scheme, with clear implications for the standard of service that members receive. Teachers have worried about their jobs and their pay in recent years and now a black cloud is hovering over their pensions. The

[Mr. Foster]

Government's devotion to privatisation has outweighed the reasoned arguments against the change, and therefore I do not believe that it should be supported.

9.22 pm

Dr. Robert Spink (Castle Point): While we have heard some interesting speeches by Opposition Members, I believe that they have represented the vested interest rather than the public interest in this matter. Their accounts of the Government's proposals have been tendentious and I do not think that they have reflected properly the Government's actions and proposals, which make a lot of sense to me.

Something must be said in support of the teachers, who work very hard with great dedication and care. By and large, they are motivated by vocation rather than by money. Therefore, they deserve a good, well-administered pension scheme, and in that regard, they have nothing to fear from the Government's proposals.

Labour Members have not yet recognised the great benefits that privatisation has brought to this country in the past two decades. Many industries that used to cost the taxpayer many millions of pounds—£50 million per week is an often-quoted figure—now deliver great benefits. They pay corporation tax and they deliver better services to their customers.

Mr. Kilfoyle: Has the hon. Gentleman read the KPMG report, and if he has, what did he think of its detailed conclusions?

Dr. Spink: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for bringing me back to my speech. I shall demonstrate to him that I know what the KPMG report revealed.

The Government invited six private sector companies to tender for a contract to administer the teachers superannuation scheme in England and Wales. Those tenders were invited because the Government considered that letting a contract would provide better value for money than retaining the administration of the scheme within the public sector. The Government have tried and tested that philosophy and it has been proved for almost two decades.

All six companies have declared that they would seek a fee for administering the scheme that is lower than the expected costs of the Teachers Pensions Agency, which currently administers the scheme, so there are real benefits for the taxpayers. Last year, the TPA's running costs were more than £15 million—not an insignificant sum. We owe it to the taxpayer to find out whether we can make savings and if we can, we should do so, but we must be satisfied that a private sector company will deliver better value for money than the TPA. I am happy with the comfort that the Minister has given the House on that point.

Any contract would concern only the administration of the scheme; the scheme itself would remain in the public sector on its current statutory basis. The Secretary of State would remain responsible to Parliament for the scheme and would continue to be advised by his civil servants. Letting a contract would not affect the size or safety of the teachers pension in any way. As we have heard from the Minister tonight, the scheme does not have a real pension fund. Instead, payments are made to and from the Exchequer.

When he replies to the debate, can my hon. Friend confirm that any contract would require a standard of service and performance at least as high as that currently provided by the TPA? Will he undertake to monitor the contractor's performance to ensure that?

Will my hon. Friend also confirm that he is absolutely committed to ensuring that the scheme continues to operate smoothly without interruption and that the contractor would not be allowed to advise teachers whether to join or to leave the scheme, so that the problems that arose with the mis-selling of personal pensions could not occur? We heard the misgivings of the hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster) on that matter and I am sure that my hon. Friend will want to give us some comfort.

Will my hon. Friend give us some guarantees about the use and protection of data within the scheme? I am pleased that all six companies have declared that they will keep data confidential and I am sure that that will be the case, but we still require some guarantees. I seek some assurances that a contractor must have effective arrangements in place to deal with any complaints about the administration of the scheme. We know that there are no plans to allow a contractor to impose new charges on members of the scheme or employees and I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that.

Finally, the resolution does not demonstrate a negative attitude to the TPA. It is widely accepted that the TPA provides a good service to its members and I am grateful to the Minister for confirming that once again. We now intend to build on the success of the TPA and the affirmative resolution, which I recommend that Members support, represents a positive move in the administration of the scheme and in the good stewardship of public finances that is absolutely essential.

9.25 pm

Mr. Edward O'Hara (Knowsley, South): The debate shows the enormity of the power that a Minister can take unto himself under the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act 1994. It is shown in the sheer scale of the function that the Government propose to privatise—and I use that word deliberately.

The teachers superannuation fund is one of the biggest such funds, with 1.25 million participants. The public will note that the Government are contracting out that enormous scheme without primary legislation and with inadequate consultation and review. Not least, that will be noted by the 1.25 million teachers and retired teachers who have a direct interest in the matter. I declare my interest as a lifelong member of the Association of Teachers and Lecturers. I have a pension under the teachers superannuation scheme.

The issue was first raised in February and there was some correspondence at the time, but it has become more prominent recently because people have begun to realise that the Government have come to the end of their charade of consultation. I visited schools in my constituency and canvassed teachers—the people most affected by the proposal. The reaction was one of anger at the principle of the proposal and at the lack of consultation.

I received a letter from a teacher in a school in the constituency of Knowsley, North. The school will be coming into my constituency under the boundary review

and at one time I was chairman of the board of governors. I know the teacher, Marjorie Sumner, well. She teaches at the Prescot county primary school and is one of the unsung heroines of the teaching profession—a dedicated and good teacher who has spent 30 years in her locality.

Mrs. Sumner wrote to me today saying:

"I am writing to you, as you are my Member of Parliament"—

she lives in my constituency—

"to express my opposition to The Governments proposed Privatisation of the Teachers' Pension Scheme.

I have taught for my local L.E.A. for over thirty years, paying into a Superannuation Scheme, without option, on the understanding that my teachers retirement pension would be secure.

Having devoted myself to the teaching profession for all my working life I have implemented the National Curriculum with enthusiasm and expertise spending many hours discussing, preparing and presenting resources for colleagues.

As the Government did not think things"—

the national curriculum—

"through, a great deal of time, work, effort and money have been totally wasted and I now feel very let down by The Government once again by them proposing a drastic change in the administration of the Teachers' Superannuation.

I feel I must voice my objection to the lack of consultation and liaison with Teachers."

Marjorie Sumner is by no means a political activist; she is not militant in any way. She is a rank-and-file teacher, moved to anger and disgust by the Government's proposal.

I have some questions for the Minister, some of which have already been raised by my hon. Friends. Cost-effectiveness does not equal efficiency, as has been proved with compulsory competitive tendering in local authorities. What about the cost savings that could be available to the present Teachers Pensions Agency through the introduction of information technology? What about the costs of contracting out in relation to redundancy payments? We can be sure that there will be redundancies and they come at a heavy cost. What about the costs of the scheme in future years?

Once the scheme is contracted out and the facilities taken over, the position will be similar to that in local councils when the refuse collection service was taken over. If the Government are not satisfied with the service at any time in the future, they will not have the core facility available to enable them to take it back. As we have seen with other privatisations, once the tender is let, the negotiating hand is with those who hold the tenders because they have the resources to carry out the function.

What we have here is a short-term ledger benefit. It is probably an illusory benefit when we take into account the start-up costs of the scheme in terms of redundancies, write-downs and, if the facilities at Darlington are not taken over, the drag on resources to maintain the facilities. There are long-term costs in terms of efficiency and in the loss of jobs to the Darlington area.

I have a question to ask the Minister that no one has asked so far. He said several times that he has been given to understand that all six of the organisations that were consulted would probably keep the core function in Darlington. What does that mean? Does it mean, for example, that basic data input operations, such as basic keyboard work, could be subcontracted out to the Philippines? I should like an answer to that question, and perhaps the Minister will have the opportunity to answer in his reply.

The Government are all about short-term ledger benefit, and that is what the order is all about. The order is all about upheaval in one of the major superannuation funds to attain an ephemeral saving of £15 million in running costs. Horace said:

"Parturiunt montes, nascetur ridiculus mus",

which means that mountains go into labour and a ridiculous little mouse is born. Perhaps it is an edible dormouse—a chocolate mouse, a tasty morsel—that makes an infinitesimal contribution to the tax cuts with which the Government are seeking to bribe the electorate.

9.36 pm

Mr. Kilfoyle: With the leave of the House. I know that the Minister is anxious to answer the many points that have been made. May I commend him for the magical letter of 10 November to which many of us have referred? The letter was so good that the hon. Member for Castle Point (Dr. Spink) made it seem like a remedial reader—something that should be used more often by Conservative Members.

I should like to ask the Minister two serious questions arising from the debate. First, it is recognised by all hon. Members that the Teachers Pensions Agency has been extremely cost-effective and efficient in dealing with the teachers superannuation scheme. On that basis, if no other, why was it frozen out from bidding for the work? The Government know that the TPA observes commercial disciplines and that it has shown in practice how effectively it can compete with anyone in the private sector.

Secondly, will the Minister announce whether he will publish the notes of the discussions that were held with the chosen companies that led to the terms, conditions and excuses set out in the letter of 10 November?

9.38 pm

Mr. Robin Squire: This has been an interesting debate, although I sense that Opposition Members did not either read my famous letter, which is now to be immortalised—I cannot wait for the video—or take into account the comments that I made earlier.

I begin by thanking my hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Dr. Spink) for his comments. I share his praise for teachers, and I can confirm that they have a good pension scheme. The scheme is not in any way at risk as a result of the order. As for confirmation of each of the points that he rightly mentioned, I have to save time—Opposition Members will get a little agitated if I go over them—so I confirm them all, as indeed I did in my opening speech.

I shall try in the time available to answer each of the questions asked, beginning with that asked by the hon. Member for North-West Durham (Ms Armstrong). She asked whether complaints to the pensions ombudsman would be published. The answer is no, because—[HON. MEMBERS: "Shame."] When I have finished, hon. Members may be able to withdraw the "shame". Quite a few people who complain to the pensions ombudsman may not be willing to have the facts and detail of that

[Mr. Robin Squire]

complaint made public. If, however, they wish to make it public, they have, with great respect, any and every way so to do.

The hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster), speaking for the Liberal Democrats, asked a question about the ability for personal pensions to be sold to members of the TPA. I assume that he meant those within the scheme, not the staff. I emphasise what I thought I had made clear, but obviously I had not: the contractor will not be able to use data that he holds on members of the scheme to seek to sell any financial schemes.

The hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Kilfoyle) asked whether manual records will be covered by the Data Protection Act 1984. Manual records will be covered by a confidentiality clause in the contract. If those records are computerised in due course, they will of course be covered by the Data Protection Act.

Further to that point and on the same issue, the hon. Member for Bath asked what would happen if the contractor or its agents misused the database. That would be a breach of contract and would be treated very seriously indeed.

The hon. Member for Darlington (Mr. Milburn) understandably spoke on behalf of many of his constituents and his point was emphasised by at least one other hon. Member. The agency is already committed to making significant savings in this and the next two years. The hon. Gentleman can also guess, although it is not absolutely certain, that, logically, those savings may have staffing implications. That is scarcely a strange suggestion to make.

We are considering how best to safeguard the interests of staff at Darlington. If it is decided to allow the private sector to run the scheme, that would, for reasons that I advanced in opening, give significant promise of long-term stability to staff at Darlington.

It is common ground between the hon. Member for Darlington and me that the quality of staff is high, and I emphasise what I said in an intervention: that precisely because the quality is so good, it would scarcely be in the interests of any incoming contractor to consider not locating its business at Darlington. That is where the knowledge and expertise has been built up and where—obviously—it would remain.

Mr. Milburn *rose—*

Mr. Squire: If the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, I will not give way. I was generous in giving way. I am conscious that I have only two and a half minutes left and I am trying to deal with quite a few other questions. There will be opportunities to raise matters outside.

The hon. Members for Darlington and for Walton said that it was disgraceful—or words to that effect—that the TPA had not made a bid. It could have done so. Its staff or management could have launched a bid to buy the agency, but they chose not to do so. That was their choice. They were not required to do so, and they did not do so.

The hon. Member for Darlington asked, and I tried to answer, why companies should be consulted on the draft requirements. I shall try one more time to convince him. Administering the scheme is a complex operation—that much at least should be common ground between us. We want to give the companies the chance to clarify any points that are unclear. They may also be able to suggest improvements to draft requirements, drawing on their commercial expertise. I confirm, however, that there is no question of watering down the requirements and that there is no suggestion that the companies would seek to do that.

The hon. Member for Bath also asked what discretion the contractor would have in making decisions on entitlements. I can confirm that the Secretary of State would retain control over decisions that affect entitlement to benefits under the scheme or the amount of those benefits.

I will write to hon. Members on points that I have not covered. In essence, there is a choice tonight. There are only two reasons for rejecting the order. The first is that hon. Members have not understood the order and the safeguards that are built into it—I am afraid to say that that may be so—and the second is that hon. Members, especially Opposition Members, are still against the private sector. Despite all the honeyed words of the Leader of the Opposition, who says that Labour has now changed, the reality is that it has not and that is why Labour Members will vote against the order.

It being one and a half hours after the commencement of proceedings on the Motion, MADAM SPEAKER *put the Question, pursuant to Standing Order 14B (Proceedings under an Act or on European Community documents).*

The House divided: Ayes 244, Noes 205.

Division No. 5] **[9.45 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Atkins, Rt Hon Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'byire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Rt Hon Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*

French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Hamilton, Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Sir Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Horam, John
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Legg, Barry
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lightbown, Sir David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Rt Hon Sir Hector
Moss, Malcolm
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Sackville, Tom
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Sir Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Viggers, Peter
Walden, George
Waller, Gary
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Yeo, Tim

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Timothy Wood and
Mr. Gary Streeter.

NOES

Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Bennett, Andrew F
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Cabom, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomery)*
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Dafis, Cynog
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Chris *(L'Boro & S'worth)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harvey, Nick
Henderson, Doug
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howells, Dr Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Helen *(Sheffld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kennedy, Jane *(L'pool Br'dg'n)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Litherland, Robert
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McLeish, Henry
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max

Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Mike *(N Wlshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooker, Jeff
Rowlands, Ted
Salmond, Alex
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Chris *(Is'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Walley, Joan
Wareing, Robert N
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Jon Owen Jones and
Mr. Joe Benton.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That the draft Contracting Out (Administration of the Teachers' Superannuation Scheme) Order 1995, which was laid before this House on 15th November, be approved.

EDUCATION

Ordered,

That Mr. Greg Pope be discharged from the Education Committee and Mr. Alan Keen be added to the Committee.—*[Mr. MacKay.]*

ENVIRONMENT

Ordered,

That Mr. John Denham and Jane Kennedy be discharged from the Environment Committee and Mr. Neil Gerrard and Mr. Matthew Taylor be added to the Committee.—*[Mr. MacKay.]*

HOME AFFAIRS

Ordered,

That Ms Janet Anderson be discharged from the Home Affairs Committee and Jean Corston be added to the Committee.—*[Mr. MacKay.]*

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Ordered,

That Mr. Nigel Waterson be discharged from the National Heritage Committee and Mr. Tim Renton be added to the Committee.—*[Mr. MacKay.]*

SOCIAL SECURITY

Ordered,

That Mr. Malcolm Wicks be discharged from the Social Security Committee and Mr. Alan Howarth be added to the Committee.—*[Mr. MacKay.]*

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Ordered,

That Ann Coffey, Mr. Richard Caborn and Mr. Nick Harvey be discharged from the Trade and Industry Committee and Mr. Roger Berry, Mr. Martin O'Neill and Joan Walley be added to the Committee.—*[Mr. MacKay.]*

TRANSPORT

Ordered,

That Mr. Nick Hawkins be discharged from the Transport Committee and Mr. Eric Pickles be added to the Committee.—*[Mr. MacKay.]*

TREASURY

Ordered,

That Mr. Mike O'Brien be discharged from the Treasury Committee and Mr. Clive Betts be added to the Committee.—*[Mr. MacKay.]*

Higher Education

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Burns.]*

10 pm

Mr. Don Foster (Bath): I am very grateful to you, Madam Speaker, for giving me this opportunity to raise this important matter.

Earlier today, we were discussing the Education (Student Loans) Bill, and, in so doing, we touched on the view of many hon. Members that it does not begin to tackle the growing problems of poverty and hardship faced by many students. In this brief debate, I want to draw attention to the growing concern about the significant rise in the level of stress among students in higher education—stress brought on partly, but not exclusively, by financial worries.

If the Government are not prepared to take serious action to reduce the cause of those problems, as they ought, they should at least take action to assist higher education institutions and to bolster their support and welfare services to enable better counselling and guidance to be given to students suffering the effects of such stress.

In answers to recent parliamentary questions, the Government have acknowledged that, in the past five years, they have undertaken no research into the number of students suffering from stress and depression. In such answers, they have also argued that they have no powers to intervene, and admitted that they have taken no steps to improve welfare and counselling services during the past five years.

During the summer, I carried out a detailed survey of the issue. The results were very worrying. As a result of the survey's indications, I believe that there are a number of areas in which the Government could take action.

When conducting my survey, I contacted all 117 universities in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland about levels of stress and student suicide during the past 10 years. I ensured that Ministers received a copy. Seventy-two per cent. responded, and, to ensure that the results were rigorous and consistent, the 40 universities that provided us with complete data were used in the final statistical analysis.

The study was based on a survey of the responses from all 72 universities, as well as on the records and informed opinion and comments from welfare counsellors, heads of student services and vice-chancellors. We also liaised with organisations such as the Association for Student Counselling.

The survey showed that, with rare exceptions, universities reported a significant increase in the number of students seeking some form of counselling. Financial concerns were cited as the most common factor inducing stress in students. For example, one university described financial pressures on students as "intolerable".

Other reasons for the need for counselling were also cited. Current academic and future employment pressures were among the common causes mentioned. Academic pressures resulted mainly from the shortage of books and equipment and overcrowded study places. Employment pressures were brought on by knowledge of growing graduate unemployment.

I said that there were a range of different issues. One issue of particular concern, which relates to the debate we had earlier today, is stress caused by money problems. As a result of such money problems, more and more students have to take jobs during term time, which has often led to exhaustion and to their falling behind with their studies.

Only today, I received a letter from a student in Lancaster. Unfortunately, I cannot read her surname. I am delighted to see the hon. Member for Lancaster (Dame E. Kellett-Bowman) in her place. The student, who is at St. Martin's college, wrote:

"I'm a mature student, a single-parent, who is finding it hard to keep balancing my financial juggling act. I also work part-time as my grant does not even cover my outgoings. I am not allowed income support and family credit was also rejected on the grounds that I get a grant.

My case is not unique. Most students are having a difficult time. We have no options but to work to make ends meet. This is causing a lot of stress, physical fatigue and illness."

Problems with increasing stress were also caused by the growth in the number of students not being matched by the growth in the number of staff. As a result, lecturers have to deal with larger class sizes, and therefore find it more difficult to give attention to individual students. As one academic in our study reported:

"There is often little time or energy left for responding to the individual personal and academic needs of students."

Sadly, there has been an increase in the number of young people committing suicide. Although the rate of suicide at university is lower than in the most comparable prevailing age group—that is, 15 to 25-year-olds—there has nevertheless been a significant increase in the number of students in higher education committing suicide in recent years. The rate, allowing for the expansion in student numbers, has risen fourfold between 1983-84 and 1993-94.

From the survey, we also noted that male students from 1993-94 were three times more likely to take their lives than female students. We also noted that mature students are especially vulnerable. Of all students who took their own lives, 45 were aged 25 and above, although such students constitute only 22 per cent. of the total student body.

Ours is not the only survey that has looked into the issue. In a somewhat limited survey last month, the British Medical Association discovered that university doctors were reporting a rising number of students being treated for stress-related illness. The survey followed concerns over the mental and physical health of students raised by the British Association of Health Services in Higher Education. It had found growing instances of panic attacks, chronic fatigue and depression among students, especially among those trying to hold down part-time jobs while studying or worrying about their employment prospects on completing their courses.

Professor Colin Pritchard, professor of social work studies at Southampton university, is researching a new book on the causes of suicide, to be called "Suicide—the ultimate rejection?" From his studies, he says that many tragedies could be avoided if students had more access to counselling and one-to-one contact with tutors.

Other sources that support our survey include a recent National Union of Students study, "Values for Money", which was published in March this year. It revealed that

[Mr. Don Foster]

one in four students admitted to "often" or "always" worrying about their financial positions, and that 10 per cent. reported often having depressed moods.

The study said that 39 per cent. of the students surveyed considered themselves to be in financial hardship. More than one in four admitted to "often" or "always" worrying about financial hardship, and one in four had considered dropping out of his or her course because of financial difficulties. The survey also confirmed our study, which revealed that many students were now beginning to work part time. Just under a third of those surveyed had worked part time during term time while at university. Of those who worked, 69 per cent. thought that the work had affected their studies.

Universities are well aware of that growing problem. They have responded as well as they could, by providing a range of support and counselling services, with appropriate medical and psychiatrically trained staff where possible. A multi-layered provision has developed, including welfare tutorials offered by academic staff and counsellors alike. Residential wardens in halls of residence and chaplaincies have also become involved.

A range of other support services are developing through student welfare services, provided by either the university or the student union or, in some cases, both. A number of voluntary organisations have become involved in this issue. I draw attention to the valuable work of Nightline.

Having published our survey, we circulated it to the institutions that we had originally invited to respond to it. We received many responses from them in the light of the content of our survey. Plymouth university welfare unit's annual report said:

"With students facing increasing financial hardship the workload in Welfare has increased dramatically with the first cases of malnutrition in students being reported."

The counselling and advisory unit at Westminster university responded by saying that our report

"is exactly what is needed to bring the whole topic into the open . . . for several years now it has been a growing problem in British Universities and yet it is one which is scarcely talked about, sometimes even among professionals. In a climate where suicide is still something of a taboo word, it is a great relief to see that our findings are endorsed by objective research such as yours".

Essex university said that the picture that our survey

"paints is clearly recognisable at this University and it adds to the already compelling case for a reform of student funding that would tackle student poverty."

This is not primarily a debate about student funding—we had that debate earlier today. However, there is a case for suggesting that the Government could take some action at least to find ways of alleviating some of the difficulties of students suffering as I have described. There are enormous variations from university to university. For example, the "Push Guide to Which University 96" reports widely differing figures for the number of students per counsellor, which range from one counsellor per 36 students to one counsellor per 833 students.

In the past few days, thousands of students have demonstrated in London to protest about increased hardship. At the same time, academics at Westminster university have hosted a conference entitled "Managing Poverty; A one-day conference to explore poverty in education and its impact on the student experience". The time has come for action to be taken.

Edinburgh university, for example, has now set up its own labour exchange to help hard-pressed students find part-time jobs during term time, as an alternative to falling in debt. The Samaritans have launched a new telephone number for students, and many university nightlines now work in conjunction with the Samaritans. Even the Higher Education Funding Council is funding a research project at the university of Northumbria on the increase in the number of students in UK universities who have acute mental health problems. The time has therefore come to take action.

I therefore urge the Minister to consider whether it is possible to establish a working party in conjunction with the National Union of Students, the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals and the relevant voluntary organisations to review counselling services in our universities and student unions; to identify them and publicise examples of good practice; and to report on any identified deficiencies in levels and type of provision. I hope that they will also find the means of creating better publicity about the availability of existing student counselling services. In particular, I hope that they will find a way to target such publicity at male students, since our study suggests that those students in particular still feel that there is a stigma attached to seeking help.

The Secretary of State, having seen a copy of our survey results, responded to me only today, saying that it related to

"a matter which cannot help but concern everyone involved in higher education."

Based on the Minister's response, I hope that that concern will be translated into action.

10.15 pm

The Minister of State, Department for Education and Employment (Mr. Eric Forth): I thank the hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster) not only for bringing this important matter to the attention of the House, but for doing me the courtesy, as he invariably does, of letting me have the background material to the debate so that I could consider it and give a measured response.

I looked carefully at the document that the hon. Gentleman sent to me, which forms the basis of the debate, and, because it is relevant to our consideration, it would be fair to quote the phrase:

"We feel it appropriate to emphasise that this is by no means an authoritative survey."

The hon. Gentleman has accepted that. I do not mean to undermine the thrust of the findings contained in the document, but it is fair to say that, like so much other information on the subject, the document is not necessarily representative. It may not give the full picture, but it certainly highlights a matter of concern not only to the hon. Gentleman but to many other people.

I should like to quote two paragraphs from the document because they provide a relevant background to the subject. The first paragraph states:

"In the last ten years a dramatic change has taken place in the field of Higher Education. More and more people have enjoyed the benefits of higher education. Students are increasingly drawn from

a wider variety of backgrounds; there are more mature students, women returners, disabled students and people from ethnic minority backgrounds."

The paragraph also outlines that whereas in the 1983-84 academic year there were 882,000 students in higher education, that number had risen by 1993-94 to 1,573,000. We are obviously dealing with a much larger and disparate group of people in higher education, whereas, as the House will know, many years ago it was an elite that received higher education. I think it is fair to describe it as such. Now, thankfully, the kind of people who are coming into higher education are a much more varied group. We all welcome that. That is the first relevant factor that one must bear in mind.

The hon. Gentleman's report also refers to an interesting and revealing fact. The relevant paragraph states:

"The expansion of the university system has taken its toll on the student population. With rare exception, universities report more and more students seeking some help."

The next sentence contains the key phrase:

"Clearly that increase can be attributed to the growing awareness in our society of counselling services. To seek professional help is no longer the taboo it once was."

I find that revealing and relevant because there is no doubt, whether one agrees with it or not, and one does not have to, that society in the 1990s has become much more aware of the concept of stress and its manifestations. Right across society people have become much more willing to identify stress in themselves and to seek advice about and support for it. Some people may almost regret that, while others may welcome it. It is not for me to do either on this occasion.

As background to the case, it is a relevant consideration that whereas, in the past, people sought advice or help from their families or friends, or perhaps went to the bar and got drunk, if they felt under stress, now they are much more prepared to identify stress themselves, and seek advice for that.

I quote once more from the report. I hope that the hon. Gentleman is happy that I am quoting so frequently from his document.

"However, as one senior academic observed,

'for the counsellors the irony is that the kind of help which they can offer is now highly acceptable to many just at a time when the level of distress is greater than it has probably ever been.'"

We should bear in mind the fact that that is the context in which we consider that difficult aspect. That should be weighed against the claims that the hon. Gentleman made about drop-out rates. Drop-outs were also mentioned in our earlier debate on Second Reading of the Education (Student Loans) Bill.

Our figures on drop-out rates do not support the contentions that have been made, not only in the debate, but previously. According to information that is available to the Department for Education and Employment, the drop-out rate of students from full-time and sandwich first degree courses is about 17 per cent. in the latest academic year for which we have reliable figures, and we know of no evidence of a rising trend.

That rate has fluctuated. The rate was 17 per cent. in 1987-88, before the introduction of student loans. As far as I am aware, it continues to be close to that rate. It may increase and decrease year on year—that would be no surprise—but I know of no firm evidence to support the allegation that was made that drop-out rates from higher education are significantly greater than they were in the past. However, we are examining that and I have urged my officials to consider the reasons for the incidence of drop-out rates in different institutions for that and connected reasons.

Allegations are also made about the reasons behind drop-outs. I am aware of a recent survey at Sheffield Hallam university, which was published earlier this year, on the results of its retention rates research project. It covered, I admit, a limited sample of students who had left the university without completing their courses.

Interestingly, the research showed that, when asked for the primary reason for dropping out, 44 per cent. of the students who had dropped out cited an unsuitable course, 19 per cent. cited personal reasons and 16 per cent. cited academic problems. When asked for all reasons, 41 per cent. said that they disliked the course and 17 per cent. mentioned personal reasons. Eleven per cent. named financial problems as a factor—the same as the proportion who mentioned academic difficulties.

I believe that that research gives the lie to several contentions that were made today in different ways—not least the allegation that student hardship or poverty is driving students out of higher education. That survey, albeit of only one institution, does not support that contention.

The survey suggests what, I believe, we have all known—that many students become unhappy or disillusioned with the course that they have selected as they find out more about it, and switch courses or leave altogether. That is regrettable but understandable. It does not support the contention or allegation that widespread student hardship or poverty is driving students out of higher education—almost the opposite.

Whether the survey supports contentions about much greater stress, whether stress is greater now than it has been or whether simply more people are prepared to admit to it or recognise it and seek help for it, is a complex question, to which we do not have ready answers.

As I believe that the hon. Gentleman said, most institutions take the welfare of students very seriously. They all produce a statement setting out their policy in respect of student welfare, and they acknowledge their responsibility for the overall educational and personal development and well-being of their students.

In the further education sector, if I may mention that for a moment, Further Education Funding Council inspections have shown that, in all but one case from 163 reports, student guidance and support was judged as good or excellent. Given that higher education institutions are independent and autonomous organisations and responsible for their internal affairs, we always find it difficult to justify intervening in what they do and the way in which they do it.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned in passing the possible effect of larger classes. One must tread very carefully in that respect, not only because, if we make comparisons between higher education class sizes in this country and those of our European neighbours, we tend to come out rather better. I know of no comparative work that has been done comparing stress levels in our institutions and those in mainland Europe, but the drop-out rates in mainland Europe are much higher. Moreover, as far as I am aware—I am having this examined—staff-student ratios

[Mr. Eric Forth]

there are much higher than ours. The findings also ignore the strides made by technology in dealing with different student numbers in different circumstances.

The hon. Gentleman concluded that it was for the Government to act to alleviate the difficulties in the higher education sector that he had identified. He cited widely differing practices in higher education student support. He then asked for a working party involving the Government, the National Union of Students and the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals to identify good practice, produce publicity and so on. At this point I must differ with him.

I do not think that such action is a matter for the Government—not only because the Government would not naturally become involved in such an area, but because of sensitivities with regard to the relationship between my Department and higher education institutions, with their proud traditions of autonomy and independence. I am somewhat puzzled: this may indeed be natural territory for either the NUS or the CVCP, or perhaps for both those bodies working together, but Government intervention should not be required to initiate the action described by the hon. Gentleman.

Surely, if the NUS shares the hon. Gentleman's concern about its members, it is a matter for it—with all the resources at its disposal, its contacts on campuses and its national network of information—to act in whatever way it chooses. No doubt it would be beneficial if it could involve the CVCP. I fail to see why the case made by the hon. Gentleman should involve the Government.

It is not for me to judge, at this stage, whether the level of stress alleged in the document produced by the hon. Gentleman exists, but I have hinted at my reservations. I refer not only to the use of the term "stress", as we now see it developing throughout society, or to the change in the nature of the higher education student body, but more generally to the extent to which stress is increasing—or perhaps we are more aware of it, or perhaps more people are claiming to experience it—and the extent to which it may vary from one institution to another. Surely all that is natural territory for the NUS and bodies affiliated to it—and perhaps for the CVCP, if it can be encouraged to participate.

I do not want to denigrate or minimise what the hon. Gentleman has said, or to deny that concern exists—as it would in any other part of society. Nor is it for me to suggest—although I am tempted to—that those who are involved in higher education, and are no doubt qualified and proud to be so, should in many ways be better equipped internally to handle the phenomenon of stress. Nevertheless, I feel that this is not a matter for Government.

I hope that the hon. Gentleman accepts my analysis. I am glad that he raised the matter, and we shall want to keep a much closer eye on it. I shall wait with interest to see whether the NUS, the CVCP or any other body will be prepared to take up this important issue as a result of tonight's debate.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-eight minutes past Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 28 November 1995

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

DEFENCE

Procurement Programme

1. **Mr. Batiste:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what would be the effect on the Government's procurement programme of reducing defence spending to the European average. [810]

The Minister of State for Defence Procurement (Mr. James Arbuthnot): If any Government were to reduce spending to the European average of 2.5 per cent. of GDP, they would be forced to cut spending on defence by as much as £4 billion, That would have a devastating effect on our procurement programme.

Mr. Batiste: Is it not clear that the Government's policy of putting the front line first could not be sustained if we reduced defence spending to the European average? Would that not put 315,000 defence jobs at risk, and deny our troops the equipment that they need? Do not those who advocate such a policy—including many Opposition Members—put Britain's front line last?

Mr. Arbuthnot: Yes. Year after year, the Labour party conference has voted to cut defence spending to the European average. This year, members of the Labour party did not do that. They did not even allow themselves a vote, because they knew that they could not be trusted on defence. The entire country knows that Labour cannot be trusted on defence.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: Do not some procurement issues depend on the management rather than on the size of the budget? Why has a lack of spares led to 30 Royal Air Force Tornado aircraft being grounded? Why has pilot training been restricted as a consequence? How are those developments consistent with the Government's stated objective of putting the front line first?

Mr. Arbuthnot: I am pleased to say that the difficulties that have arisen over spares—partly because of industrial action at Rolls-Royce—are being rapidly overcome. They have not affected our ability to deploy Tornadoes at times when they are needed, and we are fully up to speed in making the aircraft available for the tasks that need to be done.

Mr. Mans: Does my hon. Friend agree that, if we reduced our defence spending to the European average, the Eurofighter programme would be put in severe jeopardy? Does he also agree that rumours perpetrated by American aircraft companies that the Government are thinking of buying some F16s instead of the Eurofighter should be nailed once and for all?

Mr. Arbuthnot: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving me the opportunity to correct the story that has recently appeared in the newspapers. We are not considering buying F16 aircraft in place of the Eurofighter; we are fully committed to the Eurofighter, and intend it to form the cornerstone of our air defence capability over the next century. In that context, I am pleased to be able to announce that the revised main development contracts for the Eurofighter were signed yesterday. That puts the project on a much tauter, more commercial and better basis.

Dr. David Clark: Does the Minister feel somewhat guilty about spreading the falsehood that the Labour party intends to reduce defence spending to the European average? Is it not the Government who have reduced defence spending by 30 per cent., with the result that the Army is 10,000 men short and call-up papers had to be sent to reservists yesterday? Is it not true that our Royal Navy has been reduced to 30 ships, and that of 36 planes at RAF Bruggen, only six can fly? Does the Minister agree with the *Daily Mail* that our services are now overstretched and undervalued?

Mr. Arbuthnot: No. The hon. Gentleman is being a little desperate. He knows that, shortly after the Labour party conference, 42 of his hon. Friends voted to cut defence spending to the European average. He knows that his party has voted for that time after time. Now he is calling for a fundamental defence review, but we know that he is scared to admit that what he really wants to do is to cut defence spending.

Western European Union

2. **Mr. Garnier:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he last discussed the Western European Union with Defence Ministers from the other members of that organisation; and if he will make a statement. [811]

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Michael Portillo): Western European Union Foreign and Defence Ministers met in Madrid on 14 November. We made clear our view that European nations acting within the WEU needed to develop their capability of mounting effective, small-scale military operations.

Mr. Garnier: I accept that European security is British security, but will my right hon. Friend confirm his support for the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation and, in particular, for the transatlantic limb of that alliance? Will he also assure me that he will not allow the WEU to be folded into the European Union?

Mr. Portillo: NATO must remain the cornerstone of European defence. I cannot conceive of true security in Europe other than on the basis of a transatlantic alliance. For north Americans to have confidence in NATO, it is necessary for Europeans to show that they can do more and do their bit. The WEU and not the European Union is the proper organisation to develop that European defence capability.

Mr. Jim Marshall: First, will the Secretary of State accept that, throughout the House, there is general

agreement anyway that foreign and security policies should remain a separate pillar under the Maastricht arrangements? Secondly, will he give some idea of how he intends to improve or increase the WEU's operational capability? Words are fine—we have had plenty of words—but what sort of action will ensue?

Mr. Portillo: I am not sure that it is a shared view in all parts of the Chamber that security and foreign policies should remain part of the European Union's pillared structure. It certainly is the belief among Government Members that it should not be brought within the treaty of Rome, but I notice that European socialists, certainly in the European Parliament, have advocated the spread of qualified majority voting to sectors including foreign, defence and security policy. I do not know, therefore, whether Labour Members are disowning the socialist European Members. I hope that, during our presidency, the situation centre of the WEU, the planning cell and the intelligence section will be brought into life so that they will be fully operational towards the end of our presidency.

Defence Land (Gosport)

3. **Mr. Viggers:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the release of defence land in the Gosport area. [812]

The Minister of State for the Armed Forces (Mr. Nicholas Soames): Where it is not possible for my Department to find alternative uses for redundant sites, we seek to dispose of the surplus land as quickly as possible.

Mr. Viggers: I thank my hon. Friend for the manner in which the Ministry of Defence has co-operated with local authorities over the release of defence land. Does he agree that the proposed development of the Portsmouth harbour region, involving some £100 million of investment, backed by some £40 million from the millennium fund, offers an unprecedented opportunity to local authorities to develop their land sensitively? Will he undertake to maintain close contact with the local authorities, including, if necessary, at the appropriate time, a further ministerial meeting on the subject?

Mr. Soames: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I agree that the project is extremely exciting, interesting and potentially rewarding. I shall be happy to see my hon. Friend at the head of a delegation to discuss those matters and I look forward to receiving that delegation at his convening.

Mr. Miller: The project in Gosport is extremely interesting. Will the Minister assure the House that, in discussions with local authorities such as that in the constituency of the hon. Member for Gosport (Mr. Viggers), careful consideration will be given, both to the need for low-cost housing in those communities and to economic development? What discussions is the Minister having with his colleagues in other Departments on those specific points?

Mr. Soames: I can assure the hon. Gentleman that we always have regard to uses other than defence uses when we come to make such plans and, plainly, housing is one of them. We work extremely closely with the local authorities and, where possible, we try to conform to what they wish. As to our relationship with other Departments, plainly, in matters such as planning and the environment, we work absolutely cheek by jowl with them.

Recruitment

4. **Sir Anthony Durant:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the effect on recruitment of reducing United Kingdom defence spending to the European average. [813]

Mr. Soames: If any British Government were to reduce our defence spending to the European average, that would have a devastating impact on the size of our armed forces and the Government would never consider it.

Sir Anthony Durant: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply. Bearing in mind our commitments in Northern Ireland and Germany, and now heavy commitments in Bosnia, will he ensure that we have enough personnel to deal with those issues, and with any others that might arise?

Mr. Soames: I am grateful to my hon. Friend and he is quite right to draw attention to the recruiting difficulties that we have, in the Army in particular—the Royal Navy and the Royal Air Force are satisfactorily recruited. We are doing everything possible to ensure that we overcome those difficulties and are able to continue to recruit the high-grade young men and women that we need in the armed forces today.

Mrs. Anne Campbell: Is not one way of reducing defence spending, which would not have any effect on recruitment, to buy the British-made Land Rover military ambulance rather than the Austrian Steyr that has been recommended to the hon. Gentleman?

Mr. Soames: The hon. Lady makes a fair point. I am able to tell her that no decision has yet been taken, but my hon. Friend the Minister of State for Defence Procurement will have heard what she said and noted her interest.

Mr. Brazier: Does my hon. Friend agree that there is a certain inconsistency between wanting to reduce defence spending to the level of the European average on one hand and the special pleading by individual Members who are concerned about orders for their constituencies?

Mr. Soames: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend, who makes a good point. As my hon. Friend the Minister of State for Defence Procurement said, a reduction to the average level of European expenditure would be about £4 billion, which would represent a down-sizing of about two thirds in any one of the individual services. That is a totally unacceptable proposition and is one of the reasons why this country knows that it can never trust the Labour party on defence.

Mr. Spellar: Can we thank the Tory Whips for having planted that question so that we can ask the Minister how the Government have managed in the past year to spend £500 million on redundancies and £100 million on recruitment, to make a number of troops compulsorily redundant yet still be short of troops in the armed forces and to have to call up reservists? What level of incompetence is that?

Mr. Soames: The hon. Gentleman has no idea what he is talking about and is clearly suffering from paranoia. The question of recruiting should be understood. We are having difficulties recruiting for the infantry and it will not be easy to continue to recruit people to be match fit

for 365 days a year for a demanding job. We need to spend more money on recruiting and we need to do it better. The hon. Gentleman is quite wrong to speak as if reservists were second-class. We have called up reservists to do jobs for which they provide extraordinarily important specialisations, and we badly need their help.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: Will my hon. Friend accept that Her Majesty's forces are the finest military personnel in the world? They are envied for their expertise and their skill. Will he further agree that, without adequate defence, no country has the credibility to play any role in the world today?

Mr. Soames: My hon. Friend is entirely right. The British armed forces are renowned throughout the world for their competence, skill and courage and the plain, understated way that they just get on with the job. My hon. Friend is also right that having formidable armed forces give our country strength and sinew and a far greater sense of nationhood than would otherwise be the case, and, sadly, is not the case in other less favoured countries.

Military Equipment

5. **Mr. Nigel Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will review the suitability of private contractors to repair and maintain military equipment. [814]

Mr. Arbuthnot: No. Military equipment is manufactured by private contractors and private contractors are perfectly capable of repairing and maintaining it.

Mr. Griffiths: What is the final bill for the damage done by the private contractor Airwork Ltd. to the Tornado aircraft that it was supposed to repair? Was not the Government's decision to take that work away from dedicated and skilled RAF personnel and give it to a private contractor another example of the Government being penny wise and pound foolish?

Mr. Arbuthnot: The final bill is the matter of a claim and it would not be right for me to comment on the precise figure at this stage. It is true that we have learnt several lessons from the difficulties that have arisen over the repairs to the Tornado. The fact is that private contractors make defence equipment, and we think that it is a good idea for them to be closely involved in work which relates to defence equipment because they know very well how to do it.

Mr. John Greenway: Does my hon. Friend agree that the contractorisation provided by Hunting Engineering for the supply and maintenance of flight training aircraft has been extremely successful? Can he say when the contract for the extension of the joint elementary flight training scheme will be concluded? When does he expect to announce the outcome of his review into the replacement of Bulldog?

Mr. Arbuthnot: My hon. Friend and I are in correspondence about that issue. I congratulate him on once again standing up for his constituents, something that he does so well. I agree with all that he says about Hunting Engineering.

Mr. Murphy: Does the Minister accept that the damage done by private contractors to the 18 Tornado aircraft at RAF St. Athan's will cost at least £120 million, and that about 4,000 hours of extra work will have to be carried out on each aircraft? Does he agree that such wasteful bungling raises basic queries about the Government's ability to manage some of our most vital defence capabilities, as well as giving us another example of how they have become wholly complacent in their financial management?

Mr. Arbuthnot: I do not agree with the hon. Gentleman's figures. We have given many contractors work on defence equipment over many years. That always has been, and always will be, the case. They have the expertise, of which we need to make use. We have made hundreds of millions of pounds of savings by putting work out to private industry. That has benefited the Ministry of Defence in many different ways, such as defence procurement, repair of defence equipment and recruiting.

Western European Union

7. **Mrs. Gorman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what aims the Government have for their presidency of the Western European Union. [816]

Mr. Portillo: We intend to concentrate our efforts during the United Kingdom presidency on ensuring that the WEU can fulfil its operational role more effectively as the European pillar of the transatlantic alliance.

Mrs. Gorman: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that Great Britain was a member of the WEU long before it joined the Common Market? Does he agree that other European countries, such as those in eastern Europe, should not be excluded from membership of the WEU just because they are not yet members of the EU?

Mr. Portillo: I agree that the WEU has a long and distinguished history and we believe that it also has an important future. I also agree that it should be willing to extend its membership to new applicants. It would be most unhelpful if the criteria for membership of the WEU and of the EU were made the same, because we do not want to place in the way of eastern and central European countries, which may be able to join a military alliance, economic barriers that they might not be able to cross.

Mr. Hardy: I do not dissent from the Secretary of State's view, but does he accept that, over recent months, he and his colleagues have devoted a great deal of energy to berating Labour Members who expressed concern that our defence burden is somewhat greater than that of our colleagues in Europe? During our presidency of the WEU, should not he and his colleagues ensure that our neighbours are persuaded to bear a greater share of the burden? If he does not achieve that, the presidency will be a disastrous failure.

Mr. Portillo: On the hon. Gentleman's first point, I believe that we have not yet spent nearly enough time berating Labour Members—I intend to put that right in the months to come. On the question of burden sharing, he seems to be hinting at what we have been saying all afternoon, which is that the Labour party wishes to reduce the amount that this country spends to the European average. The fact is that this country has special and global responsibilities and we are not prepared to cut our defences in the way that Labour Members want.

Mr. Colvin: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the principle of mutual security is as important to the WEU

as it already is to NATO, and therefore that no country should be admitted as a new member of the WEU until it is a full member of NATO?

Mr. Portillo: It is extremely important that we distinguish between, as it were, political clubs and military alliances. NATO and the WEU are military alliances. That means that countries that want to join have important responsibilities, which they must understand, and it means that we are prepared to give guarantees to those countries. They are solemn guarantees, and we must be very careful about how we give them. I believe that NATO and the WEU will expand in future, but they are important matters, which are worthy of careful thought. We must not proceed imprudently in any.

Gulf War Syndrome

8. **Ms Eagle:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent discussions he has had with his American counterpart concerning Gulf war syndrome. [817]

Mr. Soames: Senior medical officials from my Department frequently discuss the alleged Gulf war syndrome with their equivalents in the United States Department of Defense. I have also spoken to members of the United States Administration about it.

Ms Eagle: Why has the Minister not taken the same positive attitude to finding out the truth about Gulf war syndrome as his American counterparts? Given the searing criticisms of his Department in the recent Defence Select Committee report, which accused him and his Department of defensiveness and general torpor, will he now wake up and establish a full medical inquiry to establish the truth about Gulf war syndrome?

Mr. Soames: The hon. Lady is right to suggest that we were disappointed by the tone of the report of the Defence Select Committee. Clearly, the Government recognise that there were some people who went to serve in the Gulf who are no longer well. There is absolutely no evidence that any of those illnesses were caused by service in the Gulf, nor is there any evidence in this country, in France or in America that there is any such thing as a Gulf war syndrome.

Although the Defence Select Committee, in the most unreasonable fashion, accused my Department of suffering from torpor, the Royal College of Physicians gave a broad endorsement to our work in July 1995. It recommended that we should undertake some further work and research, which we are doing, and my Department retains an open mind about it. The hon. Lady is making mischief if she alleges in any way that there is any such thing as a Gulf war syndrome.

Mr. Robathan: I am sure that everybody will welcome the further research and investigation into Gulf war syndrome. Is my hon. Friend aware, however, that a large number of the people who served in the Gulf—I should say the majority—and who took the unpleasant nerve agent tablets and who had the injections are highly sceptical about Gulf war syndrome and do not believe that it exists?

Mr. Soames: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his comments, and that is certainly the case. Only 700 people have claimed that they have been made ill by their service in the Gulf, only 350 of whom have come forward for the full medical examination and care which the services provide. It is worth telling my hon. Friend that, while there remains certain scepticism among the vast majority of those who served in the Gulf war, plainly we should keep an open mind about those who are ill. We shall continue to conduct research, monitor the situation and work very closely with our American friends and others on this important matter.

Royal Arsenal Site, Woolwich

9. **Mr. Austin-Walker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the future of the royal arsenal site at Woolwich. [818]

Mr. Soames: A development plan has recently been completed for the whole of the royal arsenal west site. That will form the basis of negotiations for the transfer of the site from my Department to English Partnerships. The east site was vacated recently and we hope to market the site next year, when investigations into the contamination are complete.

Mr. Austin-Walker: Does the Minister agree that the 75-acre site, which is derelict industrial land that once had 80,000 people employed on it, presents an unarguable case for a defence diversification strategy? Would he accept that the Royal Artillery Heritage museum is a project for the regeneration of that site, Woolwich and the Greenwich waterfront? Will he outline a timetable for reaching agreement with English Partnerships and for a start on the renovation of the 15 listed buildings on the site?

Mr. Soames: I entirely agree with the hon. Gentleman, who has been a doughty champion of his constituency interest. It is an important site, with some extremely important buildings on it. I also agree that the Royal Artillery Heritage museum is—possibly—a worthwhile operation to have on that site. Other people are also interested in it. Negotiations for the transfer of the west site to English Partnerships are in train.

A master development plan for the whole area is, as the hon. Gentleman knows, being drawn up and will be finalised as soon as it can be, in consultation with the London borough of Greenwich. The hon. Gentleman may be assured that my Department will play its role to the full in achieving a satisfactory outcome in a very important matter for his constituency and the nation.

Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith: Is my hon. Friend aware that there are many hundreds of thousands of gunners, including former gunners among hon. Members on both sides of the House, who have contributed millions of pounds to ensure that the site will be developed, not only in memory of the royal artillery as part of this country's heritage, but for very many other reasons which have been well advanced by the hon. Member for Woolwich (Mr. Austin-Walker)? Will my hon. Friend look kindly on the fact that voluntary contributions are substantial and growing?

Mr. Soames: My hon. Friend, as a former gunner, speaks with feeling, since Sir Martin Farndale has clearly already dipped his hand into my hon. Friend's pocket. He is quite right to say that many hundreds of thousands of former gunners, old comrades and present gunners, have generously donated money to the plan for the Royal

Artillery Heritage museum. I wholly agree that it could be the most wonderful museum. Anyone who has been there and seen the fantastic collection of guns at Woolwich, which the hon. Member for Woolwich (Mr. Austin-Walker) is so keen to see more formalised, will realise that it could be an astonishingly exciting project. There is a great deal more to do and much more money required, but I wholly endorse my hon. Friend's point.

Fraud

10. **Dr. Wright:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the level of fraud within his Department's operations. [819]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The level of fraud is low and the National Audit Office supports that assessment. We are, however, determined to bear down on fraud and are taking action against it with a wide range of measures.

Dr. Wright: In view of the recent damning report of the NAO on Ministry of Defence contract fraud, and the Gordon Foxley case in particular, will the Minister give a number of assurances that none of the firms involved in the Foxley case is still doing MOD work, that the MOD will not deal with any contractors who prevent employees from reporting fraud, and that it will put in place secure procedures to enable members of staff to report suspected fraud and to save taxpayers millions of pounds in the process?

Mr. Arbuthnot: As I said, we take this matter extremely seriously. I give the hon. Gentleman the assurance that he asks for that the firms involved are no longer given work by the Ministry of Defence. We have put in place, because we take the matter so seriously, a Defence fraud unit. We have also brought in a new code of procurement ethics. I am very pleased to say that the NAO's report was not damning because it displayed the fact that we have a huge budget and that a relatively tiny proportion of it is lost to fraud, partly due to the Government's vigilance and partly because of the very high standards expected of, and received from, our public servants.

Force Levels

11. **Dr. Michael Clark:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the effect on force levels of reducing United Kingdom defence spending to the European average. [820]

Mr. Portillo: If any British Government were to reduce our defence spending to the European average, it would have a devastating impact on the size of our forces. The Government will not allow that to happen.

Dr. Clark: Does my right hon. Friend agree that we get excellent value for money from our armed forces? Will he reassure the House that, at the current level of expenditure, our worldwide commitment to humanitarian assistance, peacekeeping and protection will not be diminished, and our national defence will not be put in jeopardy?

Mr. Portillo: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend that we get very good value from our armed forces. They have a fine reputation and they project the prestige and influence, and, when necessary, the power of the country, on a global basis. Their contribution to peacekeeping is demonstrated by the announcement that I made by written answer yesterday that 13,000 British troops are to become part of the implementation force in former Yugoslavia. Of course I take extremely seriously the necessity of the defence of the realm. That is my duty, and I give my hon. Friend the assurance that he seeks.

Mr. Burden: Given that achieving value for money must surely be important in reducing defence expenditure, does the Secretary of State agree that it was not good enough for the Minister of State for the Armed Forces to say to my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge (Mrs. Campbell) that, in connection with the purchase of military ambulances, the Government were merely considering the choice between Land Rover and an Austrian company?

Will the right hon. Gentleman comment on the report that appeared in *The Observer* on Sunday that the rules of the competition were being changed to benefit the Austrian company? Does he agree that the Government should be interested in having the reliable spares and service back-up that can be provided by buying British?

Mr. Portillo: As a matter of policy, I do not comment on stories in *The Observer*. We do not change the rules of competition halfway through. My hon. Friend said that no decision had yet been taken, and I remind the House that Britain buys about 90 per cent. of its defence procurement from British companies. That happens not through favouritism but because they provide value for money, and that will continue to be an important criterion for us.

Mr. Cash: Does my right hon. Friend agree not only that we give enormous credibility to our British Army and the performance that it puts up in relation to the defence of Europe, but that the report in *The Sunday Telegraph* suggesting that he might favour moves towards a single army was complete rubbish, and that he would have nothing to do with any such proposals?

Mr. Portillo: Yes, the report was absolute rubbish. I am pleased to say that I have had the opportunity on any number of occasions to make our policy clear, but if I may repeat it: NATO provides the cornerstone of security for Europe, but Europeans need to demonstrate that they can do their bit, which they can do through the development of Western European Union. The comment made in *The Sunday Telegraph* was disappointingly ignorant and ill informed.

Dr. Reid: On defence expenditure, Defence Ministers are in a state of advanced self-delusion. Do they not recognise that, under the Conservative Government, there has been a 30 per cent. cut in defence expenditure? There has been a cut of more than 100,000 in personnel, and defence spending has been reduced from 5.8 per cent. to 2.8 per cent. of GDP. Is it not time for everyone in the House to give up the juvenile name calling that has marked defence debates for the past 15 years and face the real challenge of a low defence budget, which is to identify the essential framework and to reach a national consensus on national security policy?

Mr. Portillo: Last year, the United Kingdom spent 3.3 per cent. of GDP on defence; the European average was 2.5 per cent. Yesterday, I was in Germany having

agreeable discussions with my German opposite number, and he revealed to me that the German figure is now 1.8 per cent. The reason why we cannot reach a consensus on the matter is that a large part of the Labour party wants to cut our defence spending; there is a large part of the Labour party that cannot be trusted on defence.

The delusion is in the mind of the hon. Member for Motherwell, North (Dr. Reid), because when he sees 42 Labour Members of Parliament calling for savage reductions in our defence spending, he deludes himself that it has not happened, or that those people are not Labour Members. Unfortunately, they are. The threat from Labour is real, and the country cannot trust Labour on defence.

Mr. Atkins: Is my right hon. Friend aware that, if the cuts suggested by the Labour party took place, he would not be able to order next week 2,500 vehicles constructed by British companies—including Leyland Vehicles in my constituency, as well as companies in many other constituencies the length and breadth of the country—and that he might then be forced to order Mercedes vehicles, which he, like all Conservative Members, knows would be unacceptable to all his hon. Friends?

Mr. Portillo: Thousands of jobs would be lost in the British defence industries if the savage cuts advocated by Labour Members were put into practice. If those cuts were made, we would not be able to play a role as a power of global significance in military matters, we would not be able to play a part in NATO and we would not be able to form part of the implementation force in Bosnia. We would be a wholly different and reduced country if Labour's policies were put into effect.

Ministry of Defence Police

12. **Mr. Rendel:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to reduce the number of Ministry of Defence policemen and policewomen. [821]

Mr. Soames: The overall manpower requirements for Ministry of Defence police are kept under constant review. We will shortly be issuing consultative documents concerning our proposals for future defence police and guarding requirements.

Mr. Rendel: Does the Minister agree that security at sites such as Aldermaston and Burghfield which have nuclear materials is so important that it would be a bad mistake to reduce the number of MOD police at the sites or to replace them with other less well-trained or less highly skilled personnel?

Mr. Soames: Clearly the hon. Gentleman is right: the policing and guarding of those sites are extremely important. Quite properly, the Government have examined whether there is scope for reducing costs without in any sense reducing essential standards. The safety and security of personnel and the establishments and the effectiveness of our operations have remained and will remain our primary objective.

Mr. Key: My hon. Friend knows that scores of MOD police work in my constituency, and he has already expressed his support for the work that they do. Will he undertake as swiftly as possible the review that he mentioned? The MOD police have been faced with reviews of one sort or another for some years, and that is bad for morale and unfair to the families of those involved.

Mr. Soames: My hon. Friend is a doughty champion of all the defence establishments and personnel in his constituency. I agree that the MOD police fulfil a very important role, but they are—I have to say—extremely expensive. We must therefore examine carefully where we need the MOD police to exercise constabulary powers and where we do not need people of such superior quality. I agree that we need to get that news into the public domain as soon as possible, and my hon. Friend has my assurance that that will happen. As he knows, there are some complex issues to be resolved.

Mr. Foulkes: Is the Minister aware that the MOD police who monitor low flying using Sky Guard are doing a very good job? But does he realise that there is far too much low flying in the borders area? The number of low-flying sorties in the borders is on the way up, whereas in the country as a whole it has fallen by 30 per cent. Is he aware that an all-party delegation—including the right hon. Member for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro)—saw the Under-Secretary of State for Defence, and that we were absolutely furious at the lack of action from the Ministry of Defence on the matter? Will the Minister, who I know is a man of honour, give a personal pledge that there will be a review of low flying so that the borders tactical training area gets no more than its fair share?

Mr. Soames: The hon. Gentleman managed to turn a question about the Ministry of Defence police into one about low flying, which was clever even by his standards. I shall give no such undertaking at this Dispatch Box. I acknowledge the important meeting that he had with my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary, and I am aware of the concerns in the borders. I can report to the hon. Gentleman that the MOD police hugely enjoyed his visit to Sky Guard.

Sir Michael Shersby: Does my hon. Friend agree that the MOD police are a splendid body of men and women whose skill and professionalism are renowned? Does he also agree that they are able to give civilian back-up wherever that is required? Will he take that into account during his review?

Mr. Soames: My hon. Friend speaks with a good deal of specialist knowledge. He is right to say that they are a fine body of men and women, and we are fortunate to have them on the strength. We are very much aware of the important role that they can play in a civilian capacity in backing up the civilian police. My hon. Friend can rest assured that we will liaise with the civilian police and the civilian police authorities as we come to our conclusions on this complex matter.

RAF Valley

13. **Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to receive bids for the contractorisation of services at RAF Valley. [823]

Mr. Soames: The closing date—*[Interruption.]* Competing for quality has never been so popular. The closing date for submission of bids is 3 January 1996.

Mr. Jones: Will the Minister confirm that there are four companies actively involved in preparing bids for the

contractorisation of services for RAF Valley? Will he also confirm that the Department has made it clear to those companies that they have a duty to maximise job opportunities for local people and to set up training schemes funded by the Welsh Office?

Mr. Soames: The hon. Gentleman has been in touch with me on a number of occasions about the matter. As he knows, several companies are interested in undertaking this very important work. We are pleased with the way in which it is moving ahead. I give him my assurance that as many local people as possible will be employed on the contract when it is let. As for training, I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will welcome the decision of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales to make available £75,000 to North West Wales training and enterprise council as its contribution to that training programme.

Mr. Wilkinson: As the Hawk tactical weapons unit at RAF Valley has a war role, will my hon. Friend ensure that at least some of the contractor personnel are members of the sponsored reserve who are required to accept military discipline, so that they can fulfil duties in emergency or war?

Mr. Soames: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for making that important point. It will certainly be important that a number of those contractor staff are members of the sponsored reserve. My hon. Friend will be pleased to know that the Reserve Forces Bill will, I hope, receive its Second Reading today in the other place.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mrs. Ewing:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 28 November. [840]

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): This morning, I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mrs. Ewing: Although I recognise the significant role that the Prime Minister has played in the Northern Ireland peace process, he will understand that there is now widespread concern at what appears to be an impasse. In those circumstances, does he feel that it is now time to establish an international commission to help the matter on?

The Prime Minister: I am grateful for what the hon. Lady said in her opening remarks. Naturally, I hope that we will soon be able to launch what has become known as the twin-track initiative. I had a further conversation with the Irish Prime Minister earlier today. I expect to speak to him later this afternoon. Some important points are still outstanding. It is too soon to say whether and when we might reach agreement, but some progress has been made.

Mr. Trotter: Might I, on Budget day, remind my right hon. Friend of the massive Siemens plant which is being built on Tyneside? Is he aware that, at £1.1 billion of German money, it is the biggest investment in Europe? Is he aware that, with its planned exports of £700 million every year, the plant could have gone anywhere in the world? Is not the decision to put it on Tyneside, with the thousands of jobs that result, a tribute to and proof of the attractiveness of Britain, the soundness of the economy and the success of Government policies?

The Prime Minister: It is certainly a very welcome investment as, indeed, is all the inward investment that we have seen over recent years. What is very refreshing is that we are receiving inward investment not just from outside the European Union, from which we have had the bulk of inward investment into western Europe for many years, but reinvestment from one part of the European Union to the United Kingdom. That reflects our tax structure, the opportunities in this country, the fact that we are not committed to very high social costs, and the skills of the British work force.

Mr. Blair: Does the Prime Minister recall giving a firm pledge that, after rail privatisation, fares would be capped? How is it then that we are now told that fares on only 20 per cent. of inter-city lines and only 40 per cent. of the rest will be capped?

The Prime Minister: Let me remind the hon. Gentleman that we remain committed to fares rising in line with inflation over the next three years, then falling by 1 per cent. below inflation for the next four years. That is capping of fares. The right hon. Gentleman will recall that, when Labour was last in government— *[Interruption.]* Yes, Madam Speaker, it was a long time ago. It is because Labour was so appalling in government that it is such a long time ago. When Labour was in government, rail fares rose by more than 22 per cent. over and above inflation. The fact is that fares would go up again under Labour to pay for its policy of renationalisation.

Mr. Blair: The Prime Minister did not answer the question as to why the pledge that he gave is no longer honoured. We now know that an extra £700 million of public subsidy is going to those rail networks after privatisation and hundreds of millions of pounds is being spent in the sale. A report today suggests that the network may be sold for a quarter of its book value, which is a loss to the taxpayer of billions of pounds. In those circumstances, is it not time that, if he cannot even maintain the pledges that he has given, the sale was dropped and the network kept as a proper public service?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman is wrong all the way down the line. I assume that he is getting advice from the deputy leader of the Labour party, but he is clearly wrong with all his facts. I made the point about fares rising in line with inflation and then falling. I have again made that perfectly clear to the Leader of the Opposition. As for the sale of Railtrack, there is no question of its assets being sold off cheaply— *[Interruption.]* A few days ago, we saw the Labour party briefing on a Budget that it has not heard. Now, we hear Labour Members scoffing at decisions that have not yet been taken. How do they know? They do not. They are in the business of trying to smear this privatisation, as they have tried to smear every other privatisation.

Mr. Gale: I am sure that my right hon. Friend will welcome the news that the videotape made from recordings culled from clandestine cameras has been withdrawn from sale. Will he ask my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary to consider

prosecution, as the tape was illegal and uncertificated? Will he consider confiscation of the proceeds of the sale? Will he also prevent further similar events, so that closed circuit television cameras, which are a valuable weapon in the fight against crime, are not brought into disrepute?

The Prime Minister: I will see that my right hon. and learned Friend considers my hon. Friend's remarks.

Mr. Ashdown: Having been fooled by tax promises before the last election, followed by record tax hikes after it, why does the Prime Minister believe that the British people will be taken in twice by his Government on taxes?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman finds himself in a rather curious situation. He has consistently opposed tax increases and now opposes the possibility of tax reductions. Of course, it is a typical Liberal position to oppose one thing and oppose the precise opposite. What the right hon. Gentleman—whom we welcome safely to his place today—neglects to mention is that since I became Prime Minister take-home pay after inflation has risen by more than £600 a year in today's prices, real disposable income is £400 a year per head higher in today's prices and, in addition, average mortgage costs have fallen by £140 a month.

Mr. Dykes: Further to the first supplementary question, does my right hon. Friend agree that the Government's careful and meticulous policy on the Northern Ireland peace talks has the full, bipartisan support of all parties in the House, but none the less that there is a strong collective desire for further progress from now on? Following his previous answer, can he say a little more on the prospects following the American President's visit to Britain and the island of Ireland tomorrow?

The Prime Minister: I am grateful for what my hon. Friend had to say, further to the remarks of the hon. Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing). As I said, I hope to speak with the Irish Prime Minister again later this afternoon. I am not certain whether we will be able to reach full agreement on that occasion, but, if we do not, we shall continue at a later stage to see whether an agreement on acceptable terms is possible.

I emphasise to the House that the agreement has to be on acceptable terms. It has to be an agreement that will lay the groundwork that would enable all parties to get together and talk in due course. There is no purpose in an agreement that will not work and will not achieve that, so we have to deal with the matter carefully. We have to consider the position of all parties who have expressed views on the matter and I will deal with it as speedily as is practicable, but only with the determination of reaching a satisfactory settlement. As soon as we can reach one, we will announce it. If we cannot, we will continue to seek one.

Q2. **Mr. McAvoy:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 28 November. [841]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. McAvoy: A moment ago, the Prime Minister mentioned mortgage payments; but, to deal with other statistics, can he confirm that, in the five years since he took office as Prime Minister, no fewer than 320,000 families have lost their homes through repossession and that the repossession rate is running at over 1,000 per week? Is that a record of which he is proud or will he take this opportunity to apologise to those families for the misery that he caused them—or is it all their own fault?

The Prime Minister: I can certainly reconfirm the point I made earlier and also confirm the point that repossessions are falling. What is most necessary for the housing market is stable inflation and the lowest possible interest rates. We have achieved a better position on inflation than we have seen for generations and a better position on interest rates than we have seen for very many years. That bodes very well for the housing market.

Mr. Tracey: Does my right hon. Friend share a sense of intrigue with me at the speech yesterday of Commissioner Kinnock in which he said that major events in Europe were unlikely to happen until well after 1999? Does he agree that this was not so much a statement of the policy of the European Commission as an indication of the state of nerves of the British Labour party?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend draws attention to a very intriguing speech and, like every other Member of the House, I read it with a great deal of interest. I believe Commissioner Kinnock is approaching this matter with a greater clarity of vision than right hon. Gentlemen on the Opposition Front Bench. I think what he has had to say is to have had the audacity to admit what we have been saying for ages: that Europe may well not be ready for a single currency in 1999 and that, if it is not ready to proceed without Europe being ready, that would be disastrous not just for individual countries but for every country in the European Union.

Q3. **Mr. Bryan Davies:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 28 November. [842]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Davies: How can our nation be at ease with itself, an ambition that the Prime Minister set five years ago, when one in five non-pensioner households have nobody working?

The Prime Minister: I have to say to the hon. Gentleman that I think that what one needs to ensure that a nation is at ease with itself is a range of different factors that we are now producing. I will tell the hon. Gentleman what they are: first, the smashing of the inflationary psychology and the protection of pensioners' savings; secondly, the best economic outlook for generations, which we now have; thirdly, the largest fall in recorded crime for over 40 years, which we now have; the lowest rate of unemployment among large nations in Europe, which we now have; and a range of other factors which this Government have put in place and which no earlier Labour Government matched in any way.

Q4. **Mr. Simon Coombs:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 28 November. [843]

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Coombs: Has my right hon. Friend seen the news today that the Honda motor company is proposing to create

500 new jobs at its plant in Swindon? Is this not excellent news for the motor industry in this country, which was on its knees under the last Labour Government? How would the prospects for investment such as this be affected if Britain were to sign up for the European social chapter, as advocated by the Labour party?

The Prime Minister: I join my hon. Friend in welcoming this news. I think it is good for Britain and I have no doubt that it is good for my hon. Friend's constituents. They join the workers of Black and Decker in Sedgefield, they join the workers of NEC in Livingston, they join the workers at BSkyB in Dunfermline, all of whom have benefited as a result of that sort of investment, and that sort of investment would not have taken place but for the success of this Government's economic policy and this Government's other policies.

The reality is that signing up to the social chapter will add unnecessary cost to employers and put our record for inward investment at risk. *[Interruption.]* Opposition Members shake their heads, but they know that the social chapter is not a pick-and-mix option, as the Leader of the Opposition says. Once we have signed up to it, we have it; and if we have it, we might well not have those sorts of investments.

Q5. **Mr. Spellar:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 28 November. [844]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Spellar: On the fifth anniversary of his premiership, how does the Prime Minister justify having doubled the national debt during that period?

The Prime Minister: If the hon. Gentleman looks at the record of successive Labour Governments, he may wish to withdraw that question. He will see that we have financed our borrowing properly. The last Labour Government increased debt by an unprecedented amount.

Mr. Wilshire: Further to my right hon. Friend's understandably cautious replies about Northern Ireland, can he confirm that a start to decommissioning remains a precondition of all-party talks in Northern Ireland?

The Prime Minister: Those who have read the "Building Blocks" paper which we published recently will see that it sets down specific requirements for the body's report. It also says that the international body is not being established to recommend when decommissioning should start. That position has not changed.

BILL PRESENTED

Channel Tunnel Rail Link

Secretary Sir George Young, supported by the Prime Minister, Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr. Secretary Rifkind, Mr. Secretary Lang, Mr. Secretary Gummer and Mr. John Watts, presented a Bill to provide for the construction, maintenance and operation of a railway between St Pancras, in London, and the Channel Tunnel portal at Castle Hill, Folkestone, in Kent, together with associated works, and of works which can be carried out in conjunction therewith; to provide for the improvement of the A2 at Cobham, in Kent, and of the M2 between junctions 1 and 4, together with associated works; to make provision with respect to compensation in relation to the acquisition of blighted land; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time tomorrow and to be printed. [Bill 7.]

WAYS AND MEANS

Budget Statement

[Relevant document: The unnumbered Explanatory Memorandum submitted by HM Treasury on 26th July 1995, concerning the Council Recommendation to the UK with a view to bringing an end to the situation of an excessive deficit in the United Kingdom, prepared in regard to Article 104c(7) of the Treaty establishing the European Community.]

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Before I call the Chancellor of the Exchequer, it may be for the convenience of hon. Members if I remind them that, at the end of the Chancellor's speech, copies of the Budget resolutions will be available to hon. Members in the Vote Office.

Introduction

3.31 pm

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Kenneth Clarke): I have already said publicly that I have been looking forward to this year's Budget. I am enjoying each Budget a little more as I get nearer to my aims—*[Interruption.]* My aims are very worth while.

The British economy has now been growing for almost four years. The recovery has created more than half a million new jobs. We have more of our people in work than any other major country in the European Union. Inflation is enjoying its best run for almost 50 years. All the major western economies have slowed down this year, but our recovery remains stronger than most. The International Monetary Fund has forecast that, next year, we shall be joint top, with Germany, of the G7 growth league table.

Few Chancellors have delivered their Budget against a background of such strong economic fundamentals. But getting this far has not been easy. It has required tough decisions on tax and spending over the past three years. This Budget builds on the hard-won gains that this Government have made and keeps Britain on course to be the enterprise centre of Europe: a Britain that creates more jobs and generates the greater wealth and personal prosperity in which all can share; a Britain in which everyone can keep more of what they earn or save to spend as they choose, not as the state chooses; and a Britain where more money is spent on the things that everyone cares about—our schools, our hospitals, our police. [Hon. Members: "Oh."] Yes.

The people of this country believe in those goals. Only this Government are committed to the means of achieving them. We are keeping inflation low. We are keeping control of public spending. We are keeping Government borrowing on a downward path. And we believe in the policies of low taxation, which all countries must follow if they want to be world-class economic powers.

These are the people of Britain who are hard working and take responsibility for themselves and their families. They are the people who want to get on in life, who run their own businesses and who create jobs. And they are the people with that great British virtue—a social conscience—*[Interruption.]*—people with a real social conscience, who want to see a successful economy first earn the wealth, in order to give the weak and the less fortunate a helping hand.

This Budget addresses the aspirations of the people of this country in an economically and socially responsible way. It controls public spending overall while shifting more money towards schools, hospitals and the police. It keeps Government borrowing on a clear downward path and fiscal policy tight so that the recovery will be sustained. And it cuts taxes. For all those reasons, that is why I have been looking forward to this year's Budget.

The Recovery

Before moving on to specific tax and spending measures, let me deal briefly with the economic background. In 1994, the economy grew by around 4 per cent., fuelled by the success of British exporters overseas. No mature industrial economy could easily sustain those rates of growth without risking a rise in inflation. That is why towards the end of last year I raised interest rates. In the event, slower growth in the world economy has reduced the growth of British exports. British exporters are well placed to compete in markets overseas. For example, we now have a current account surplus with the so-called tiger economies of south-east Asia. But our key markets in America and Europe are growing by less than they were in 1994.

The growth in this country will be sustained because the fundamentals of the economy are strong as a result of our economic policies. We have low inflation, sound public finances and more competitive businesses. The change in the pace of growth this year is not unique to Britain and has been seen in the United States, Germany and elsewhere. No recovery ever proceeds at a constant rate of growth throughout. In fact, this recovery is proving to be the steadiest seen in Britain for a generation.

Many commentators confidently predicted that the higher tax and lower public spending of the last three Budgets would knock the recovery off track. They were wrong. Consumer spending has been on a firm upward trend since the recovery began. With the necessary tax increases behind us, consumer spending should grow further next year and the year after.

Businesses have responded to the economic recovery by investing for the future. Manufacturing investment has grown by 12 per cent. over the past year. The conditions for further increases in investment—low inflation, low interest rates, low corporate tax rates and healthy company balance sheets—remain in place.

For the economy as a whole, the forecasts, which I am publishing in the Red Book, are for growth of 2¼ per cent. this year and 3 per cent. next year.

My last two Budgets have strengthened the foundations of the economy and put the recovery on to a secure footing. I have reduced public spending and borrowing plans to create more room for the wealth-creating part of the economy to grow. I have helped businesses. And I have improved the workings of the labour market.

The decisions I took and the policies I pursued in those Budgets have helped to reduce pressure on me to increase interest rates further, without jeopardising my inflation target.

Inflation

We have got inflation under control. Inflation has picked up over the past year as the impact of last year's worldwide increase in commodity prices has fed through the price chain. Those cost pressures are now steadily easing. Underlying inflation may be close to its peak and should resume its downward path during the course of next year. It remains on course to meet the Government's target of 2½ per cent. or below by the end of the present Parliament. The House might care to remember that last August was the 20th anniversary of inflation in this country reaching a staggering 26.9 per cent.

The Public Finances

We have got inflation under control. We have also got the public finances under control. The Government have delivered last year's tough public spending plans. Indeed, we expect to undershoot them. However, tax receipts have come in lower than expected this year. That is partly due to lower inflation and to lower growth. The public sector borrowing requirement is the difference between two enormous numbers, so that forecasts for public borrowing have always been notoriously difficult to make—under whatever party. I have therefore been cautious and prudent this year in setting out the latest projections for the PSBR. I now expect the PSBR to be £29 billion in the current financial year. That will be £7 billion less than last year and £16 billion less than two years ago. I am determined to follow a consistent course and I have taken more public spending decisions to keep it that way.

I have no intention of throwing away the gains we have made in recent years in getting public borrowing down. We will keep on track towards balance in the medium term because I do not want the future strength of the recovery put at risk. Overall, our decisions on public spending and the tax measures I shall describe shortly will be broadly neutral in their impact on the downward path for the PSBR over the next three years.

That downward profile for Government borrowing sets the overall framework for my Budget this year. I am not prepared to take any action that would put at risk my fiscal target of moving towards balance in the medium term. I had to make the difficult judgments and decisions about the balance between the levels of taxation and public spending. This year, as in previous years, I have made those judgments and taken those decisions with the dominant priority of improving the long-term health of the British economy. Our tax and spending policies must promote our aim of becoming the enterprise centre of Europe.

Public Spending

In each of my three Budgets, I have reduced public spending plans substantially. This year, I have once again kept a firm grip on public spending, helped by my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary. My right hon. Friend and I have at least three things in common. We have both been in charge of big spending Departments, so we are both poachers turned gamekeepers. Neither of us could be described as adopting the slash and burn approach to public spending. But we are both convinced that the share of national income taken by the state in public expenditure must be reduced to below 40 per cent. if we are to remain competitive in today's world. It is essential to give the private sector more room to generate the jobs, the investment and the wealth that will make people and their families more prosperous.

That goes hand in hand with our commitment to a modern welfare state. In the rapidly changing world of technological advance and a more flexible labour market, the British people need to be prepared and equipped to embrace change in a flexible way. They will be more willing to do that if they know that high-quality schools, health care and a safety net for the unemployed, the disabled and the old are there if and when they need them. That is why we are modernising the welfare state so that it underpins the British economy, and does not undermine it. We are changing the welfare state to ensure that it serves the needs of today, not of 40 years ago; that it serves those who genuinely need it; and that it is affordable to the taxpayer.

Those objectives are being achieved in the face of huge pressures for higher public spending that come rolling in year after year. But this Budget proves that we can have good-quality public services and spending control. Unlike our critics, we understand that good services depend not only on how much one spends, but on the way that one spends it.

That realistic but socially responsible approach has guided me this year. I have limited the growth of spending overall. But I have also provided more money for the public services that the British people care about most—schools, hospitals and the police. To pay for that, my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary and I have found savings elsewhere from our continuing drive to modernise government.

Let me deal first with the priority areas where I have been able to increase spending plans.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Having cut them last year.

Mr. Clarke: None of them was cut last year. That was an ill-thought-out and inaccurate interjection.

I shall turn to what we are doing to the national health service. This Government are committed to the national health service. I am proud that since 1979 spending on the NHS has increased by more than 70 per cent. in real terms. We are continuing to deliver our commitment to increase spending on the NHS in real terms. That is what we said that we would do, and we are doing it.

Public spending on the national health service will increase by over £1 billion next year. In addition, patients will benefit from improvements in efficiency, including reductions in NHS management costs. All those savings—around £650 million next year—will be ploughed back into patient care. Privately financed projects will bring nearly £700 million of extra investment over the next three years without in any way undermining the fundamental principle that health care should be free at the point of service. It is no good the word "private" producing curls on the lips of Labour Members. The money is on top of the additional £1 billion of public expenditure, and it all represents additional resources for our free national health service.

Schools

The Budget allows for spending on schools to rise next year. We have already increased spending per pupil by some 50 per cent. in real terms since 1979. We devote a higher proportion of our public spending to education than Japan, Germany or France.

[Mr. Clarke]

Our achievements have been impressive. Post-16 staying-on rates have risen dramatically, from 42 per cent. in 1979 to 72 per cent. now. Almost one in three young people go on to higher education, up from one in eight in 1979. We have a higher graduation rate than any other major European country. We have achieved many improvements in our schools: introduction of the national curriculum, more rigorous schools inspection, measures to tackle failing schools, greater choice for parents, better vocational education and extension of free nursery education. That is not just good for our children; it is good for our future and good for our economy.

Our reforms have delivered better standards of education for each pound that we spend—but we are also spending more pounds. The plans that I am publishing today allow for an increase in spending on schools of £878 million. Within that, over £770 million will be channelled through the local authority settlement. Parents will rightly expect local authorities to carry that funding through to school budgets, and they should ask their local authorities how the extra money for schools will be spent on their children.

Police

Since 1979, spending on our police has almost doubled even after allowing for inflation. Next year, the resources available to fight crime will be increased again. Money is being provided for an extra 5,000 police officers over the next three years. That is on top of the 32,000 increase in the police service since 1979. The plans also allow for an extra 10,000 closed circuit television cameras in town centres and elsewhere.

I have found those extra resources for important programmes because we are changing government to ensure that it meets the needs of people today, not those of 20, 30 or 40 years ago. We are cutting Government bureaucracy, cracking down on fraud, getting Government out of activities in which they need not be involved and using private sector skills and finance to provide better public services. That is the hallmark of a Government who are looking to the future needs of a modern industrial state.

Running Costs

We are now making spectacular efficiency gains as a result of our civil service reforms of recent years. I remind the House that in my last Budget I cut provision for central Government running costs by 10 per cent. in real terms over three years. This year, I will go much further on top of that. The cash cost of Whitehall will be £860 million lower in three years' time than it is today. In real terms, that represents total savings of 12 per cent., which is equivalent to a saving of nearly £2 billion a year. But we must never delude ourselves that more resources for schools, hospitals and police as well as tax cuts can be paid for just by eliminating waste in the public sector. Life is not that simple. We have also had to look elsewhere.

Three years ago, before my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security very skilfully put in place a programme for long-term reform, we were expecting social security spending to grow by more than 3 per cent. each year in real terms. We now expect real growth in planned spending of around 1 per cent. per year over the next three years. That reduction in growth will build up year on year to a cash saving of huge proportions. The changes that we have made and that we are making are an assurance for future generations. We are going to leave our children a welfare state that works and a welfare system that they can afford.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security will announce the details of this year's settlement to the House tomorrow. I shall set out just the main points. Increases in social security spending next year will be well within the growth of the economy. We will ensure that all that spending represents legitimate spending on people in genuine need. That is why my right hon. Friend will give details of a further intensive campaign against fraud. He will also announce measures that will mean that people who apply for asylum on arrival in the country will cease to receive benefits after an unfavourable adjudication.

My right hon. Friend will announce steps to close the gap between single parents benefit and those paid to other families. The right approach to single parents is neither to penalise them nor to favour them. The costs and responsibilities of having children are the same for couples as they are for single people.

We intend to build at the same time on our previous measures to help more mothers move from benefit dependency into work. My right hon. Friend will announce a package of measures to encourage work, including a further increase in the child care allowance in family credit from £40 to £60 each week.

Next is housing benefit. The housing benefit system should not be an inducement for young people to leave their families before they need to. My right hon. Friend will announce measures to restrict the amount of housing benefit paid to single people under the age of 25 to a maximum that more sensibly reflects their circumstances. The benefit system should offer a real incentive to young people to rent within their means, improving their incentives to work rather than dependency on the social security system. [Hon. Members: "Nonsense."] Opposition Members are so predictable. It is by restricting spending in those areas that we can protect people in greatest need and stand by our pledges on pensions and child benefit. Others apparently claim to be thinking the unthinkable. I have yet to see evidence of their thinking at all.

This Government have acted decisively to put in place policies to bring social security spending under better control. Let no one underestimate what we have achieved. The measures that I have announced in my three Budgets will reduce planned social security expenditure by £5 billion each year by the end of the century.

Social security is a good example of how more money can be found to be spent on areas that we care most about, by trimming back elsewhere. We have applied that principle to most other programmes. When hon. Members examine the full details of our spending plans, they will find that, in practically every Department of Government, we have found significant savings while protecting the front line of public service delivery.

Let me give two examples. We have found further efficiency savings in defence, but we maintain fully our commitment to a strong front line and, in a tight public spending round in the Foreign Office, the planned

allocation for bilateral aid is likely to be little changed from that set out in last year's departmental report. British bilateral aid is internationally recognised for its high quality and for the substantial share going to the poorest countries in Africa and Asia, and that will continue.

We are also doing more to get the Government out of activities that they simply need not be involved in. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence is today announcing his intention to transfer ownership of the Ministry of Defence married quarters estate to the private sector. That will improve the management of the estate, which will be good for the services, and good for service families. We plan to privatise the Housing Corporation loan book, and to encourage the banks to provide student loans.

Private Finance

There are many services that the Government have a duty to ensure are provided as public services, but where private sector management skills and expertise can improve delivery to the public. That is where the private finance initiative comes in.

Under the private finance initiative, the public sector does not simply sign a contract to buy a prison, a train or a computer system. It pays to have specific services supplied at guaranteed levels of performance—available prison places, trains running reliably on the Northern line, national insurance records kept up to date. *[Interruption.]* The Opposition had better make up their mind whether they agree with that policy or not. It rather depends which day of the week it is or which spokesman is speaking, as far as I have been able to see. The Government choose the quality services that the public require, and then go out and acquire those services from private companies with the finance and expertise to deliver.

The key point is that the initiative delivers infrastructure projects of higher quality at a lower overall cost to the British taxpayer. That is because the private sector puts its own money at risk and brings its own management skills to bear.

The initiative means that better public services will be provided by better private means. The service remains a public service and the taxpayers get a better deal. No wonder some of our critics have decided to copy our innovative policy. *[Interruption.]* We are now, as the deputy leader of the Labour party demands, far beyond the stage of simply identifying projects. The money is starting to flow. We expect actual capital spending under the private finance initiative to be around £2 billion per year and rising over the next three years. We expect to have agreed contracts worth at least £14 billion by the end of 1998-99.

That money is replacing old-style public sector capital spending and it can deliver big gains in value for money for the taxpayer. In the past, cost overruns and delays were typical of public sector capital projects. The private finance initiative is delivering better-quality projects. To take two well-known examples, the PFI contract for Northern line trains specifies reliability levels that are nearly four times above the best fleet currently operating on London Underground. The service that we shall get from the new national insurance records system could have cost up to twice what we shall pay under the privately financed deal that we have struck. As a result of those flows of private finance, we have been able to find savings in publicly financed capital while maintaining overall high levels of investment activity and high-quality investment.

Let me just illustrate progress with another four projects that demonstrate the extent to which the private finance initiative is spreading to all parts of Government activity. First, I can announce a huge new package of privately financed roads, five new projects with a capital value totalling £500 million. Secondly, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health has announced today that a £35 million deal is going ahead to modernise two hospitals for the South Buckinghamshire NHS trust. Thirdly, we are tendering for the refurbishment of Lowdham Grange prison, a £50 million project to add to the two new prison building contracts at Bridgend and Fazakerley, which will be signed shortly. Finally, full bids will be due on 5 December for the £45 million water project in Inverness and Fort William. My hon. Friend the Financial Secretary to the Treasury will be publishing more details tomorrow on the real progress of the private finance initiative.

In the 1980s, our privatisation programme brought enormous benefits to the British economy. Our private finance initiative can and will do the same in the 1990s and beyond.

Challenge Funding

We are also rapidly developing our innovative idea of challenge funding. Challenge funding invites groups to compete for public funds to improve local services. That is another way in which the quality and value for money of public services is improved.

The first single regeneration budget challenge fund bidding round ensured that every £1 of public money attracted another £1 of private funding. Some £250 million has been made available for the third and fourth bidding rounds for the single regeneration budget challenge fund. That will help to regenerate many areas, including inner cities. More than £300 million of challenge funding will be made available to speed up the transfer of deprived housing estates to housing associations and other private landlords.

Challenge funding has enormous potential for projects of all kinds. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment is considering more challenge funding for a wider range of local authority capital provision, and he will be making an announcement in this debate later this week. Challenge funding ensures that the best possible projects get the money, while fostering genuine local commitment to the project.

Budget Strategy

Public spending as a share of national income varies from year to year, but under this Government's policies—and I have described our policies, which are policies of change and of priorities—over the past 16 years, the trend has been downward.

In the mid-1970s, when public spending peaked, it did so at 47¼ per cent. of national income. The next peak reached 45½ per cent. in the early 1980s and the last peak was 43½ per cent. in the recession of the early 1990s. I now expect total public spending to be 42 per cent. of national income this year.

When I became Chancellor two and a half years ago, I said that we should aim to push the ratio below 40 per cent. and keep it there. The decisions I am announcing today will

[Mr. Clarke]

achieve that aim. The ratio will be below 40 per cent. from 1997-98 onwards. That is far below the ratio in any other major European country. Controlling public spending is crucial to our goal of making the economy more successful and the enterprise centre of Europe.

I have now taken £53 billion out of projected public spending in my three Budgets. I judged that necessary to reduce Government borrowing following the international recession of the 1990s. Even with the extra money for schools, the extra money for hospitals and the extra money for the police, I now expect total planned public spending to be kept broadly unchanged in real terms over the next three years.

When we first set out our public spending control totals three years ago, most of the pundits did not believe that we would stick to them. The doubters have been proved wrong.

Not only have we stuck to our plans, but I have managed to reduce them again, for the third year running. Next year, the control total will be £3¼ billion below the level that I set in last year's Budget. That is £12 billion below the level we expected it would be for that year when I was first appointed Chancellor.

Having carefully reviewed the latest projections for public borrowing in the light of those decisions, I have concluded that we can now return to the task of starting to cut taxes again. *[Interruption.]* I hope that some Labour Members begin to understand that there is a correlation between the two in a well-managed economy. I am able to make tax cuts broadly equivalent to the spending reductions, with Government borrowing still falling to zero by the end of the decade.

After the Budget measures are taken into account, I expect the PSBR to continue to fall at roughly the rate we have now achieved in the past two years. I expect it to fall from £29 billion this year to £22½ billion in 1996-97 and £15 billion in 1997-98. Broad balance should be reached after a further two years. The financial deficit is now expected to be close to the Maastricht reference level of 3 per cent. of GDP in 1996-97 and to fall well below it in subsequent years.

So fiscal policy will remain tight. That is why the measures in this year's Budget are economically and socially responsible. I have made it clear all along that every Budget I deliver will be dominated by the long-term interests of the British economy. Let me now turn to my tax proposals.

INDIRECT TAXES

I have had to consider carefully where tax cuts might fall. Since 1979, this Government have shifted the tax burden away from direct taxes, which fall on income and employment, and towards indirect taxes on spending and consumption. That is the best way to encourage enterprise and investment and it is the best way to improve the long-term performance of the British economy. Before moving on to direct tax, let me run through my proposals for indirect taxes.

Landfill tax

Last year I proposed a new landfill tax, which is a charge on the disposal of waste in, for example, tips and old quarries. That will come into effect on 1 October 1996. It will be charged at a standard rate of £7 a tonne and a lower rate of £2 for inactive waste.

That is a tax on waste in order to enable me to reduce the tax on jobs. The money raised by the landfill tax will allow for a matching cut in the main rate of employers' national insurance contributions by a further 0.2 per cent. to 10 per cent. from April 1997. That will cut the cost of employment by half a billion pounds and will make it cheaper for businesses to create new jobs.

Road fuel

Next, I intend to stick to my commitment to raise road fuel duties by at least 5 per cent. on average in real terms. From 6 pm this evening, tax on petrol and diesel will rise by 3½p a litre. I also plan to increase the tax on super-unleaded petrol by a further 4p next May. That reflects its higher emission of pollutants such as benzene and the dangers to the Revenue of switching to super-unleaded from leaded petrol. Despite those increases, petrol prices in this country should remain lower than in any other major European country.

Last year I froze the duty on gas used in road vehicles, that is, liquid petroleum gas and compressed natural gas, pending further work on their impact on the environment. Studies since then have confirmed that those are relatively clean fuels. The Government would like to help to encourage further use of those fuels, and I propose to reduce the duty on them by 15 per cent.

VED

We expect emissions of most pollutants from vehicles to fall over the next few years, but emissions of some pollutants may remain at high levels, so the Government now intend to look into ways of using vehicle excise duty to encourage low-emission vehicles. *[Interruption.]* I am glad that someone welcomes it.

This year, the tax disc for cars will rise by £5, but I am freezing the rates for lorries for the sixth consecutive year.

Honest motorists are irritated by tax disc evaders. The Secretary of State for Transport and I are publishing today a revised proposal on continuous licensing, which will make it easier to enforce the collection of vehicle excise duty, but we shall not be requiring licences for vehicles when they are kept off the road. To make sure that the new system does not penalise vintage and classic car enthusiasts, many of whom run their cars on the road only occasionally, we shall be exempting from duty all cars and motor cycles over 25 years old, taking 150,000 historic vehicles out of tax. [Hon. Members: "Well done."] My parliamentary private secretary is not the only hon. Member who approves of that.

Gambling

The national lottery has been an outstanding success and over £1 billion has been raised for good causes over the past year, but its success has affected other parts of the gambling industry in Britain.

I am satisfied that the industry's concerns are genuine and I propose to cut general betting duty by 1 per cent. The benefits should be spread between the betting industry and horse and greyhound racing. If satisfactory agreement can be reached quickly, the duty cut can take effect from 1 March.

The pools companies have also been affected by the success of the national lottery. I propose to reduce pool betting duty by a further 5 per cent. from 3 December on top of a similar cut that I made last year. I am willing to reduce pool betting duty by a another 1 per cent. from 5 May, if the pools companies will agree to pass on that extra 1 per cent. equally to the Football Trust and the Foundation for Sport and the Arts. That reduction will help the trust and the foundation to continue their valuable work, and I am sure that it will be welcomed—indeed, it has been—on both sides of the House.

Tobacco

In my 1993 Budget, I gave a commitment to raise duty on tobacco by at least 3 per cent. a year in real terms in future Budgets. I thought then that that was the most fair and effective way of backing up health warnings on smoking and I remain convinced of that today. From 6 pm this evening, the tax on a packet of 20 cigarettes will increase by 15p, on a packet of small cigars by about 6p and on a 25 g packet of pipe tobacco by about 8p. I intend to freeze duty on hand-rolling tobacco this year because it is proving to be by far the easiest product to smuggle.

Alcohol

Next is alcohol. Cross-border shopping and the smuggling of alcohol is a serious problem for the retail drinks industry in Britain and it affects Government revenue, although our total revenue is still rising. Shopping abroad is one of the greater freedoms gained for consumers in the European single market. But smuggling is a crime that we will continue to fight.

Our duty levels are higher than those of our continental neighbours. Each member state must retain its freedom to set its own tax levels and we accept the downward competitive pressures on tax in a single market. We therefore have to address the legitimate concerns of the British drinks industry, but at the same time minimise losses of revenue that would otherwise have to be raised by other taxes.

This year I propose to freeze the duty on beer and wine. Tax as a share of the cost of a pint of beer will be the lowest that it has been in this country for more than 20 years.

There are two changes that I propose to make to other duty rates here at home. Very strong cider is at present undertaxed compared with other drinks and I intend to raise its duty by 8p a pint from next October, without disturbing the rate for ordinary ciders.

High rates of duty at home have made it difficult for the Scotch whisky industry to press its excellent case for lower duty rates in other countries. Scotch is one of our most important exports. Spirits duty will therefore be reduced by 4 per cent. from 6 pm today. That is equivalent to 27p off a bottle of whisky. *[Laughter.]* I have just had the last sip of the expensive stuff.

OTHER TAXES

Windfall Tax

I turn now to the utilities. My right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade will speak about the regulatory regime that protects consumer interests in his speech in the Budget debate on Thursday. I have been looking at the case for a windfall tax on the utilities. I have been told that it has many splendid qualities. It is a one-off tax, often described as if it hurts nobody. It is claimed that it has no impact on the economy and apparently can be used to pay for up to 10 public spending proposals which cost far in excess of the amount of tax that it actually raises. What a potential pot of gold; an elixir to cure all the ills of some people.

Of course, a windfall tax is nothing of the kind. It would damage investment and threaten the quality of customer service. It is an illusion that a windfall tax is paid by the company. It is paid by its shareholders, including many small shareholders and pension funds, and it would mean higher future prices for customers. The whole point of privatisation is to benefit consumers, not simply the Exchequer. I have no intention of introducing such a tax. *[Interruption.]* If that decision is meant to be a help to the Labour party, heaven help it. I do not think that it can make much of that.

Redundancy Payments

Let me turn to some other proposals that I do not intend to make. I have no plans and I never did have any plans to change the rules that allow the first £30,000 of redundancy payments to be received free of tax. I also never contemplated any increase in insurance premium tax, nor air passenger duty. Those ideas were inventions of the newspapers that wrote about them.

Tax law has become too long and complicated. That campaign is certainly well founded. Some experts have described tax law as incomprehensible. The Inland Revenue will shortly be publishing a report on tax simplification. We shall propose that the Revenue tax code is rewritten in plain English—a major task. The House has a duty to set out clear legislation, which in that area we have not done. We in the House will need to look at our procedures, to see how that tax rewrite can be sensibly handled.

Housing

The Government's commitment to home ownership remains as strong as ever. Today there are 16 million homes in the United Kingdom occupied by their owners—40 per cent. more than when we came to power in 1979. All surveys show that the vast majority of people still want to own their own homes.

We therefore have a target in our housing White Paper of a further 1.5 million home owners over the next 10 years. I reaffirm that mortgage interest relief will remain unchanged for the lifetime of this Parliament.

We have already introduced measures for mortgage lenders to make it easier for people with negative equity to move home, and the Finance Bill will pave the way for housing investment trusts, which will encourage investment in private rented housing.

I have considered very carefully the case urged upon me for special measures to revive the housing market. Many housing experts, sadly and reluctantly, are forced to the same conclusion as I am—that none of the affordable proposals would actually make any difference.

The problem at the moment is not the cost of house purchase to the purchaser. There have never been such bargains on the market. An average mortgage costs only around £180 per month, far less than renting an equivalent property, and houses are more affordable than they have been for years.

[Mr. Clarke]

I remain convinced that what the housing market needs above all is steady growth in the economy and low inflation. That is what this Budget delivers. This Budget will reinforce my ability to keep interest rates and mortgage costs down. That matters most of all to the housing market. All the major lenders expect prices to start to rise next year, and as confidence grows I expect the market to start to move soon.

DIRECT TAXATION

I now turn to my proposals for direct taxation. I want to do four things this year. I want to give people more security by ensuring that their needs will be met in old age. I want to help people to have a greater personal share in the prosperity and success of the businesses for which they work. I want to encourage enterprise, particularly small businesses. And I want to allow people to keep more of the money that they earn, or that they save, to spend as they choose, not as the state chooses. That is essential in a modern dynamic economy.

Long-term Care

In this Budget I shall be helping people who are earning and people who are saving. But I also want to help the people who have worked and saved all their lives. Some of them may be unfortunate enough to need care in residential or nursing homes in their old age. If they do, they may find their savings eaten away quickly to pay for that care. Of course, that is one of the rainy days for which people save. But the balance between the state paying and the family paying must be right. If it is not, many prudent people will complain that they are being treated unfairly compared with those who were unable or unwilling to save at all.

To help people who have already put money aside, it was recently decided to exempt from VAT some forms of care provided in someone's own home. I now have two important further proposals.

First, I intend to exempt from tax the benefits from a range of insurance policies that provide long-term care benefits. We should encourage, not penalise, people who decide to take more responsibility for themselves.

Secondly, at present only people with assets worth less than £3,000 are not asked to make any contribution from their capital towards the costs of residential or nursing home care. People with assets worth more than £8,000 receive no financial support from the Government. When applied to care in residential and nursing homes, those limits are far too low.

From April, and sooner if practicable, we shall more than treble the lower threshold, from £3,000 to £10,000, and double the upper threshold, from £8,000 to £16,000. That means that people in residential care who have worked hard and saved will now keep more of their own money. It will give many elderly people and their families more financial security and greater peace of mind. But we also want to find more ways of helping people who are now in work or recently retired and want to plan ahead to prepare for their old age.

We shall be consulting shortly on an innovative range of proposals to encourage people to make provision for long-term care. We are studying in particular the concept of so-called partnership schemes. The essence of those schemes will be that individuals who plan ahead to meet a proportion of long-term care costs themselves will be able to retain more of their assets above the £16,000 capital threshold.

State-funded care will, of course, still be there for all those who need it, but those who have provided for themselves will be able to keep more of their savings. The partnership approach combines state provision for the needy with reward for the thrifty who make provision for themselves.

In addition, I have asked the Inland Revenue to consult on the possibility of extending to members of occupational pension schemes the option to take a variable pension. That could provide a larger pension in later years, when people are more likely to need long-term care, in exchange for a smaller pension earlier on. For future generations, long-term care will be a growing problem for the finances of many families. The Government have put in a lot of work to put together a package to meet their concerns. We shall now go out and consult and explain our ideas in detail.

For all retired people living on their savings, the pensioners bonds that I introduced have proved a very popular National Savings product. The House will recall that I introduced them two years ago. I am today announcing that we are reducing the qualifying age for purchases of those bonds from 65 to 60.

Taken together, this package of measures covering the big problems of savings and long-term care for the elderly is the mark of a Government who care about our elderly, their families and their sense of security. It also shows yet again that we are a Government who look to the long term in all those difficult areas of social policy.

Employee Share Ownership

I am proud of our record of wider share ownership, which has seen the number of shareholders in this country treble. There are now 10 million shareholders in Britain. Thanks to our policies, shareholding is no longer a minority interest.

All the old-fashioned distinctions between employee and employer, between capital and labour, are being broken down in our modern enterprise economy. Most employees understand that their rewards depend on the success of the businesses for which they work. Most businesses believe that the best way to motivate staff is to let them share in the rewards of success. The public's willingness to embrace and understand those principles has been a major culture change over the past 16 years.

An important part of that change has been the spread of employee share ownership, which is one of the most attractive features of what has become known as popular capitalism. Holding shares in the company for which they work gives people a stake in the company's future success. Nobody in the House has advocated the cause of performance-related rewards and employee share ownership more than I have over the years, and I started doing so well before those ideas become fashionable.

We have two tax-privileged schemes to encourage share ownership for all employees: save-as-you-earn schemes that encourage share ownership through share options linked to savings plans and profit-sharing schemes that allow employees to receive free shares. There are around 1 million people in each scheme. I want to build on those successes by improving both schemes.

The minimum period for saving under a SAYE scheme will be reduced from five years to three and the minimum contribution will be halved to £5 a month. The holding period under profit-sharing schemes will also be reduced from five to three years. Those changes will increase significantly the attractiveness of those employee share-owning schemes. But I am going to do more.

In July, I withdrew the tax privileges attaching to some so-called "executive" share options. The overwhelming majority of companies used those options for their more senior employees. I approved of such options so long as they were linked to genuine performance, but I did not see any justification for maintaining their tax privileges.

The resulting debate brought out the fact that there was a demand for a third type of wider share ownership scheme, to provide a more flexible basis of granting options to lower-paid employees. I am, therefore, introducing a new tax relief that will enable companies to grant options, under a scheme approved by the Inland Revenue, up to a limit of £20,000.

The conditions for the new relief will be similar to the conditions that applied for the old one. The relief will also be available to schemes in existence at 17 July 1995, which qualified under the old rules subject to the £20,000 limit.

Those changes go further than ever before in creating a climate in which employee share ownership can become the norm. I hope that companies will offer all their employees, not just their executives, the chance to enjoy the economic benefits and the sense of ownership that shareholding can bring.

Helping Business

I have said several times in this speech that the Government's aim is to turn Britain into the enterprise centre of Europe. *[Interruption.]* That is where we are going. We are encouraging more innovation, investment and growth. That means allowing people to keep more of the income that they earn, and I shall have more to say about that in a moment. It means encouraging people to save more, to invest more and to build up more personal wealth. It also means helping small businesses. The backbone of our modern, dynamic, successful economy is an active small business sector. Small businesses are the seedcorn of our future prosperity.

I have some important measures this year to help businesses, and small businesses in particular.

Business Rates

First is help with business rates. Many businesses faced lower rates bills following the five-yearly revaluation of rateable values, but many others faced higher bills. To help that group, I announced in last year's Budget that real terms increases in rates bills would be capped to a maximum of 10 per cent. a year. I have looked at that cap again and I no longer consider it to be low enough. For 1996-97, the maximum real terms increase in rates bills for all businesses will be reduced from 10 per cent. to 7½ per cent. Small businesses will get extra help. The maximum increase for small properties will be 5 per cent. instead of 7½ per cent. One million two hundred thousand business properties will benefit from those changes, including 870,000 small properties.

Capital Gains Tax

Investment is important for prosperity. Investment depends on capital. We want to reduce taxes on capital to encourage and reward the investment that the millions of people who work for private businesses depend on. We remain committed to abolishing capital gains tax when resources allow.

The starting point must be help for those who have built up their own businesses and want to be sure that they can sell up and enjoy the rewards of their own hard work in managing the business that they own. Tax relief for the owners of businesses selling up on retirement was substantially increased in 1991 and again in 1993, so that capital gains of up to £1 million now benefit from that relief. This year I am going to extend further the relief for owners who have worked hard and created their own businesses by reducing the qualifying age from 55 to 50.

That will reward the success of more of those who own and manage their own business. It will increase incentives for those who are going to work in their own business in the future. It is the mark of a Government who back enterprise. *[Interruption.]* If I repeat it often enough, the Labour party might eventually at least discover how to spell it. At the moment, it is not up to speed on it in any other way.

Inheritance Tax

It is not just businesses that create wealth. Thanks to this Government's policies, ordinary hard-working people have a bigger personal stake in the wealth of this country than ever before. In our property-owning democracy, more and more people have the opportunity to own their own homes, have occupational or personal pensions, invest in TESSAs and PEPs, build up other savings and own shares. Those benefits are now being enjoyed by the many and not just the few.

Many people who do not consider themselves rich work hard and save for their families throughout their whole lives. They pay their taxes when they work. They want to pass on their family capital without having it taxed again when they die. Many people want to pass on an inheritance to their children and their grandchildren to give them a better start in life than they had. That is a natural instinct in families. Inheritance is now an issue for middle Britain. It is to help middle Britain that we aim to abolish inheritance tax as soon as we can afford to do so.

It is a myth that inheritance tax is paid only by the very rich. In fact, the very rich are well placed to dispose of their wealth in their own lifetime. Most people hit by inheritance tax are those who would not consider themselves rich at all. These are people who bequeath not much more than the present tax-free allowance of £154,000. They may be people who own their home and a few modest investments. There are many more people like them who fear that their assets will be hit by inheritance tax. I therefore propose to increase the tax-free allowance substantially to £200,000. The number paying inheritance tax will be reduced by one third and only one in 45 estates will now pay that tax.

Inheritance tax can also have a direct effect on enterprise. A family company, for example, may have to be broken up when the owner dies. We already recognise that problem through the existence of business property relief for qualifying unquoted companies. I now propose to remove the problem altogether by extending 100 per cent. relief to unquoted shareholdings, whatever their size.

[Mr. Clarke]

INCOME TAX

Finally, I turn to my proposals for income tax payers. In the post-war era, when Britain went into comparative economic decline, Britain had high rates of taxation on income. Those rates damaged the economy and stifled prosperity. We had a tax policy that was based on envy.

When this Government came to power, the basic rate was 33 per cent. The top rate on earnings was 83 per cent. Rates on so-called unearned income were as high as 98 per cent. There was nothing fair about taxation before we started to make it fairer. During the past 16 years, we have cut the basic rate by around one quarter to 25 per cent. and abolished all rates of income tax above 40 per cent.

But the income tax burden is about more than just tax rates. Tax allowances matter as well. I propose to increase allowances for married couples and people receiving related allowances by £70, in line with indexation. It is a myth that the tax system penalises marriage and that single people are better off than married couples within the British taxation system. Any young couple contemplating living together and starting a family will pay less tax by getting married.

As the economy continues to grow and create jobs, more people, as they return to work, will find themselves earning more than the tax threshold. I believe that we should relieve as many of the lower-paid as possible from the burden of income tax. I therefore propose to increase the basic personal allowance by £240—that is £100 more than indexation. That will provide an incentive to work to those at the bottom of the income scale. More than 200,000 people will be kept out of tax, compared with indexation of allowances.

People who do not consider themselves rich now find that their incomes may bring them into the top rate of tax. That has a lot to do with the growth of the economy over 16 years and the growth in personal incomes. I do not want more people to be taken into the 40 per cent. band next year. I therefore propose to raise the higher rate threshold by £1,200—that is £200 more than indexation.

But in the longer term, of course, we have a clear and achievable goal for income tax—moving to a basic rate of 20 per cent. as soon as we can. This year, I can move much faster towards that goal. I propose to increase the 20 per cent. band by a further £700—that is £500 more than indexation. That will bring an extra 1 million people into that band. That means that around a quarter of all taxpayers—that is, over 6 million people—will pay tax on their income at just 20 per cent.

There were many who doubted the credibility of our goal of a 20p basic rate when we first set it out in 1992. We are now making big strides towards achieving it. Some people are even having to resort to trying to outbid us, I discovered in recent debates. But widening the lower rate band is not the only route to 20p. I want to make progress on another front. I therefore also propose to reduce the rate of tax on all savings income for all basic rate taxpayers to just 20 per cent. That will apply to the tax deducted from interest on bank and building society accounts, for example, and it is equivalent to an increase in interest rates for savings income. Around 14 million savers will gain from that tax reduction and they will see the income from their savings increase. As a result of that measure, people will gain an extra £5 from every £100 they receive in interest from their building society account.

Many of those who benefit will be pensioners, who will gain £75 a year on average. Some could stand to gain £500 a year or more. So, again, those who have earned and saved will be able to keep more of their own money and benefit more from their own money; and the measure is another and decisive step to a 20 per cent. basic rate for all income.

I propose to reduce the small companies rate of corporation tax to 24 per cent. The reason I am able to reduce the small companies rate of corporation tax is that the small companies rate has for many years been pegged to the basic rate of income tax. My final proposal in this Budget is therefore to reduce the basic rate of income tax by one penny to 24p in the pound. *[Interruption.]* It is no good laughing. That was the shortest smile, on the face of the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown), that I have seen even from him in a very long time, because these three steps—widening the 20p band, a 20p tax rate for savings income and a penny off the basic rate—move us much closer to a 20 per cent. base rate of tax for all income. We have a clear commitment—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The House should listen to the Chancellor.

Mr. Clarke: We have a clear commitment to the 20p basic rate. We believe in it and we can achieve it. As a result of the measures in this Budget, a married couple with only one earner on average earnings with two children will pay £190 less tax, but overall, their real take-home pay after tax will rise by around £450 next year. They will be £700 a year better off than they were at the time of the last election, and that is extra money for families to spend as they wish.

My Budgets of the past two years have kept us on the course that we said we would follow. We have cut taxes, we are cutting taxes and, when we can afford it and when it is in the interests of the economy, we will cut taxes again. Good economics is good politics.

This Budget puts Britain on course to be the enterprise centre of Europe; a Britain that creates more jobs and more wealth in which all can share because business can flourish here in a secure climate of low borrowing, low taxation, deregulation and free trade. That is why this Budget controls overall public spending while shifting more money towards schools, towards hospitals and towards the police. That is why this Budget keeps Government borrowing on a downward path and that is why this Budget cuts taxes. I have achieved that hat trick—controlling spending, downward borrowing and cutting taxes—only because the Government have followed a consistent economic policy.

Only we, in this House, have clear objectives and we know how to achieve them. We are aiming at borrowing falling to zero; public spending below 40 per cent. of national income; inflation below 2½ per cent; and a 20 per cent. basic rate of income tax. This Budget puts us on a path to meet all those goals and I commend it to the House.

Provisional Collection of Taxes

Motion made, and Question,

That, pursuant to section 5 of the Provisional Collection of Taxes Act 1968, provisional statutory effect shall be given to the following motions:—

(a) Spirits (rate of duty) (motion No. 2);

(b) Wine and made-wine (rates of duty) (motion No. 3);

(c) Hydrocarbon oil (rates of duty and rebate) (motion No. 5);

(d) Tobacco products (rates of duty) motion No. 8);

(e) Vehicle excise duty (increase in general rate) (motion No. 13);

(f) Vehicle excise duty (electrically propelled vehicles) (motion No. 14);

(g) Vehicle excise duty (steam powered vehicles, etc.) (motion No. 15);

(h) Vehicle excise duty (vehicles capable of conveying loads) (motion No. 16);

(i) Vehicle excise duty (old vehicles) (motion No. 17);

(j) Value added tax (supplies of gold) (motion No. 23).—[*Mr. Kenneth Clarke.*]

put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 50 (Ways and Means Motions), and agreed to.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I now call on the Chancellor of the Exchequer to move the motion entitled "Amendment of the law". It is on that motion that the unified Budget debate will take place today and on succeeding days. The remaining motions will not be put until the end of the Budget debate next week, and they will then be decided without debate. After the Finance Bill has been brought in, the House will be invited to dispose of proceedings on a motion dealing with public expenditure, which will have been debated along with the Budget resolutions.

Budget Resolutions and Economic Situation

AMENDMENT OF THE LAW

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That it is expedient to amend the law with respect to the National Debt and the public revenue and to make further provision in connection with finance; but this Resolution does not extend to the making of any amendment with respect to value added tax so as to provide—

(a) for zero-rating or exempting any supply, acquisition or importation otherwise than by—

(i) zero-rating or exempting supplies of goods which are, or are to be, subjected to a fiscal or other warehousing regime; or

(ii) zero-rating or exempting supplies of services on or in relation to such goods;

(b) for refunding any amount of tax otherwise than to persons constructing or converting buildings in cases where the construction or conversion is not in the course of furtherance of a business;

(c) for varying any rate at which that tax is at any time chargeable; or

(d) for relief other than relief applying to goods of whatever description or services of whatever description.—[*Mr. Kenneth Clarke.*]

4.41 pm

Mr. Tony Blair (Sedgefield): I suspect that what we have just seen is the shortest lasting cheer on the Conservative Benches in all the Budgets that we have witnessed. If this Budget is supposed to relaunch the Conservative party, it will fail. It will be known as the "7p up, 1p down Budget". After all, the people of Britain are not novices dealing with the Tories; they are battle-hardened today. Their innocence has given way to experience, their faith to mistrust.

They have learnt two hard lessons from these masters of political deception. First, with 16 years' experience, they know above all else that what they are given with one hand is taken away with the other. One hand may hold open the public purse, but the other is usually in the citizen's pocket.

The Tories say that income taxes have been cut over the years. But then came the other taxes, charges, costs and fees: dentists; prescriptions; rail, bus and tube fares; school books; repairs to school buildings; rent rises; water bills; and insurance premiums. *[Interruption.]* Tory Members do not like being reminded of those, but that is Conservative government.

The second lesson is that, in the end, what matters is the real strength of the economy. Behind the year-to-year decisions on tax, especially those made before an election, stand the big questions that dwarf the rest into insignificance. People have learnt something about that, too, after 16 years. They know that, for 16 years, Conservative Chancellors have stood at the Dispatch Box telling us that we were about to have an economic miracle, that we were about to overtake all the other nations of the world, that this time it would be different, and we should trust them again.

People also know that, after 16 years, their living standards have fallen compared with other countries, from 13th to 18th place in the national prosperity league. They

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know that, despite the tax changes, these Tories who call themselves tax cutters take a higher proportion of national income in tax from ordinary families today than they did 16 years ago. They also know that, during those 16 years, these people had the benefit, as no other Government had, of £120 billion-worth of North sea oil. That has gone, and £18 billion-worth of the nation's assets have been sold. They have gone, and the money has been spent.

People know that, whatever promises were made before the last election—those promises are identical to those made today—we ended up with the largest peacetime tax rise in British history, to cover the largest borrowing ever in British history. They know that, even with today's tax cut, the public sector borrowing requirement will be £29 billion—£6 billion up on what the Tories forecast last year. Is it not right that, for next year, it will be £22.5 billion—£10 billion up on what they forecast last year?

Of course we welcome certain aspects of the Budget, such as those relating to long-term care. However, we shall study the details of that proposal carefully, because I suspect that a large number of families will be left out of it altogether. We shall return to that issue in the debate. We also welcome the landfill green tax, help for employers on national insurance, and employee share ownership.

Taken as a whole, however, this is not a Budget for Britain's long-term future. It gives with one hand what it takes with the other in a host of costs and charges. It ignores completely the fundamental weaknesses of the economy. It does nothing about the unemployment, social division and social decay in Britain today. As I shall show, it does not deal with, but rather avoids, the key issues on welfare. On tax, it gives people back 1p on the standard rate, but after taking 7p.

People have had enough punishment. We know that, and will now oppose it. But they will remember "7p up and 1p down". The Budget gives back only a fraction—

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) *rose—*

Mr. Blair: Frankly, no one is less qualified to lecture us on tax than the Liberal Democrats.

This Budget gives back only a fraction of what has been taken away. As a result of the tax rises since the last election, people will remain £700 a year worse off after this Budget. That is a fact, and the Tories cannot deny it. They won power promising to cut tax year on year. They swore blind that they would never raise it, and they have.

Mortgage tax relief has been cut; national insurance contributions are up; the married man's allowance has been cut; new taxes have been imposed on insurance policies, households and holidays; and VAT has been imposed on fuel and power. *[Interruption.]* Tory Members want us to forget about this. They do not want us to remind people of it. I shall tell the hon. Member for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow) that we shall remind people of it from now until polling day.

It is not merely that people will have lost all that money. More people pay the top rate of tax now than ever before, and at lower levels of income. Tax today starts at a lower level than it did in 1992. Many people on the bottom rate face marginal tax rates of 70, 80 or 90 per cent. Here we have our old Tory friend—give with one hand and take with the other. Rail fares have risen by more than the rate of inflation, other taxes have risen, and council tax has risen. If the figures are right, those charges may be up to twice the rate of inflation—possibly up to 11 per cent. To give with one hand and take with the other is Tory tax policy.

Whereas the Government could have introduced the fairest tax cut of all—VAT on fuel and power—they did not, despite having promised at the last election that they would never raise it.

Surely the most fundamental point is that, in the end, tax and spending depend upon economic strength. The real reason why taxes have gone up, living standards have fallen and we have slipped down the prosperity league from 13th to 18th is the deep-rooted nature of our economic problems. The Budget, after we have taken account of some of the bits and pieces here and there, does nothing for investment and skills. [HON. MEMBERS: "Rubbish."] We will decide on the evidence produced in the debates this week, but I think I am right in saying that the budget for skills and training is to be cut. The very thing necessary for our long-term economic strength is to be cut.

As for the Chancellor's glowing record of our economic prospects, let us analyse from his own Red Book the figures that he has given. He has said that the growth rates are all booming, but, in actual fact, I think I am right to say that he has had to revise downwards the growth rate for this year. He has said that investment is booming, but, according to the figures released today, investment is set to rise by 1 per cent.

The actual forecast on imports is that they will rise. The right hon. and learned Gentleman has said that we have a trade surplus with the Asian tigers, but we have a trade deficit with members of the European Union, who are our main partners. All that despite a 25 per cent. devaluation of our currency under the Conservatives. Surely that is the serious point. With the currency devalued and the pound worth 25 per cent. less than it was a couple of years ago, one would expect that we would be able to be in trade surplus, but even now we are unable to achieve that. The problems remain.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman spoke about the Asian tiger countries. Let us remind him of one fact. The real lesson to be learned from them is their levels of investment, because it is that investment which makes the difference to a country's strength in the future. In some cases, they have levels of investment approaching 40 per cent.—Japan invests more than 30 per cent.—but the United Kingdom invests below 18 per cent. If we are still 35th in the education league, no wonder we have problems with our economy for the future.

The Chancellor omitted to tell people one or two things as he was going through the Budget. Let me draw attention to some of them. As I understand it, the community programme, which is designed for the long-term unemployed, is to be phased out this year. There it is :40,000 places for those in most need are to be phased out.

One very big spending rise has been forecast in the Budget—the amount of money to go to the common agricultural policy is set to rise to more than £3 billion for the first time. *[Interruption.]* I do not know whether

that worries the Chancellor's colleagues more than my colleagues. In any event, it is a curious thing to be cutting our own skills budget and raising that money for the CAP.

When people examine the Budget, they will start to ask what are the Government's priorities. The Chancellor told us about the increase in health spending, but if we look at the figures, as we have just done, we see that those figures forecast that almost 17 per cent. is to be cut from the capital budget of the health service programme. The health service programme is to be cut by 17 per cent. [HON. MEMBERS: "What about the PFI?"] Do not worry: I can assure Conservative Members that I will deal with the PFI in a minute.

That 17 per cent. cut in the health programme could have been saved by removing tax relief on private medical insurance. That would almost make up the shortfall in full. The failure to do that reveals the difference in priorities.

The Chancellor has said that all the cuts in capital investment will be made up through the PFI, which was relaunched yet again today. It has been relaunched almost as many times as the Prime Minister, and often as successfully. It is the case that the Government assume that the PFI will provide the answer. Last year, the Government said that there would be £5 billion-worth of new projects. I think I am right in saying that just £500 million has been spent. Now the Government say with a great flourish that, in the next few years, £14 billion of PFI money will be available.

All the difficult questions relating to public spending and capital investment are suddenly to vanish, and all will be switched to the PFI. This is not a Budget—it is a wish list. The Government have no grounds for thinking that that will happen. That will take place long into the future—long after the Conservatives have gone, of course. We are entitled to judge the Government by results.

The PFI is right in principle. We have supported it, and in many ways we have been advocating it.

Mr. John Prescott (Kingston upon Hull, East): We initiated it.

Mr. Blair: It should not be manipulated to cook the books of public finance.

Some of the capital spending that is all to be transferred to the PFI will not be replaced—there can be no guarantee of that. The PFI is a concept about financing, it is not a commitment to finance projects.

If the Government want to do something for the housing and construction industries, they could take up our proposals and phase the release of the capital receipts in local authority accounts to get some houses built for the people.

The PFI may save a capital sum this year if that capital money is removed from the Government's account, but in future years the taxpayer will face a recurring liability. That is why it is a classic example of giving with one hand and taking with the other. [HON. MEMBERS: "That is not true."] Hon Members may deny it, but that is precisely what will happen.

The Government envisage that, instead of the public sector financing the construction of a hospital or a prison, the private sector will build it. It will then lease it back to the public sector, but, at the end of that period, recurring charges will be levied on the project. The same could be said about the married quarters held by the Ministry of Defence. The transfer of those assets gives the Government the appearance of having taken tough decisions, but a cost and liability will fall on the public sector in future years.

We will not support anything in the national health service that is a back-door route to privatising clinical services. If the Government want to get health spending down, they should reduce the bureaucracy that they have created in the NHS.

Welfare bills are the true bills that have risen. There has been remarkably little change in the overall level of spending, but there has been a remarkable change in the composition of it. We now spend about as much on housing benefit as we once spent on housing investment. One in three families are dependent on welfare; one in five non-pensioner households have no working member; and young people, who will often be roaming the streets with nothing to do but crime and mischief, have never worked—some at the age of 25. If we are to deal with those issues, we need to take firm action.

The Chancellor has opposed a windfall levy on the privatised utilities for one simple reason—they are the vested interests of the Tory party, and the Government dare not challenge them. Excess profits have been made. A few days ago, the National Grid was sold. It was worth £5 billion, but it was sold for £1 billion. Half the water companies pay no mainstream corporation tax. The electricity companies have made record profits, even at the height of the recession.

The case for taking on those vested interests and funding a decent education and employment programme for our young people was overwhelming, and it should have been adopted. If that had been done, we could have made a real attack on the root causes of higher welfare bills under the Conservative Government—higher unemployment, higher social decay and higher social breakdown. Many of those young people who have been in that situation for years looked for something from the Budget, and got nothing.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Blair *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. It is quite clear that the Leader of the Opposition is not giving way. While I am on my feet, may I say that I would be grateful if the hon. Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold) would desist from making sedentary interventions.

Mr. Blair: There were three aims that the Budget had to fulfil. If it was to succeed and to be anything more than a makeshift in the days of a dying and decaying Government, it had to tackle those fundamental problems of the British economy. It had to raise investment and skills, and it had to tackle the problems of social division and the lack of social cohesion that have so harmed this country over the past 16 years. Nothing of that sort was proposed.

The only anxiety ever betrayed by Conservative Members was when the Chancellor spoke about taxes. That was the only time they showed any interest, and the only time even a flicker of concern for anything more than themselves came across their faces—except, of

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course, that that concern was not for anything more than themselves, because it was their own skins they were interested in.

What was extraordinary about the Budget speech was that it gave no sense of a great strategic vision for the country's future. There was nothing—no all-encompassing horizon of achievement for this nation. The Government have given up trying to steer the ship of state, and are simply looking for the nearest lifeboat to climb into. Government Members have truly had enough of power; they cannot exercise it in the public interest any more—people know that.

If the Government think that, when the British people listen to the Budget, they will be inspired to re-elect them, I can only assume that the Government have been out of touch for so long that they do not know what to do to get back in touch. They would not know the British national interest if it got up and slapped them in the face. Indeed, it does that frequently, and the Government still do not know it. They have given up on any serious vision for this country's future. The Government wanted to hail the Budget as a turning point, but the British people know better. It is another milestone on the Government's road to defeat—and the sooner, the better.

5.2 pm

Mr. Paddy Ashdown (Yeovil): Unless my judgment is wrong—and it is shared by all my right hon. and hon. Friends—one of the curious aspects of the Chancellor's Budget was that it received more welcome for some of its smaller measures from the Opposition than it did, overall, from Conservative Members. That is a measure of the Budget overall.

Even what the Chancellor did in terms of cutting some taxes was done—as he well knows—at the risk of gambling irresponsibly in the long term with the country's economy. The tax cuts that he gave—particularly the basic cut in income tax—were done by a simple sleight of hand. He achieved those cuts by extending the borrowing, which he knows is sensible and right for this country, over the long term. I shall return to that subject.

It should have been a Budget to save our schools but, instead, it was designed to save seats for the Conservative party. We have heard the last shot in the Tory party's locker. That is it—there is nothing more. The Government's message in the Budget was simple and brutally clear: "Please can we buy your vote for a 1p cut in income tax? We have nothing further to offer you, but we believe that that will be enough to fool you into voting for us again."

In deciding how to respond to that offer from the Government, the people of this country might do well to remind themselves of an old Russian proverb which is clearly borne out in this Budget: free cheese comes only in mousetraps. The Chancellor of the Exchequer has just made that offer to the country.

The Government seem to think that they can fool the people of this country once again, just as they have done in the past. They think that we are fools and will not notice that they said last year that the economy was so bad that they would have to make record tax rises, but, although it is even worse this year, we can now have tax cuts. They think that we are fools, and will not remember that they pulled that trick last time.

The Government produce tax cuts to buy votes before the election; after the election there will be job losses, home repossessions, higher mortgages and broken businesses, as the British people have to pay for the tax promise. The Government think that we are fools, and will not notice that the lower taxes that we are given today are but a fraction of the higher taxes that they have taken off us in the past two years.

The British people will not be conned by the Budget. It is a Budget not for Britain's future, but for the Conservative party's survival, and it will not work. It is not a Budget for securing the country's long-term future, but for saving Conservatives' skin. We know that from no better source than the Chancellor himself, who in this House last July said:

"borrowing is actually taxation deferred."—[*Official Report*, 12 July 1995; Vol. 263, c. 979.]

Mr. Kenneth Clarke *indicated assent.*

Mr. Ashdown: The Chancellor was right, and I see that he assents to that proposition now. But last year, borrowing was only £1 billion above the Government's target; this year, it is £9 billion above the Government's target, according to the Chancellor's estimates. Those estimates have always been wrong in the past, and I bet that the figure will actually be higher in the outturn. If, according to the Chancellor, borrowing is taxation deferred, the Budget is taxation deferred until after the next election.

The Budget combines cynicism with irresponsibility. The Tory party has shown itself to be the party not only of devaluation and high borrowing, but of economic irresponsibility. The Chancellor's figures show that the economy is now growing at half the rate that it was last year. Inflation is growing outside the targets. Borrowing has long ago bust the Government's set targets. It is worse: the Chancellor has extended the borrowing targets for next year and the year after, in order to have money for tax cuts this year. The Chancellor's proposition to the country is to live now and pay later.

Last year, the Chancellor said that the PSBR for next year would be £13 billion. In fact, it is going to be £22.5 billion. Last year, the Government predicted that the PSBR for 1997-98 would be £5 billion. The Chancellor's figures show that it will be £15 billion. But, despite that, the Chancellor of the Exchequer is prepared to gamble his own reputation and the sound management of the nation's finances simply to purchase Tory votes at the ballot box.

For what? The Government have nothing further to offer the country, and nothing further to say to the people of this country. They have exhausted their ideas and energy, and they long ago exhausted the patience and trust of the people of Britain. If they gained power again, they would not have a clue what to use it for, except for themselves.

The Chancellor knows perfectly well the Budget that he should have introduced today; he knows what he should have said. He should have introduced a Budget for education and for the country's long-term future. He would have done himself and his party much more good if he had the courage to introduce such a Budget.

The Budget should have said to Britain: "We want lower taxes, and we want you to have them, but lower taxes must be earned, and Britain has not yet earned them." The Budget should also have said, "This year, low-interest rates and investment in our future are more important than low taxes. Therefore, this year we shall invest in people's skills for long-term economic success, and we shall cut borrowing and interest rates to sustain recovery and create more jobs."

Above all, this should have been a Budget for education; but it was not. Last year's Budget led to cuts in schools amounting to more than £700 million—£50 less in education expenditure for every primary school pupil, and £200 less for every secondary school pupil. As a result, 5,000 teachers were sacked, there was a one-third increase in classes of over 40 pupils, and thousands of schools used up their last precious reserves. One in eight of our further education colleges is now severely in debt, and the long-term survival of many may be threatened.

The figures will show that this year the Government have not even restored last year's cuts. Of the £870 million, £500 million will go on inflation alone. Another £120 million will go on doubling the assisted places scheme, and another £100 million on the Government's misguided and misplaced voucher schemes. The money is gone—and that does not even account for how it will be generated. Will it be the Government's money, or local authorities' money? I predict that this Budget will do nothing to improve the dangerous, devastating condition of schools and education.

It is, above all, our children who will pay the price of the tax cuts. It is their future that will suffer, so that the Tories can dangle a tax bribe before an electorate whom they believe to be stupid and gullible.

It was with some sadness that I heard the comments of the leader of the Labour party, who said that the Liberal Democrats could not be trusted in taxation matters. Year after year—and this year—we have produced an alternative Budget: we have said how we would pay for what we wanted to be done. Labour has never done that.

This year, Labour Members have been full of comments, attacks and criticism, but they have not said what they would do. They have come up with no alternative Queen's Speech, and no alternative Budget. That is not the way in which to win the trust of the people. It is easy to criticise the Government, but the time for "oppositionism" has passed; the Opposition should be saying what they stand for.

Moreover, it appears from what the leader of the Labour party told us today—although he dealt with this item rather quickly—that Labour will abstain in the vote on the 1p cut in income tax. Is that the best that Labour can do? Why will its members abstain? Over the weekend, the leader of the Labour party said that the Budget must pass four tests: honesty, sustainability, employment opportunities and fairness. As his own speech demonstrated, it did not pass one of those tests. What is the right hon. Gentleman waiting for?

How can the Labour party claim to be strong enough to look to the country's long-term interest if it cannot find the strength to vote against a tax cut that is designed for the short-term interests of the Conservative party? How can Labour Members say that they would put education first if they were in government, when they are not prepared to do so in opposition? If Labour will not vote against a tax cut that puts the Tory party before the country, why should we not conclude that it would put the Labour party before the country if it were in government?

I have a good deal of personal admiration for the Leader of the Opposition, and a great respect for the things that he has done. He is not in his place at present, but let me tell him that, if his party joins the Tories in this crazy competition, this auction of fantasy tax promises—"anything you can tax, I can tax lower"—the people who will suffer most are the poor, the deprived and the dispossessed, and the thing that will suffer most is the cause of progressive politics. We have seen the depth of the Government's cynicism today, and the depth of their irresponsibility; but the way in which Labour will vote will tell us about the depth of its timidity in the face of a general election that is only a year away.

In 1988, my party voted against tax cuts introduced by the then Mr. Lawson. My right hon. Friend the Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith), who was then our Treasury spokesman, was alone in warning that those tax cuts were irresponsible, that they would damage the country's finances, and that they would have to be paid for by ordinary people in the end. He warned that the Budget was "unfair and unsound". That was not a popular or an easy position to take, but it was the right position.

Of course there are aspects of the Budget that we can support on the margin. We welcome the encouragement of thrift and savings, employee share ownership, the package for small businesses and enterprise and the Government's indexation—even over-indexation—to assist some of the poorer people in the country. Overall, however, this is a Budget that sacrifices good, sound economic management of the country's finances—and, above all, sacrifices the education of our children—for a 1p cut in the basic rate of income tax.

The Government think that people want lower taxes, rather than lower interest rates and more jobs. I think that they are wrong. They think that people want more money in their back pockets today, rather than sound management of the economy in the long term. I think that they are wrong. They think that the British people would prefer a tax cut to investment in our children and our country's future. I think that they are wrong. That is why we shall vote against this irresponsible Budget, and propose in its place a responsible Budget for education and for the country's long-term future.

5.15 pm

Sir David Knox (Staffordshire, Moorlands): I congratulate my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor on his third Budget speech. It was well delivered, as were his earlier two Budget speeches, and it was commendably brief, particularly in view of the ground that must be covered in a unified Budget. I remember past speeches on Budgets that were not unified lasting for two hours or more.

My right hon. and learned Friend produced an interesting Budget, which also contained some surprises. There were no surprises in the speech of the Leader of the Opposition, however: we were told last weekend what he would say, before he had even seen the Budget. The right hon. Gentleman clearly did not wish to be confused by the facts. His speech was littered with the usual meaningless soundbites, which he mistakes for substance and which are becoming a trifle boring.

[Sir David Knox]

Let me make just one point about the right hon. Gentleman's speech. He said that the cost of the common agricultural policy would go up to £3 billion. That is not true; it is total agricultural expenditure that will go up to about that amount. There is rather more than CAP expenditure in the total agriculture expenditure bill.

The leader of the Liberal party did not even include any soundbites in his speech, but I found it extraordinary that he should suggest that the poor had been hurt by the Government. Let us consider, for instance, the increase in spending on the national health service since 1979—an increase of 80 per cent. in real terms. The proportion of the national income that is devoted to the NHS has increased from just under 5 per cent. to just over 6 per cent.

The right hon. Gentleman made much of education, but today we are spending 50 per cent. more per school pupil than was spent 16 years ago. That is a pretty fast rate of increase—and, if the right hon. Gentleman wishes to be realistic, he should bear in mind the fact that it is not a rate of increase that can be continued indefinitely.

In the preparation of any Budget, it is extremely difficult to get the various decisions right. The macro-economic decisions are particularly difficult, because they cannot be made on the basis of the current economic situation. Any Chancellor must try to anticipate the position in 18 months to two years, because there is a time lag between the taking of any action and that action becoming effective. My right hon. and learned Friend therefore had an extremely difficult task in that respect. Then, of course, he must weigh the desirability of public expenditure against the reduction of taxation. He must decide not only the total public spending level but its priorities.

In the past few months, my right hon. and learned Friend has been subject to widely varying advice, which has ranged from suggestions that 5p should be taken off the standard rate of income tax and that public expenditure should be slashed to suggestions that he should retain present tax rates and increase public expenditure. He has got the balance about right today. He has increased spending on health, education and the police in real terms—we will spend more on those sectors next year. At the same time, he has increased tax allowances generously and reduced the standard rate by a modest but real amount. Of course, he will not have pleased the simple souls who like extreme measures, but I have no doubt that he will have pleased the great majority of those of moderate opinion throughout this country.

Of the specific measures that my right hon. and learned Friend has suggested, I welcome in particular his decision not to increase beer and wine duty. Even more strongly do I welcome the decision to reduce the spirit duty on whisky by 4 per cent. That may show my preference in terms of beverages. The Chancellor has faced up to the cross-border shopping problem in the European Union and taken a small step towards trying to bring sense into that matter. In the not too distant future, I should like duty on alcohol to be the same throughout the EU. That would be much more sensible, but it would require some reduction on our part and some increase on the part of the other countries in the EU.

I am pleased that, in his attempt to deal with vehicle licensing fraud, my right hon. and learned Friend has managed to avoid penalising vintage car owners. In the past 12 months or so, that matter has caused many of our constituents much concern. Like most right hon. and hon. Members, I have had much correspondence about it. I am glad that he has managed to meet the fears of those people, because one does not wish to damage what is essentially a hobby.

I welcome the reductions in the general betting duty and in the pools betting duty. There is no doubt that betting and particularly pools betting have been affected adversely by the lottery. Those duty reductions should ease the problem a little. I say that as one who, for the past 40-odd years, has done the football pools with very little success.

I am pleased about the assistance for people in nursing and residential homes. At this stage, it is difficult to comment, and I await the details that will, no doubt, be forthcoming in the next day or two, but I am sure that my right hon. and learned Friend was right to deal with a problem that, again, is causing great concern to many of our constituents.

One of the most encouraging of the developments that affect the British economy has been the pattern of wage settlements in the past year. Whereas during the 20-odd years after the war the main constraint on the British economy was the balance of payments, since the mid-1960s the main constraint has been the level of wage and salary increases and, consequently, the growth in earnings.

For most of the period from the mid-1960s until recently, wage and salary increases have been well ahead of inflation and of the rate of growth. Except when there have been short-term incomes policies or when unemployment has been very high, wage and salary increases have been at levels incompatible with low inflation. Consequently, over the past 20 years, under Labour and Conservative Governments alike, one of the main weapons to constrain wage and salary cost inflation has been a reduction in the demand for goods and services, to effect a reduction in the demand for labour to produce them and so a reduction in increases in the price of labour—in other words, a reduction in increases in wages and salaries.

Although that policy has been effective in preventing higher inflation levels, it has never been completely successful in eliminating inflation, even when unemployment has reached the 3 million mark. Moreover, its impact on inflation has been limited when unemployment has been below the relatively high level of 2 million. I have always found that policy unacceptable and I have been astonished that the British people have put up with it for so long. Whether they will continue to do so is a moot point.

In the past year, however, there has been an unexpected, but welcome, development in pay bargaining as wage settlements have been running behind the inflation rate. Moreover, there is no evidence of the build-up of a pay explosion that could reverse that development. That runs against all recent experience. It is especially encouraging because the recent inflation increase, which in any event seems to be falling back sharply, has had no effect on the position.

Of course, that may merely be the short-term consequence of recession, but that is doubtful because we have been moving out of recession for more than three years. It may be that it is due to the fact that unemployment is still more than 2 million, but that is also doubtful, because the pressure of demand in the labour market today is higher than it was last year or the year before, and in both years wage and salary settlements were ahead of the inflation rate. It may be that we are at long last experiencing some of the benefits of greater labour market flexibility.

Whatever the reason, for the first time for many years we are experiencing a more sensible attitude about pay bargaining. As a result, wage and salary increases are being determined much more realistically. If that continues, there is even greater cause for optimism about the economy than at the time of last year's Budget. Then, we had controlled economic growth, a much-improved balance of payments position, low inflation and falling unemployment. Today, the economy is still growing and the balance of payments, although not quite as strong as it was a year ago, is still much stronger than in most years in the past decade. Despite the pressures generated by a further year's growth, that development concerning pay bargaining means that the prospects for inflation are much better than last year, whereas we would have expected them to be worse.

Realistic pay bargaining also means, however, that the demand for goods and services, and so for labour, can be increased to a significantly higher level without provoking wage and salary cost inflation and bringing the expansion grinding to a halt. Consequently, realistic pay bargaining means that the prospects for further reductions in unemployment are much better than they were last year. Of course, at this stage, we cannot be certain that the pay bargaining pattern will not return to previous bad practice. There have been some ominous signs in the motor industry, but I hope that that will not happen, because the reduction in unemployment to levels that we have not experienced since the mid-1970s is vital for social and economic reasons.

First, unemployment is a severe affront to human dignity. The fear of not being wanted is an insult to the great majority of those without work, whose only wish is to have the opportunity to earn their living and support their families. Secondly, unemployment hits the good worker just as it hits the bad worker; it hits the hard worker and the lazy worker and the skilled worker and the unskilled worker alike, because unemployment does not discriminate. The great majority of the unemployed lose their jobs through no fault of their own.

Thirdly, the effects of unemployment on our society are very serious. It undoubtedly embitters those affected. It undermines their belief in our democratic system. It adversely affects the quality of their whole life, and not just during the period when they are out of work. Fourthly, of course, unemployment is economically wasteful. If the unemployed were in work, they would be producing more goods and services and so adding to our national wealth. There would be more for all of us to share in the form of higher real incomes and better social and public services.

I hope that the restraint in pay bargaining that has been shown during the past year can be maintained. The benefits in the form of lower inflation are evident: those in the form of lower unemployment are no less real.

5.31 pm

Mr. Ted Rowlands (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney): I shall touch on some of the remarks of the hon. Member for Staffordshire, Moorlands (Sir D. Knox). It took a long preamble to get to the basic and simple point he was making—unemployment is a curse. The communities that I represent have always believed that; they believe it as fiercely and passionately now as they did when unemployment was 65 per cent. in the 1930s.

I have been a Member of Parliament for nearly 28 years, and I find that the whole nature of Budgets and Budget debates has changed. The pattern of post-war Budgets was that they were statements of fiscal measures, rather limited in claim and scope. Frequently, the Budget was an annual fine tuning of the economy. I often heard Chancellors claiming that they were cooling down or stimulating the economy with a variety of tax and credit measures and interest rates.

Now the Budget is different. I am not exactly a fan of the decision to link public expenditure to the fiscal considerations, but it has broadened the nature and character of the Budget. The Chancellor's speech illustrated that point unequivocally. That decision has broadened the whole Budget debate so that it is about broad social and economic issues. In return, the public have come to expect much more of the Budget statement and of Chancellors.

The public expect that these big moments in parliamentary life will address the broader social issues. The Budget and the expenditure plans are meant to hit the big issues that face our society. One of the curious features of that developing pattern is that the Budget has to be a Budget for something. We have to have a slogan—a Budget for enterprise or a Budget for the family. The press have even mooted recently a Budget for marriage.

Increasingly, bewildering social and economic change is occurring in society and therefore Ministers and Chancellors are expected more than ever before to address big issues. The Budget has been presented as a combination of expenditure plans and tax changes and, therefore, I feel entitled to address this simple question to the House: how far has this combination of Budget and expenditure plans addressed the challenges and the problems facing the communities that I represent?

Let us have a look at what has happened to the communities that I represent. In the past 20 years, our world has been turned upside down in terms of jobs, employment, family and community. I do not exaggerate and I shall give some figures to illustrate the point. This year, we have celebrated the 50th anniversary of the birth of the welfare state and the end of the war, and the birth of full employment as the centrepiece of Government economic and social policy.

Beveridge's mission statement, to borrow a modern phrase, was the White Paper on employment. That White Paper stood us in good stead for the best part of 30 years in my community, which entered the war with 65 per cent. of people out of work and for most of the 1950s and 1960s had unemployment rates of 2 or 3 per cent. at most, rising in a bad year to 5 per cent.

Beveridge's image and vision of full employment in post-war Britain now reads very quaintly. Let me remind the House what he said. Beveridge envisaged that a man

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would work for 48 hours a week, for 48 weeks of the year, for 48 years of his life, in probably one job. His description of the family was:

"A family will consist of two persons, a male and a female, and their offspring. Women as housewives and mothers would have the vital duty of ensuring the future of the British race and the British ideal."

In 1995, what a quaint description that is. However, that was the social basis upon which I was brought up, and that attitude was behind the assumptions that we made about the nature of community, society and the family. We cannot now, as I shall illustrate, assume in my communities that the family will consist of two persons—one male and one female.

Social change has been telescoped and accelerated in a way that people like me coming into the House more than 25 years ago could not have believed would happen. I have watched the expectation of jobs and careers, and a reasonable prospect of regular employment, disintegrate in the communities that I represent.

The belief that there was regular employment was the social cement of post-war Britain and post-war south Wales. That cement has been dissolving rapidly during the past 25 years. Increasingly, we do not believe some of the figures in the Red Book. Indeed, I have a sneaking suspicion that once again the improvements described in the Red Book are bypassing my communities. The Red Book states, in a paragraph on the labour market:

"Employment has continued to rise".

In the county of Mid Glamorgan, on the most recent figures available, the number of people in employment has fallen quite significantly in the past three or four years. It has fallen from a high of 186,000 in the late 1970s to 145,000.

The most important test is the number of wage packets—however big or small they may be—and by that test the number of people in employment has begun to fall. The assumption we made in post-war south Wales and throughout the country was that, whatever levels of unemployment might occur cyclically, the levels of employment would continue to rise. That trend has disappeared in the past five to 10 years within the communities that I represent.

The character of employment has changed. The assumption that Beveridge made about the man being the wage earner has been stood on its head in the past 20 years. That has profound effects on the argument about tax. In Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney, for most of the 1950s and 1960s, the work force were two thirds male and one third women. The most recent set of figures for the county of Mid Glamorgan—that traditional area where the industrial revolution started and developed—show that there are now more women than men in employment. I make no case about the rights and wrongs, but that shows a social change, the consequences of which we have not thought through. Combined with declining numbers of people in employment, that interesting and important change will affect social patterns.

The number of manufacturing jobs in the communities that were at the heart of the manufacturing economy of this country has fallen from 50,000 in 1981 to 40,000 now. That is at a time when, I read in the Red Book, the anticipated increase in the manufacturing deficit will rise in the coming year to £9.5 billion from £8.5 billion.

Whatever else the Government's economic strategy is supposed to have done, it has certainly not tackled one fundamental problem. It was not until about 10 years ago that Britain first had a manufacturing deficit, yet it now approaches almost £10 billion. At the same time, the number of manufacturing jobs in my community has fallen. We must reverse that trend quickly.

The other factor that has been prominent over the last 20 years is the so-called average wage. I do not know where the Government get their figures. I furiously hunt around my community trying to find the so-called Mr. or Mrs. Average earning £250 to £300 a week—on average. I can tell the Paymaster General that the 900 people left working at the Hoover factory do not get anything like £250 a week, even though Hoover is supposed to be one of the better paying employers. Even in the new, modern manufacturing sector, the average going rate for a full week's work is £150 to £160.

Wages and incomes in my community have fallen in percentage terms compared with the rest of the country. In Mid Glamorgan, earnings are only 69 per cent. of the national average. Therefore, not only is there a fall in the number of people in employment, but those in employment have less pay and lower incomes than the rest of the country. The feel-good factor is missing not only among the unemployed but among those in work in my community.

I have two other major concerns. The first relates not to the levels of formal registered unemployment but to the levels of economic inactivity in my constituency. Some 35 to 40 per cent. of men of working age are economically inactive in Merthyr, Rhymney and parts of Mid Glamorgan. It takes us back to the 1930s, in one form or another.

The second matter that worries me desperately, especially in the light of what I have just read in the public expenditure programme, is that we cannot account for one in five school leavers in Mid Glamorgan. We do not know where they are. They are not in work, they are not in training, they are not receiving benefit, they are not scrounging and they are not in any form of institution. One fifth of our school leavers have disappeared from our community. Perhaps they are at home or hanging around the streets; they are certainly not registered anywhere. Yet those are the very people who could become—I hate this American term—an underclass.

One in five school leavers are not registering for training, are not staying on at school and are not even collecting benefit. We cannot account for them. They should be connected somehow to work and to the community. They should be on some community programme so that they can begin to feel wanted. However, if we do now find them and try to make the connection with society, it will be too late because, just at the time it is most needed, the Government are abolishing the whole of the community action programme. I have never been a fan of that programme, but no one has come up with anything better. It is being abolished just at the time we need to make the connection with a highly significant group of young people who are not registered within our society as doing anything.

How does the Budget measure up to those needs? In a curious way, I was slightly relieved, because it was a little fairer than we expected. Perhaps that is why it went down so badly with Conservative Back Benchers. The income tax provisions were scattered through the tax bands, but Conservative Back Benchers wanted a huge cut in the 25p rate. With a bit of luck, if there is a little more money in people's pockets, more people will buy washing machines—that is desperately necessary for Hoover in my constituency. Perhaps the Budget will encourage more consumption.

The Budget does not deal with the problems of either the resigned middle-aged or the resentful young unemployed. As the hon. Member for Staffordshire, Moorlands said, it is time to put employment at the centre of economic and social policy. Unemployment has been the Government's anti-inflation instrument of the past 15 years; it has been the industrial relations instrument of the past 15 years; it has been the wages policy of the past 15 years. I can recall a Conservative Chancellor panicking when unemployment reached 1 million in 1973, and bringing in a Budget for jobs to counter that. We now live with 3 million people out of work, many of whom, of all age groups in my community, have been unemployed for far too long.

Sir David Knox: The hon. Gentleman pretends that the use of the level of demand in dealing with inflation has happened only during the past 16 years under a Conservative Government. I take him back to a previous Labour Government and the policies pursued by Denis Healey—they were exactly the same. In fact, the great break with the post-war consensus was in the mid-1970s, not at the end of the 1970s.

Mr. Rowlands: I would love to go back to the unemployment levels of 1978-79. If we had those levels of unemployment in my community, many of the social problems that I have described would not have become so significant. We have never supported—I hope that the hon. Gentleman would never support—the view expressed by the Bank of England in "Bank Briefing":

"Unemployment probably remains above its natural rate."

Do the Government believe in a natural rate of unemployment? Is it just a Bank of England view or is it shared by the Treasury? Is there such a thing as a natural rate of unemployment? If so, what is it?

When the Chancellor meets the lugubrious Mr. George at his monthly meetings, as well as talking about the fine tuning of interest rates do they sit at the table and talk about the natural rate of unemployment? If so, what is it? We have never been told. I find the whole concept offensive, just as I found offensive the statement of a previous Chancellor that unemployment was a price worth paying. The concept of using unemployment in the way that it has been used over the past 15 years is offensive.

Employment and jobs should be put back at the centre of Budget judgments—and with that must come proper training. One of the real tragedies of the past 15 to 20 years has been the destruction of training opportunities. Measures to promote skills and work have been like a patchwork quilt. If we are to create a new skilled work force, skills training and jobs must be the centrepiece of our economic and social policy. If that is not done, the social trends that I have described will continue to undermine the stability and the social fabric of our communities.

Ministers boast about the extra money that is to be spent on policing to deal with crime; instead, they should deal with the prevention of crime. At the centre of much of the social tension and anti-social behaviour in the communities that I represent are the younger generation's lack of prospects and lack of hope for the future of their communities.

5.49 pm

Sir Anthony Grant (South-West Cambridgeshire): I am glad to follow the hon. Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Rowlands). I think that I have been in the House a tiny bit longer than he has, but we have the same memories. I appreciate very much his concern about the unemployment problem, which his constituency has, perhaps, tragically experienced more than many others. I also share the views on unemployment expressed by my hon. Friend the Member for Staffordshire, Moorlands (Sir D. Knox), who has always given a very sincere view on that issue.

I do not share, however, the pessimistic view taken by the hon. Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney. I was glad that he referred to 1973, because I recall the occasion when unemployment hit the 1 million mark. We were in government. The hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) came across the Chamber and thumped the Dispatch Box in front of the then Prime Minister. There was a great hullabaloo. I had some responsibility at that time—I do not claim I was solely responsible—for regional development policy, and, before we were unceremoniously thrown out of office, unemployment had come down to 700,000, which was gratifying.

Mr. Michael Foot said that that level of unemployment was disgracefully high, and that it would not be tolerated. No sooner did Mr. Michael Foot take charge, however, then unemployment went up again, this time to 1.5 million—and it continued to rise.

Therefore, I do not think that the problem of unemployment can be solely attributed to one party or the other. Indeed, if I think back further, I think that I am right in saying that no Labour Government in this country have left office with unemployment lower than when they took office; it has been higher every time. Let us not have too much humbug on that issue.

I must declare all my interests, which are in the Register, but I shall certainly not be advocating them in any way, whatever that means. I am sure that, if I step out of order, you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, will immediately bring me to order at once.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Just for clarification, the hon. Gentleman must remember that it is for him to declare any interests that he has. It is not for the occupant of the Chair to decide the matter.

Sir Anthony Grant: I shall certainly not be advocating anything in any way, except the general interest of the public as a whole.

I have spoken in debates on many Budgets and Finance Bills during my 30 years in the House, and I have had the experience of no fewer than 10 different Chancellors of the Exchequer. This may be the very last occasion that I am able to speak in a Budget debate.

I have always believed that it is important to lower taxation so far as possible. I said that in the 1988 Budget debate and in the 1989 Budget debate. I said that I could

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never see any morality or merit in the authorities collecting vast sums of money from a vast range of people, sloshing and churning it around in a vast and expensive bureaucracy, and then doling it out to those who create the loudest clamour for more money. I do not believe that there is any morality or merit in that whatsoever.

Many years ago, long before the Conservatives came into office, I said that there was a need to shift the burden of taxation from direct taxation, or tax on work, to indirect taxation, which is tax on spending. I think that that has happened, and rightly so. I am glad that the Chancellor referred to that this afternoon.

I also believe, however, in a low interest rate policy. I think that the folly of the rollercoaster years that occurred under my Government in the 1980s, when low interest rates rocketed, came home to roost with a vengeance in the disastrous effect that they had on the housing market and, in particular, on small firms. Those are two causes—the spread of ownership, either through shares or house ownership, and the interests of small firms—which I have espoused in the 30 years that I have been in the House.

I therefore congratulate the Chancellor and the Government on the way that, in recent years, they have restored low interest rate stability, while at the same time containing inflation. I believe that that is the achievement of the present Chancellor and of the Government, despite the circumstances that they inherited.

I think that there has been far too much hype in the House and in the press on the reduction of taxation, although, as I say, I welcome it and I want it. There was far too much talk of pennies here and pennies there; talk of 3p or 5p off the standard rate raised expectations unnecessarily. I am a great believer in Chancellors going into purdah and not saying anything until they come to the House to present the Budget.

No good can come from lowering taxation if it revives inflationary fears which result ultimately in higher interest rates, because of a belief in the markets that inflation will take off again. In a sense, therefore, I believe that the Chancellor was right to be modest. The Budget was reasonably modest in the face of some people's high expectations of tax reductions. It could be described as a responsible financial policy, or what he would call a prudent one.

The Chancellor has avoided the peril of high interest rates, but, having said that, I hope that my hon. Friend the Paymaster General will pass on to the Chancellor my sincere hope that it will be possible to reduce interest rates further when the time is right. That more than anything else would encourage the two sectors that have suffered so much and which to a large extent reflect the feel-bad factor—the housing market and small firms, especially people starting up small firms. I leave it to the Chancellor to decide when the time is right—I accept that it may not be now—but I hope that interest rates will come down steadily. That, I understand, is the wish of industry and business generally.

I should have liked one further tax reduction. I have long advocated the complete removal of stamp duty on property transactions. I know that it would cost £700 million, but it is a ludicrous tax. Speaking in a Budget debate some years ago, I said that I could not understand how it had ever arisen. Now I know. It arose in the reign of William and Mary when, because of transport problems, it was very difficult to collect income tax or anything of that nature. It was easier to levy tax on property. However, those days are gone, and the sooner we see the back of stamp duty on property transactions, the better. Its removal would encourage movement in the housing market, which we all want.

Although the Chancellor said, I think, that mortgage interest relief at source was not going to be changed—at least not adversely—in the next two or three years, I hope that he will be flexible. If he wants to boost the housing market, it may be necessary to alter MIRAS. More important, however, is the need to keep interest rates stable, and preferably low. That, I hope, is the theme of the Budget, which I warmly commend.

The press and many Opposition Members said that the Budget would be one of bribes for the electorate, but I did not believe that. Every political party, of whatever political complexion, has since the dawn of mankind sought to bribe the electorate one way or another. However, the electorate are like the great Sir Francis Bacon who, when challenged, said:

> "Certainly I take bribes—but I never allow it to affect my judgment!"

I think that the British electorate are just as sophisticated.

The reality is best expressed in these words, which I have cited in previous speeches:

> "If you want to retain power you have got to listen to what people . . . say and what they want. If you talk to people in the factories and in the clubs, they all want to pay less tax. They are more interested in that than the Government giving money away in other directions."

Those are very wise words. They were uttered on 14 March 1978, in an address to the Labour national executive committee, by no less a person than Lord Callaghan.

I agree with him, he is absolutely right, and I am glad to say that we are following precisely his precept. When people urge greater public expenditure and say that they are prepared to accept higher taxes to facilitate it, I find that they invariably mean that other people's taxes should be higher, not their own.

The Budget could be considered in the context of an election—undoubtedly the press and everybody else is considering it in that context. But in considering the Budget's effect, the electorate will also consider the alternative to it. As I said, I go back 30 years, in which there have been three Labour Chancellors. What is absolutely clear at the moment is that the electorate have not the faintest idea about the Opposition's policy on interest rates, inflation, borrowing, or how the Opposition's taxes relate to their spending. None of those policies has been revealed.

I am reminded of the late, great Aneurin Bevan, who used to say, "Why gaze into the crystal ball when you can read the book?" We can read the book. After 30 years and three Labour Chancellors, I can read the book. I remember very well that Lord Callaghan introduced corporation tax—adverse to business—capital transfer tax, selective employment tax and purchase tax increases. Then multi-rate VAT was introduced. Then Lord Jenkins, no longer a member of the Labour party, raised taxes more than any other Chancellor since the war. Then, of course,

Lord Healey—amazing how all these peers seem to be involved—made such a hash of matters that we had to call in brokers from the International Monetary Fund.

The book of what the Opposition have done is available for all to see. The trouble is that, at the moment, it is wrapped in a plain cover, rather like those smutty books that used to circulate. Undoubtedly, the book will have to be opened at some time in the future, and when it is, the electorate will get a nasty shock, and will regard today's Budget as a winner.

The Budget passes the test that I always apply of whether it helps or harms small firms, wider share ownership and ownership generally. I return to employment, with which I began. We will increase employment only through the encouragement and development of small firms. Such an increase is not going to come from great big organisations—that has passed. The development and taking on of one, two, three or more people in a vast number of small firms will diminish the hideous curse of unemployment, in Wales and elsewhere.

The measures announced on the business rate, of which I very much improve, and the corporation tax concessions, are very helpful to small firms, so the Budget passes my test. The Budget passes the test of encouraging continued improvement in employment and of maintaining financial prudence, and it will contain inflation, which is absolutely crucial if we are not to have another boom-bust situation.

In due course, because the Budget passes the test of encouraging business confidence, which is so important to the welfare of people generally and not only business, it will pass the test of the British electorate when the time comes.

6.3 pm

Mr. Dennis Canavan (Falkirk, West): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for South-West Cambridgeshire (Sir A. Grant). I always listen with great interest to what he has to say, although I must confess that I do not always agree with him. None the less, he has a great deal of experience in the House. In fact, I am sure that he can remember being in the House when Conservative Governments would never have tolerated the high levels of unemployment which our people have had to suffer over the past 16 years.

I think that I heard the hon. Member for North-West Cambridgeshire saying that this may be his last Budget debate. I do not know whether it was a statement, or a hint, that he may not be standing again at the next election. If he is not going to stand, I wish him well. I do not think that he will be the only Conservative Member for whom it may be the last Budget debate. I watched very closely the facial expressions of many Tory Members of Parliament during the Chancellor's speech. They were hoping and praying that the Chancellor would deliver something to save their skins. Even on that narrow criterion, this Budget is doomed to failure.

The Budget also fails on criteria much more important to the people we represent. Let us consider the Government's taxation strategy, for example. A fair system of taxation is progressive, so that people who can afford to pay more in taxation do so, and people who cannot afford it pay less, or none at all. I would have thought that that was just common sense and basic justice.

But the Government have given priority in their taxation strategy to increasing the burden of VAT—of course, a very regressive tax—while at the same time using the income tax system to grant concessions, whether real or imaginary. The only people who have really benefited from that strategy are those earning very high incomes. The net result of the Government's policies is that most people pay more tax.

The Conservative party used to boast that it was the party of low taxation. That claim is now exposed as a myth, despite the Chancellor's decision today to cut the basic rate of income tax by 1p. Since the last general election, the Government have in fact introduced 21 new taxes, and increased taxation by the equivalent of 7p on the standard rate of income tax, costing the average family more than £800 extra a year.

If the Government were really serious about reducing the burden of taxation in a fair and reasonable manner, they would look at some of the unjust taxes which they have imposed over the past few years—and they could start with VAT on domestic fuel.

Last year, almost a year ago to the day, the Government suffered a humiliating defeat on the Floor of the House in trying to increase the rate of VAT on domestic fuel from 8 per cent. to 17.5 per cent. Despite that defeat for the Government, which was a great victory for us, many people on low incomes are still suffering hardship, and are dreading another long, cold winter, because they simply cannot afford to heat their homes. The Chancellor should have had the humility to admit that he had blundered by imposing VAT on domestic fuel.

I would like VAT on domestic fuel to be abolished completely, but I understand that that is forbidden by European Union law. I should have thought that, at the very least, the Chancellor could have announced today a reduction from 8 per cent. to, say, 5 per cent. The cost of such a reduction would be £500 million—quite a lot of money—but if he had wanted, the Chancellor could have raised at least six times that amount by imposing a windfall tax on the profits of privatised utilities. Yet he refused to do so, and tried to deride that proposal.

I sometimes wonder whether, when the Chancellor is sitting and smiling in his well-heated home at No. 11 Downing street, he really appreciates the frustration and anger of old-age pensioners, who are sitting shivering in their homes because they cannot afford to pay the heating bill. They dread the day the bills come through their letter box from the privatised utilities. Yet their generation helped to build those fuel companies, and the companies used to belong to them—and to all of us—before the Tory Government sold them off.

When pensioners sit freezing in their homes, fat cats such as Cedric Brown and all the rest of them on the boards of the privatised utilities are laughing all the way to the bank, with their bloated salaries and share options. The Government are imposing that obscene situation on our pensioners, and on many other people on low incomes.

A windfall tax on the privatised utilities would not only help to cut VAT on domestic fuel, but could be used to fund a public investment programme for creating real training opportunities and real jobs, especially for young people.

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There could be public investment in the construction industry, for example, to help build houses for homeless people and to provide jobs for all the construction and allied workers in the dole queue. There could also be public investment to modernise and electrify our railway system instead of selling it off, which most people in this country do not want to happen.

We could have public investment to expand the home energy efficiency scheme. It is a national scandal that, in Scotland alone, 800,000 families cannot afford to keep warm, and that 270,000 homes in Scotland suffer from dampness. A properly funded home energy efficiency scheme organised throughout the United Kingdom would cost £1.25 billion per year, but it would be money well spent. Indeed, it would be money invested, bearing in mind the fact that the scheme would create up to 40,000 jobs and could save the national health service up to £1 billion per year—the sum spent on treating cold-related illnesses.

Instead of introducing such common-sense measures, the Chancellor has decided to go for the old Tory strategy of income tax cuts and public expenditure cuts. The recipe has been tried before, and it has failed. It will do nothing to help the unemployed, and will punish the recipients of social security benefits, including young single people under 25, and refugees seeking asylum. Despite the Chancellor's protestations, it is a recipe that will further threaten the national health service, education and social services for the elderly, the sick and people with disabilities.

No doubt many Tory Members of Parliament desperately hope that the Budget will do enough to save their skins. I do not think it will. The people of this country will see it for what it is—the last desperate act of a discredited Government whose time is up. The sooner the Government go, the better.

6.13 pm

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford): One always takes a chance in standing up to speak directly after the Chancellor sits down. All over the Chamber one sees everybody's head down, as hon. Members try to figure out exactly what has been announced. Many of us find out that about half of what we thought was there may not have been there—and I have been doing much the same myself. However, hoping that my hon. Friend the Paymaster General will forgive me if I make one or two errors, I shall press on, try to summarise what I think are the main features of the Chancellor's announcements, and welcome those that I consider the most necessary, which I should like to think the whole House will welcome.

We have managed to announce a Budget with the backdrop of a stable economic performance. Notwithstanding some problems, in general we have the most stable economic position that I can recall. That is in no small part due to the great changes that we made in the early 1980s. It is often too easy to talk about such matters in isolation, as if one needed to think back only two or three years. But our present position should really be seen in the perspective of the past 15 or 16 years.

For example, we sit here today without the usual threats that used to be made at about this time. I refer, of course, to the spending programmes that resulted when the great trade union barons used to put their tanks on Mr. Wilson's lawn and make threats about what would happen if everyone did not have higher pay.

We do not even discuss such threats now, and no mention has so far been made of them. I make a small prediction that problems with trade unions will not be mentioned in any of the speeches, because that problem has been dealt with and has gone. We now have more rational and reasonable relationships in industry. Most notably, we have the fewest days lost through strikes, probably anywhere in the western world, and certainly in western Europe.

However, certain things needed to be done with regard to the economy, and the Chancellor has been faced with one or two problems that he now has to resolve. We have had to bear down on public expenditure, and we must continue to do so. It is not good enough to look for short-term measures.

My right hon. and learned Friend is right to talk about a short or medium-term target of 40 per cent., but in the longer term, if we are to compete with the rest of the world—and its growth rates represent very serious competition for us—we must bring expenditure levels down even further.

It is no coincidence that our main competitors outside Europe have public expenditure percentages in the low or mid-30s. I refer to north America and Japan, although in the so-called tiger economies of the far east public spending is even lower. I do not believe that things will stay like that in those countries, but our target must certainly be the mid-30s as an overall percentage of public expenditure, once we have got through the 40 per cent. band. I am glad that my right hon. and learned Friend began to deal with it.

We on the Conservative Benches often fail to deal with the serious philosophical difference that divides us from the Opposition. That difference is wholly legitimate, and it is important that it be raised during the debate. Opposition Front-Bench spokesmen are now trying to claim the territory, to throw a blanket over their true position and to make claims that they think the public will accept.

However, it is we who believe in the concept of reducing taxation; it must be at the core of our strategy and we must never let up on it. Whatever else has happened over the past two or three years, for a Conservative Government to leave office with levels of taxation higher than when they came into office would be a problem for us. I recognise that my right hon. and learned Friend has begun to tackle that today, and I see that as a continuing saga over the next 12 months, to bear down on levels of taxation.

We believe that money is best spent by the people who earn it, not by the Government, and the only way to bring that about is to bear down on public expenditure. In that context, I welcome the overall reduction in public expenditure by about £3.2 billion. But I make no bones about the fact that I had hoped for more. It would be wrong of me to say that I hoped for £3 billion; I hoped for £5 billion, and aimed in my mind at that figure, simply because I believed that it would have been possible to obtain more.

However, I understand the constraints under which my right hon. and learned Friend must act, and later I shall talk about the reason why I believe that he set that course, and the basis on which I support it.

I notice the reserve at £3 billion. I understand that that represents a measure of justifiable caution, but it gives us greater scope later in the financial cycle to bear down further on public expenditure, so I hope that the £3.2 billion reduction is not the end of the story by any means. I welcome the measure on that basis.

I was particularly glad to see the measures to crack down on waste and fraud, the two big things that the Government seem to discuss every year. That crackdown will apply not just to social security spending, but across the board, and will include a reduction in central Government administration. The Government's intention to look at ways of cutting back on central Government expenditure is most welcome.

The running costs cuts predicted by my right hon. and learned Friend today of £2 billion by 1998 will be particularly welcomed by most of the public, who are having to earn a living and who—in some cases—are in tenuous positions regarding employment. The protection of employment for civil servants does cost, and it is only fair that we bear that in mind. Every extra civil servant place costs extra in taxation, and both the civil service and the general public should understand that bearing down on that cost is justifiable.

I am particularly interested in the social security budget, and I think that we have not given enough credit to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security who has, during a period of some three or four years, set about changing the way in which the social security system is delivered. I feel—I am sure that he would accept this—that he has further to go. After inflation, growth in social security spending was running at some 3 per cent., and my right hon. Friend is now predicting a reduction to 1 per cent. That is below growth rates predicted three years ago, and it is welcome. That heartens me, but I am sure that my right hon. Friend accepts that we have further to go than an increase of 1 per cent.

I was particularly concerned to note that my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor today enhanced the Government's stance on fraud. I am keen on the new financial incentives for local authorities to combat fraud, and I only hope that they will deliver them efficiently. My knowledge of some local authorities—particularly my own—does not lead me to believe that they will deliver as much of that as we might hope, but we live in a period of hope. The Government should consider holding local authorities to the reduction target of some £2.5 billion by next year, as we shall provide the resources for them to do so.

The shift in direction back towards traditional families is welcome. Many of my constituents who have chosen to have families and to seek to provide for those families have felt for too long that there are far too many ways in which those who have a less coherent approach to life may be able to jump the queue, whether in housing or in obtaining greater levels of benefit. The policies that my right hon. and learned Friend put forward today, which will be enlarged upon tomorrow, are moving some way towards putting right that situation. We should not shy away from showing to the country that we believe in traditional families.

I am particularly keen on the measures on housing benefit. Many of my constituents raise the matter regularly at my surgeries. The fact that single people under 25 have such access to benefit leads to the spiralling cost of rented property in places such as Waltham Forest. We should encourage the return to the tradition of people spending greater lengths of time at home while looking for a stable environment and a stable job, and the housing benefit measures will help us to do that.

Because of the limited time, I have only glanced at the Red Book so far, but while I understand my right hon. and learned Friend's restrictions, it seems that we have some problems with regard to receipts. One has only to glance at the forecasts for the estimated outturn with regard to income tax to see that there has been a serious reduction, and the same goes for corporation tax, VAT, fuel duties, business rates and social security contributions. I accept that my right hon. and learned Friend has not had quite the scope that he would have hoped for because of the lessening of those receipts, but what do the receipts tell us? They tell us that the economy has slowed, and that problems are emerging because the predicted receipts from a growing economy are not there.

That leads me back to my point on interest rates. Last year, I stood here and said that I did not think there was any need for interest rate rises. I can put my hand on my heart and say that publicly, and hope that *Hansard* recorded it. But what I said has been borne out by events. Shopkeepers and particularly manufacturers in my constituency told me last year that they knew about the price hike in raw materials, and they said that, in the run-up to Christmas, they were all trying to push up their prices. But I was also told that the consumer was not bearing that increase. The consumers walked away from the shops for a period and the prices came back down again. So, in effect, the manufacturers bore the price hike in raw materials.

The Bank's predictions that we were rushing into a huge increase in inflation did not come true. For a few months—in an attempt to justify its position—the Bank bashed on at my right hon. and learned Friend. He raised interest rates last year, but resisted the pressure, rightly, later on. The Bank now says that the risks

> "are more evenly distributed around the central projection than earlier in the year. Consequently, although not the most likely outcome, there is now a somewhat greater chance that inflation will be below 2½ per cent. in two years time."

Well, it must be lovely for the Bank of England to push politicians to make decisions and changes, but as the economy began to slow, I did not hear the Bank saying, "Of course, we expected that." The reality is that, in a sense, the Bank has power without responsibility. The Government are responsible for those matters, and the Bank only gives us advice. I welcome my right hon. and learned Friend's resistance to the pressure all through this year.

I understand that this is a two-pronged Budget, the second prong being interest rate reductions. There is absolutely no question but that what has been delivered today has been a cautious but welcome Budget that reduces the levels of personal taxation. The Budget has found extra money for three key areas—education, health and law and order—to which the public wanted more to be applied.

I hope and believe, however, that my right hon. and learned Friend has in his back pocket the knowledge that he is going to reduce interest rates. If he does, we shall certainly be on course to make the economy grow over

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the next few years in a sustainable way. Businesses up and down the land will then get some real benefit from that growth.

I welcome all the tax reductions that have been made. The basic rate has been reduced to 24p in the pound, and I admit that I wish we could have gone lower. I expect that we shall go lower before the next election. That is not because tax reductions are some sort of bribe—I see some smiles from Opposition Members—but because of the philosophical divide between the parties. I do not believe that the Government have any right to stick their hand in my constituents' pockets to take their money before they get a chance to spend it. I would much rather let them spend it and find ways of levelling Government expenditure downwards so that we have to take less in taxation. So the focus on the family in the Budget today was welcome.

Many of us have said that those who have been most hit are families in which there is one major earner. I am most glad to see that my right hon. and learned Friend has raised the tax allowances by some £70. I should like to see him go further and make the allowances fully transferable so that we can see single-earner families gain even greater benefit. After all, they are probably the ones with the smallest margins. I urge even further progress on that, but in the meantime I welcome the measures that he announced to assist the family.

Perhaps the most welcome of the measures in the Budget and the one that has taken greatest account of one group who feel themselves hard done by is the measure to increase capital thresholds for residential and nursing care. We all know from our constituency surgeries that, although we have tried to encourage people to save, those who have saved wonder why they are penalised with regard to residential and nursing care. We have all faced up to that and said that it would cost to lift the thresholds. Yet we have to balance the incentive to save against provision and Government expenditure.

I am glad that my right hon. and learned Friend looked again at that problem for pensioners and raised the limit for nursing care from £3,000 to £10,000 and the limit for residential care from £8,000 to £16,000. Yet it was most intriguing that we did not hear a word from the Leader of the Opposition about that measure. He may not have heard it. I am assuming that he heard it and that he understood it. He may not have done. Not one word came from him in his Budget speech on that measure. So pensioners up and down the land have no idea whether the Labour party welcomes the measure or does not. I should have thought that it would have been the first thing that he mentioned and that he would have wholeheartedly welcomed it. He did not and he missed an opportunity, but I welcome it.

The Budget has paved the way to a serious interest rate reduction. It has given us the opportunity to demonstrate to people who have savings, who are on marginal incomes and who wish to create better lives for those around them and themselves that we believe in giving them that power. The reduction in taxation is giving back, not a bribe. It is saying to people, "We believe you can have more of your money. The economy needs the boost and you need the boost, and we want you to spend it on yourselves."

I look forward in the next 12 months to seeing the economy grow even more at sustainable levels and to demonstrating to the public, who had perhaps begun to lose a little faith, that we believe in them as responsible individuals who can take more power for themselves and who display much better community spirit and understanding than any amount of central Government expenditure can produce.

6.33 pm

Mr. Gerry Sutcliffe (Bradford, South): It is interesting to see Conservative Members putting on a brave face after listening to the Budget. One could feel the penny drop this afternoon as they listened quietly to the Chancellor's statement. The hon. Member for Chingford (Mr. Duncan Smith) said that my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition did not welcome the measures for the elderly. That is not true. He did, but he said that they were far too little too late. One could feel the penny drop as Conservative Members realised that what was hyped up this morning by the media and their spin doctors as the big bang Budget that would save the Tory party at the next general election would not save them. They realised that many of them will not be in the House after the next general election as a result of the Budget.

The Budget demonstrated the arrogance that the Government have displayed in the past 16 years. The Government hoped that ordinary people and the Opposition would forget what had gone on during the past 16 years and the waste of people. A generation of people are without work. The figures show that 800,000 people have been unemployed for more than 12 months. Resources have been wasted. We heard today about North sea oil and gas, which could have helped to create a booming economy and put people back to work, but public borrowing has been greater under the Tory Government than under any previous Government. We have heard about the horrendous sale of public assets at knock-down prices, but direct and indirect taxation are at their highest ever level.

The Budget continues the theme of the Tory Government—a Government who are so divisive. The Tories will never be forgiven by the British people. The key statistics which will rout the Government from office are on the distribution of wealth. They have created a society in which the real income of the top 10 per cent. has grown by 62 per cent. while that of the bottom 10 per cent. has dropped by 17 per cent. We have a two-tier society and a society that confines pensioners to living in poverty. Many young people are unemployed. They will now be homeless because they will not receive the housing benefit to which they are entitled. Many families live on welfare benefit. A third of the population in my city live on some form of benefit. We have a Government without vision governing a country which cries out for leadership.

There are several ways in which the Government could have stimulated the economy to create an effective environment for growth. They chose not to do so but to continue with a stop-start economy that relies on outdated, unjust and unfair cures. It is scandalous that the country spends £20 billion on keeping people out of work rather than improving the economy by providing desperately needed jobs in our communities, thereby raising people's self-esteem and letting them make the decisions that they want to make in their lives.

The manufacturing base has been destroyed. Communities such as Bradford have suffered greatly in the past 16 years. The history of Britain in the past

16 years could be seen as the inevitable effect of the decline in investment in our people, our infrastructure and our industry. The Tories have almost given up on Britain. The task facing us today is to equip Britain for the future by securing investment in industry and infrastructure and meeting the needs of people in today's society. Today's Budget did nothing to meet that task.

It is almost three years since the recession officially ended, but as we entered the Budget debate today Britain had a faltering recovery. There are still more than 2 million people unemployed. Borrowing is higher than expected. Inflation looks likely to overshoot the Government's own targets. Perhaps of much greater concern, we have critically low levels of investment.

The Tories have presided over the two deepest recessions since 1979. The economy does not have the capacity for strong growth. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development calculations show that Britain has fallen down the prosperity league from 13th place in 1979 to 18th in 1993. The main reason why we are falling is simple. We do not invest enough. In 1979 Japan invested 56 per cent. more, Germany invested 21 per cent. more and Belgium invested 11 per cent. more than Britain. Now the gap has grown even wider. Japan invests 141 per cent. more, Germany invests 60 per cent. more and Belgium invests 35 per cent. more than Britain.

The real issue in the Budget is not that income tax is a penny down but how we can increase investment and boost the economy. The fundamental difference between the Conservatives and Labour is that while Conservatives believe in a minimalist state in which the Government abdicate responsibility for investment, Labour believes that the only route to success is high investment in infrastructure, people and technology. They believe that investment will follow success; we believe that success will follow investment.

Conservative Budgets have consistently failed the country. The Conservative party's key promise in 1979 was that it would reverse Britain's decline. Sir Geoffrey Howe, as he then was, said in his 1979 Budget:

"in the last few years the hard facts of our relative decline have become increasingly plain, and the threat of absolute decline has gradually become very real."—[*Official Report*, 12 June 1979; Vol. 968, c. 237.]

That is a prospect that I am not prepared to accept, and nor are the British people.

The Tories' record of the past 16 years is one of Britain's falling further and further behind. As originally pointed out by the Bank of England in its August 1995 inflation report, investment has been weak in the present recovery. In two years of the recovery, business investment has increased by only 4 per cent., compared with 28 per cent. in the 1980s and 16 per cent. in the 1970s. Weak investment and skill shortages are laying down the foundations of the next recession.

In 1994, total investment was more than 10 per cent. below the level that it was in 1989, before the recession. The investment share of the economy has fallen for six years in a row—from 24 per cent. in 1989, to 17 per cent. in 1994. In 1993, the United Kingdom was 20th out of the 24 OECD countries in terms of the share of the economy devoted to investment.

Investment is the key macroeconomic variable for growth, inflation, unemployment and trade. Not only does spending on investment increase output in the current period, but, as an addition to the capital stock, it can be used to produce three times as much output in the following period. With a higher capital stock comes higher capacity, which means higher growth rates can be sustained without inflationary pressures.

For all the reasons that we have heard, Britain has too small a manufacturing base. It no longer meets some domestic demands, so we have to import, which worsens the balance of trade. Higher investment is not only the key to growth and, therefore, to lower unemployment, but the means by which sustained low inflation can be achieved.

The Chancellor was keen to point out that manufacturing investment is 12 per cent. higher than a year ago, but it is still about 14 per cent. below the peak of 1989. In real terms, manufacturing investment in 1994 was 20 per cent. below the level of 1979.

The Government portray the United Kingdom as the enterprise capital of Europe. We heard it again from the Chancellor today—I think that he said it three times. He said that we achieved that status by receiving one third of all inward investment into the European Community in 1993 and more than 40 per cent. of Japanese and foreign investment. What is not generally recognised is that even more investment is leaving the country. Inward investment was £6.6 billion in 1994, but outward investment was £16.4 billion. Since 1979, the cumulative balance of inward investment less outward investment was a deficit of £58 billion. In 1979, manufacturing accounted for around 30 per cent. of the output of the economy. By 1994, that figure had fallen to 21 per cent., with a loss of more than 2.5 million jobs.

It is clear that, without tackling the problems of capacity in the economy, we face the re-emergence of the problems of stop-go and boom-bust, which have historically afflicted the British economy. Throughout the 1980s, the Conservatives argued that high unemployment was a price that had to be paid for low inflation. The reality is that high unemployment and high inflation are products of under-investment.

It is no good Conservative Members talking about the scourge of unemployment and how hard it is for people who are out of work, when the Government do nothing to sustain the economy. I have some sympathy with my hon. Friend the Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Rowlands), who said that the Bank of England and the Chancellor talk about the "acceptable" level of unemployment, but that there should not be an acceptable level. We must study ways to avoid it.

Unemployment is a waste of people and it shows an enormous lack of investment in the British people by the Conservatives. The Prime Minister took office in November 1990, and in June of that year the work force in employment stood at 27.186 million. By June this year, it had fallen to 25.7 million—a drop of 1.46 million. There are grave doubts about the accuracy of the unemployment figures. I have given the Government figures. There might really be more than 4 million people out of work. We see that in the large number of our constituents who do not have jobs.

Another worry is that the country has a problem with skills. There is a mismatch between the skills of the unemployed and those required by industry. That fact is accepted, not merely by Opposition Members but by the Deputy Prime Minister, who has called for a job skills

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audit. The unskilled and the poorly educated have suffered most from the rise in unemployment. The Tories have failed to invest in new technologies and industry and in the skills of the work force. In an internationally competitive global economy, where investment capital is mobile, a highly skilled work force is the key factor in competition.

The United Kingdom lags behind all OECD countries except Turkey in the proportion of 17 and 18-year-olds in education—180,000 of our 17 and 18-year-olds are not in education, work or training. As my hon. Friend the Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney said, they have gone missing.

The Government have slashed the training for work budget by 29 per cent. since 1992. In 1994, the economic adviser to Lloyds bank warned that Britain was in danger of becoming a low-skill economy unless the levels of investment and training in manufacturing were raised. He said:

"Low skills will discourage industry from adopting best technology, further undermining the need for better training. This downward spiral is probably the greatest threat to the opportunities now facing the UK".

Those are the words, not of a Labour sympathiser, but an economist looking at the facts.

After 16 years of Tory government, it is funny that they are asking us to draw lessons, not from Britain, which they have been governing, but from the Asian tiger economies, where very different policies have been pursued. As usual, the Tories have drawn the wrong lessons from the Pacific rim. The main reason that they have been so much more successful than Britain in recent years lies not in the difference between levels of public spending, but in the much higher levels of investment, both public and private. They have achieved those higher investment levels by encouraging higher levels of savings and competitive domestic markets and by investing in education and infrastructure. They have promoted a culture that values long-term investment, not short-term return.

The Tories reject that role for government. That is why Britain has fallen so far behind in investment since 1979. While Hong Kong and Singapore invested £1.3 and £1.1 respectively for every pound per head invested in Britain in 1979, today they invest nearly £3. The lesson to be learned from Hong Kong and Singapore is not that public spending necessarily creates economic success, but that high investment does. Indeed, the lesson that those countries could teach us on public spending is that economic success can cut the need for public spending.

Essentially, there are two options for Britain—carry on with the failed prescriptions of the past 16 years, or adopt a new common-sense approach. For Britain in the 1990s and heading towards the 21st century, the central challenge of economic modernisation is to overcome the long-standing problem of under-investment in people and in our social and economic fabric to expand the capacity of the economy.

Investment must be a priority, and the Budget does not achieve that. We must ensure that investment is long-term. The Government have been too complacent for too long about investment and have ignored warnings from business, industry and the Bank of England.

The Budget is not about a choice between investment and tax cuts, but about increasing investment as the only route to decent public services and a sustainable economy. For the past 16 years—too long—we have suffered the political dogma of the Conservatives, and they have accused us of political dogma. The British public will not fall for the bribery of tax cuts. Conservative Members wanted cuts in the region of 4p or 5p, not the 1p announced today. The British public will not be bribed in the way that the Tories feel that they can be.

Last year, I was a member of the Standing Committee that considered the Finance Bill, which was an interesting experience in itself. A key phrase for Tory members of that Committee was the difference between tax evasion, which is illegal, and tax avoidance, which is legitimate. That subtlety allows disabled people to pay tax on benefits, while huge corporations employ expensive accountants to find ways not to pay it.

This Budget does nothing for people with disabilities, even though campaigning groups such as the Disablement Income Group continually ask the Chancellor for tax allowances similar to those available to people who are registered as blind. Why is there discrimination between disabilities? In a written answer on 9 March 1995, in column *265* of *Hansard*, the Financial Secretary to the Treasury replied that it would cost "£20 million" to implement a clause that would give equality of treatment to people with disabilities. That would have been money well spent. Instead, the Chancellor has hit hardest those who can least afford it.

The Chancellor's action in taxing disability living allowance without ensuring a fair taxation system is nothing short of scandalous. I am sure that we will return to that issue when the Finance Bill comes before the House.

Mr. Alan Duncan (Rutland and Melton): Will the hon. Gentleman inform the House exactly how much extra the shadow Chancellor has committed the Labour party to spend on the disabled?

Mr. Sutcliffe: The shadow Chancellor has said that, when we are in government, we will have to inspect the books. We will have to consider what money is available for us to spend. My hon. Friend the Member for North-East Derbyshire (Mr. Barnes) introduced the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill last year, but it was seriously disrupted by the Government—their Bill, now the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, did nothing to enhance the position of people with disabilities. The disabled are not the only group that are disadvantaged in many other ways. They look both to national Government and to local government to provide efficient and effective public services, yet with the cuts in public spending, local government will carry the can disproportionately.

Last year's local government settlement failed to meet the cost to councils resulting from inflation, pay increases and the growing number of school children and old people. As a result, there were cuts in services and dramatic increases in charges for those that were left. My authority has faced cuts, including this year's anticipated cuts, of up to £60 million over the past three years. Our city's schools are falling down and have inadequate temporary classrooms. We cannot afford to allow our children's education and future to be jeopardised by poor conditions through lack of proper Government funding.

When, on deputations, we meet Ministers, they say that they are sympathetic to what they hear, but the reality is that the Budget does not allow local authorities to spend money. We know that the Government do not like local authorities, especially Labour-controlled local authorities, and that that is why they consistently attack them. Equally, the Government suffer the consequences because, in adversity, Labour councillors enjoy the support of the majority of electors.

The Government claimed today that they intend to spend more money on education. That is a necessary step, as we hear from teachers, parents and governors. Let us not have a sleight of hand whereby the education standard spending assessment is increased, but other services are cut and expenditure on other items reduced. That is not increasing the spend. We shall examine the documents that the Government produce and see whether we will get real, extra finance or whether what is given with one hand is taken by the other.

The council settlements should be based on priorities, not political favours—Westminster council obviously comes to mind. Failure to provide adequate funding for local authorities means that people pay more for less. As has been said often today, what the Government give with one hand, they take back with the other. The poorest people cannot afford to accept that.

The Budget fails Britain, as Government policies have been failing Britain for the past 16 years. It is without doubt time for the Tories to go and let in a Labour Government that could do much better in a shorter space of time.

6.51 pm

Sir Alan Haselhurst (Saffron Walden): I welcome my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer's description of his Budget as economically and socially responsible. I think that that is a fair assessment.

Apparently, the Budget lacked what the Leader of the Opposition described as great strategic vision, but we did not get much clue from his remarks as to what made up his great strategic vision. He mentioned that people were paying too much tax and he was critical of specific taxes. He is presumably trailing his coat. If he says that too much tax is being paid, the implication is that he would reduce it. If there are certain taxes that he does not like, the implication is that he would remove them if he had responsibility.

My hon. Friend the Member for Chingford (Mr. Duncan Smith) was wrong when he said that the Leader of the Opposition made no reference to my right hon. and learned Friend's proposals for long-term care; he did. In an aside, he said that, while he welcomed them, he doubted whether all families would benefit when it came to the small print. Presumably that is yet another spending commitment by the Leader of the Opposition. If he thinks that what my right hon. and learned Friend has done is insufficient, he would top it up if he discovered that some families were not going to benefit as much as he thought.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): Does my hon. Friend know whether the Leader of the Opposition would support the proposals in the Budget or oppose those proposals, which I believe are progressive, long overdue and much needed?

Sir Alan Haselhurst: No, we did not get a clue on that. The right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) just left it open. If he thought that what had been done would be insufficient, he might oppose it. Clearly, another spending commitment was lurking around there.

The Leader of the Opposition thought that one of the consequences of the Budget would be a possible increase in council tax. He said that disapprovingly, so we must assume that, if he had responsibility, he would not allow council tax to increase. The only way in which one can do that is either to cause spending to be reduced, or for further amounts of money from the central taxpayer to go out in grant to local authorities.

The Leader of the Opposition deplored the fact that the Chancellor had done nothing to reduce VAT on domestic fuel. Presumably, had he had responsibility, he would have introduced measures to reduce VAT on domestic fuel. The hon. Member for Falkirk, West (Mr. Canavan) estimated that a reduction to 5 per cent. would be worth £500 million. That is another commitment that we have heard from the Leader of the Opposition. He also referred to the possible demise of the community programme, implying that he would not cause that programme to disappear; presumably that is another spending commitment.

Mr. Denis MacShane (Rotherham): When I learned Latin at school, I had immense difficulty with future negative conditionals, which are what the hon. Gentleman is offering us. Could he spend less time on what my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition said, and tell the House whether he thinks that 1p off income tax is enough to save the Tories at the next general election?

Sir Alan Haselhurst: I will come to that. First, I shall deal, as I am entitled to in debate, with the great vision thing which the Leader of the Opposition was implying should be in the Budget for the forthcoming year. I am trying to find the items in his speech which were to add up to this great vision thing. All I have been able to find are commitments to further expenditure or reductions in tax.

The Leader of the Opposition deplored the 17 per cent. cut in the capital programme, so one presumes again that he would restore that cut if he was dissatisfied with the role played by the private finance initiative. He went on to say that he would want council house sales receipts phased into public expenditure—another commitment to expenditure.

Frankly, it does not add up. It is not a vision; it is not even a responsible alternative to what is being proposed. It is all, by implication, saying that the Labour party disapproves of anything that involves disadvantage to people, but is in favour of anything which people might find advantageous.

The only thing that the Leader of the Opposition had the grace not to mention this afternoon was the 10p rate of tax. At least he spared us that insult on top of all the expenditure commitments that were implicit in his remarks.

The right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) began to sound as though he were the most orthodox iron Chancellor in history. He deplored the fact that the

[Sir Alan Haselhurst]

Government were not being sufficiently responsible in bringing down the public sector borrowing requirement. The fact that it is coming down, and is scheduled to come down by £7 billion per annum, was apparently not good enough for the right hon. Gentleman.

If that is the case, he implies that he would bring it down faster. At the moment, the British economy needs that sort of extra discipline like a hole in the head. The PSBR is being brought down responsibly, but it seems that the Liberal party wants to impose much greater controls on the economy, which could only cause recovery to disappear.

The one fixed idea of the right hon. Member for Yeovil is that the standard rate of tax should go up. The right hon. Gentleman's increase in the standard rate of tax to pay for education is always 1p ahead of where the Government stand at any one time. How he could combine in the same speech the fact that he would want to spend extra on education, while at the same time offering a grudging welcome to the changes in allowances that my right hon. and learned Friend has announced today, I do not know. It is yet another Opposition party whose ideas simply do not fit together and make absolutely no economic sense.

Mr. Duncan Smith: He did not like the Labour party, though.

Sir Alan Haselhurst: At least he had that going for him, but they did not seem to like each other much.

The Government are accused of being out of touch, but I was glad to see that the Chancellor has been listening carefully to what members of the public have been saying to us over the past year. That is evidenced by the fact that there is to be increased expenditure on education, health and the police. That expenditure will be welcomed.

On a slightly lower key, the fact that some help will be given on betting duty will also be welcomed by people who have put that point to us. Although one cannot brush aside the revenues of between £3 billion and £4 billion that the Government legitimately receive from alcohol, the fact that the Chancellor has recognised the problems caused for the licensed trade as a result of duty on alcohol, and has tried to help in a small measure, will also be welcomed. My right hon. and learned Friend's proposal to help people with the cost of residential care will strike a chord with a great feeling in the country at present.

Three other problems worry people and cause them to be disaffected with the Government. Those worries have allowed the Opposition parties to cash in on that disaffection. The first is job insecurity, which is one of the great fears in the country. Unemployment is undoubtedly an extremely unpleasant experience for anyone to face. It is the Government's responsibility to try to run the economy in such a way that employment opportunities can be maximised. The key to that is maintaining a low-cost, low-inflation economy, which is exactly what this Budget has been designed to achieve on a sustained basis.

The Budget also provides help for small businesses, which is extremely welcome, because we must look to the small business sector if we are to maximise job opportunities in the future. That is a more sensible approach than believing that a minimum wage and a windfall tax are a magic formula to transform the economy.

Secondly, people are upset by what has happened to house values. I recognise the fact that my right hon. and learned Friend has not felt it appropriate to take direct action today, but if we can establish low inflation as the underlying basis of the economy, it will have a good effect on the housing market and help to boost confidence.

The general climate that the Budget attempts to create will have an indirect beneficial effect on the housing market. If my right hon. and learned Friend's judgment is right in that respect, we may also see a fall in interest rates, which will directly benefit not only present home owners but future ones. Reductions in mortgage interest rates have already been announced, but many people whose interest is calculated annually will not yet have benefited from any reductions. So good news is in the pipeline for home owners and potential home owners, and I hope that that will be sufficient to boost the housing market.

Another issue that has been at the heart of the debate so far is whether tax is of central importance to the vast bulk of people. Some people say that it does not affect how they will vote in a future general election, yet that does not seem to sit easily with the thrust of the remarks that we have heard from Opposition Members today.

It was interesting that, at the end of the Chancellor's speech, the cry of derision audible from the Labour Benches was, "Goodbye." It implied that Conservative Members had something to fear at the hands of the electorate because the Chancellor had not made bigger tax reductions. What do Labour Members think the British public want? Do they believe that they want lower or higher taxes? My instinctive feeling is that, naturally, the public want decent public services, but they want lower taxes.

The Chancellor has framed his tax reductions in the right way, because he cannot be seen simply to have gone for a crude election gimmick. Rather, he has tried to bring help where it is needed and can most fairly be applied. There was a strong case for some fiscal relief to sustain economic recovery. So the idea that one should simply reduce taxes for party advantage is nonsense against the judgment of many economic commentators.

The Opposition give themselves away by being unclear about whether they think the public are keen to have tax reductions. They realise in their hearts that the public want low taxes. If that is true, the public will see through the fog of confusion that characterises Labour's economic policy. Ultimately, it will come down to whether people believe that they will have a fairer regime under the Conservatives than under Labour. The Budget will enable important public services to be sustained at a satisfactory and improving level.

If the economy continues to expand at the rate predicted, and if people's confidence grows—with extra money in their pockets as a result of these measures, they are likely to spend more, thus boosting VAT receipts—it will have a beneficial effect on British companies, so that corporate taxation receipts will also rise. It can be demonstrated that it is possible to boost tax revenues for important public services while taking a smaller chunk out of individuals' earnings in the process. It is perfectly possible to combine those two measures. If taxes are reduced, it does not necessarily follow that less will be available for public services.

Throughout the 1980s, Conservative Governments showed that it was possible to reduce rates of tax while improving public services, and I believe that we are on our way to doing that again next year and for as many more years as people are wise enough to trust the Conservatives with the administration of their affairs. If they change track, they will return to a party that, by its very instincts, will tax higher because it wants to interfere and meddle, believing that it knows better than private business and can outwit the market in spending public money to achieve a given effect. The Labour party has always been shown to be wrong in the past, and, if it ever has the chance, it will be shown to be wrong in the future.

My right hon. and learned Friend has judged the situation right. His claim that this is an economically and socially responsible Budget will be vindicated in my eyes and those of the wider public as the months unfold.

7.8 pm

Mr. Austin Mitchell (Great Grimsby): I will not follow the hon. Member for Saffron Walden (Sir A. Haselhurst) in his adventure in the pluperfect subjunctive, but I noted with interest that he had more to say about what the Labour party has advocated than about his party's Budget. That is probably a wise course.

There is an old saying that a Budget that plays well on the day is viewed as pretty disastrous six months later, whereas a Budget that is disastrous on the day is viewed better six months later. Frankly, that is the only hope for the Budget, because it is a rag-bag of pits and pieces. A curate's egg is good in parts—the Budget was a crate of curate's eggs. That is surprising, because the Budget was an opportunity for great ingenuity and inventiveness.

We have a Conservative party with its back against the wall, facing defeat, and an inventive Chancellor. I am an admirer of the Chancellor. He is extremely clever, insouciant, fun, and capable of clever footwork. If there were rabbits in the hat, he would be the Chancellor to find them. Those rabbits would be numerous, slightly overweight perhaps, and wearing big double bows and Hush Puppies. They would be beautifully fluffed and spruced up, ready to be exhibited to the country. Not a rabbit did we see. That must suggest either that things are worse than the Chancellor has told us, or that the Government's position is more desperate than we thought.

The only rabbit pulled out of the hat was deep-frozen—the public finance initiative. It is a way of pretending to do something; a policy of build now, pay later. If one gets private finance to invest in the public sector, it means that one does not have to pay for a building to be built, but, over the years, a bigger bill must be paid to the people who built it in the first place. We will not even get those buildings soon, so it is clear that it is a policy of building slightly later than the Government need to, and letting a Labour Government pay for it when they come in.

Mr. MacShane: Does my hon. Friend agree that perhaps the Chancellor has a rabbit in his hat, but is saving it for a little later next year?

Mr. Mitchell: I do not know. It is getting desperately late for rabbits, as the season is getting colder. Rabbits do not have much chance of surviving as we reach the end of November. I do not offer great prospects for rabbits. The Budget spells myxomatosis for those rabbits.

We are confronted by two problems, one political and one economic. We are confronted by a recovery that is flagging and at the end of its tether and a Government who are flagging at the end of their tether. The Chancellor did not do much about either of those problems. The political problem is that of a party that is addicted to cutting taxes. It is now quite rightly seen by the public, however, as the high tax party. They believe it is the party that increases taxes.

The Chancellor did nothing to dissipate that image. There was a useful reduction in tax on income from savings, which I welcome, because it is an obviously sensible measure. I also welcome the increase in allowances to take more people out of tax. It is right to do that. Both those measures are good, but they will not have people dancing in the streets of Grimsby or elsewhere, because they were not major measures.

Conservative Members' reaction to the reduction of 1p on the basic rate of income tax had all the warmth of an open fridge door. That reduction will not offset the increase in taxes for which the Government have been responsible since the election. It will not offset people's sense of betrayal about those increased taxes. My leader was perfectly right to describe the Budget as the "1p off, 7p on" Budget. That is the keynote of the Government's policy, and that is what the public will remember.

That 1p reduction would not get past consumer protection legislation were it a sale offer. A reduced sale good has had to have been on sale in the store at the price from which it was supposed to have been reduced, but to increase taxes by 7p and to reduce them by 1p does not fulfil the terms of that legislation. That measure will not help the Conservatives at the election, because the people will not be fooled again. It will not get rid of the feeling that the country has been treated abominably by the Government, who promised not to increase taxes but then increased them massively.

The Budget has failed disastrously to overcome the second problem of the economy. We had a welcome and belated recovery as a result of the Government being forced out of the exchange rate mechanism. They were right to come out, because we should never have gone into that insane trap in the first place. By coming out it, the Government were allowed to reduce interest rates, which allowed the recovery to develop.

Our recovery was not as great as the Italian one, because the Italians wisely devalued by more than we did, and became much more competitive. They were helped in that procedure by something that should be adopted in this country, too, because the Italians took most of the Government politicians off to gaol. The result was a collapse in confidence in the lira, which made Italian manufactured exports even more competitive. It is a very good economic management to take one's politicians to gaol. It destroys confidence in the currency, which makes exports competitive and taxes imports. I commend that strategy to the Government, who should start looking around their Benches for those appropriate for that treatment.

We witnessed an economic recovery in the country, but it is clear that the Chancellor and the Governor of the Bank of England between them set out deliberately to dampen that recovery, if not to abort it, because the Bank of England is obsessed with not letting manufacturers

[Mr. Mitchell]

increase their manufacturing prices. Those manufacturers constantly receive sermons from the Governor, who knows nothing about the dynamics of manufacturing.

Through the ERM deflation, British manufacturers kept exports going without a profit, just to keep their markets and their production going. They were in a desperate situation. They were starved, anorexic, because of the pressures on profits. They needed to increase prices to generate profits to pay off the debts accumulated at that time. When they did so, however, they were lectured by the Governor, who was determined to stop those price increases.

British manufacturers had to increase their prices, because one of the main causes of our tragedy is that the rate of return on manufacturing is half the rate of return on other commercial undertakings in other markets. It is also less than the rate of return on manufacturing in competitor countries. That is why we are not investing, and not expanding production. We are not producing enough profit—enough return—to finance the investment that the country needs.

Manufacturing needed a devaluation because of the way it had been squeezed and hit by deflation. Devaluation represented an opportunity to generate more profit, and it had to be taken. The Bank of England, however, determined as ever to maintain its discipline, and empowered by the published minutes of its meetings with the Chancellor, which give the Governor a platform from which to preach his usual ritual insanities to the country, was determined not to give manufacturers that opportunity. As a result, interest rates were kept far too high when the rate of inflation was coming down. As a result, the value of the pound was kept at a level far higher than it should have been.

In the past couple of years, real interest rates, allowing for inflation, have been double the historic average of real interest rates since the war. The result was an overvalued exchange rate, which was made worse because interest rates were then increased. The fall in those rates was halted, and the value of the pound was pushed back up. By those procedures, the recovery was aborted. I do not know why. Was it to be communautaire? Was it to show a spirit of good will and shared suffering with the French? Was it motivated by a desire to discipline manufacturers?

What was supposed to be an export-led recovery has been halted. Imports have begun to rise again. In the three months to August, United Kingdom exports—trade with the world, including the European Community—went up by 5 per cent., while manufactured imports went up 9 per cent. Manufactured output went up 1 per cent.

The latest non-EC figures, which come out in advance of those EC figures, are even worse. The export-led recovery is tailing off, and imports are beginning to rise again. Imports have a dominant share of our current market—that share has trebled to about 50 per cent. of the market for manufactures. As a result, the manufacturing trade deficit is now widening again. It was £7.1 billion in 1992, but this year the figure, at an annual rate, is £8.9 billion. Such is the deficit in manufactured trade.

Because of the rise in the value of the pound, our relative export trade prices are now 10 per cent. higher than they were in the fourth quarter of 1986. It is no wonder, therefore, that the growth rate is slowing; that manufacturing production has not returned to the level achieved in 1990, and is only a few points above that achieved in 1973. What an abysmal record. It is a record that has been beaten only by a few other countries. Nearly every country has increased manufacturing production by more than half in that period. Very few countries have not increased it. Our pathetic record explains the huge rise in unemployment, which is basically due to the reduction in manufacturing jobs.

The recovery that we have experienced since our departure from the ERM gives us an opportunity to reverse the record. The best way to do that—the action that the Chancellor needs to take now to atone for his failure to do anything in the Budget—is to reduce interest rates. He should take the Governor by the scruff of the neck and tell him, "Eddie, reduce interest rates."

They should be reduced by 2 per cent.—3 per cent. would be better, but 2 per cent. would provide some help, if that is the most that can be forced out of the Governor. A reduction in the exchange rate will turn the economy round, and manufacturers will realise that investment will pay off because exports will pay and the recovery will be sustained. Unless we take that action, we shall not obtain the investment in increased production that we need. The only way to boost exports, to tax imports and to increase productivity—which always increases with production—is to have a competitive exchange rate.

We need to turn round the economy, and the Chancellor needs to take steps to do that now. He has a great opportunity to do so while Europe is immersed in the monetary union folly, and while the French are sacrificing their economy to the policy of the franc fort. Here is our opportunity to revive our economy and boost a recovery that began with our departure from the ERM, but is now petering out. That recovery desperately needs boosting—we can and must boost it by reducing interest rates.

The Budget does nothing to boost the recovery, and must be summed up as a do-nothing Budget. It does nothing for housing, except to promise cuts in the money given to housing associations. It does nothing for local government, except promise increases in council tax. It does nothing for unemployment, except promise cuts in the training budget. It does nothing for the under-25s, except reduce their housing benefit.

It does nothing for a Tory party which is desperate for tax cuts to try to con the electorate back and to win their favour. It certainly does nothing for a nation that cannot wait to get going again when the economy revives, and cannot wait to get the Government out.

7.21 pm

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): It is always a great pleasure—I mean that—to follow the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell). The hon. Gentleman and I share a number of common campaigns, one of which he has highlighted today when talking about his support for manufacturing industry and for increased investment in it. I also share that campaigning spirit with the right hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Mr. Sheldon), who heads an important Committee of the House, the Public Accounts Committee. On many occasions in the House, I have heard him speak with knowledge and fervour about what the Government should do for manufacturing industry, which is perhaps the only source of non-inflationary sustainable economic growth.

The manufacturing industry is vital to a sound, stable economy. Over many years in this place, under—dare I say it—successive Governments, I have highlighted the importance of manufacturing. The benefits that manufacturing can bring to this country have not been properly appreciated by successive Governments.

Like the hon. Member for Great Grimsby, I welcome the fact that we came out of the exchange rate mechanism, which had slaughtered industry and enabled us not only modestly to devalue but to reduce interest rates, which were such a penal impost on investment, which is so essential to manufacturing industry. The hon. Member for Great Grimsby and I also share common ground on the subject of the Governor of the Bank of England; our views are identical. I have said it before and I will say it again: I would award Mr. Eddie George his P45. I agree with the hon. Member for Great Grimsby that the Governor has no understanding of manufacturing industry, of what motivates those in manufacturing industry and what motivates people to create wealth.

I am delighted that, earlier this year, my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor resisted the tremendous pressure brought to bear on him by the Governor of the Bank of England to increase interest rates. We all knew that, if interest rates had been increased, the impact on the economy would have been disastrous. I am delighted that my right hon. and learned Friend resisted that pressure; in hindsight, he was shown to be absolutely right and Mr. Eddie George was shown, yet again, to be absolutely wrong. I agree with the hon. Member for Great Grimsby, who stressed the importance to genuine wealth creation in this country of our industrial and commercial sector.

I did not have much sympathy with the contributions made by the Leader of the Opposition, the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair), or the leader of the Liberal Democrats, the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown). The Leader of the Opposition appeared to criticise the Chancellor, not on what he said in his Budget speech but on matters that the Opposition consider to be their strengths. The Opposition did not say what they would do with the economy and I hope that, during the Budget debate, they will spell out to us and, through the House, to the people of this country precisely how Her Majesty's Opposition, the Labour party, would seek to manage the economy.

I understand from what I have heard since my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor, the Leader of the Opposition and the leader of the Liberal Democrats spoke that Her Majesty's Opposition will not vote against the 1p reduction in the basic rate of tax. I warmly welcome my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor's responsible decision not to cut the basic rate of tax by more than 1p. Many Conservative Members would like to have seen a much greater cut, but I believe that, if my right hon. and learned Friend had reduced the basic standard rate of tax by more than 1p in the pound, the policy would have been misunderstood. I warmly congratulate him on his prudent and responsible move—a move that will not be perceived as the Government seeking to bribe the electorate of this country with their own money. I warmly welcome that decision, which was perhaps not welcomed by Conservative Members as warmly as it should have been.

To continue with my right hon. and learned Friend's strategy, he was entirely right to increase dramatically the tax thresholds. We all know that, if thresholds are raised, the lower-paid benefit to a much greater extent than if the basic rate of tax is reduced. My right hon. and learned Friend has increased the threshold—from the lower rate to the basic standard rate to the higher rate. That will be warmly received and I congratulate my right hon. and learned Friend on his policy.

Ultimately, the people of this country will judge my right hon. and learned Friend's Budget. Tomorrow we shall see what the economic pundits say in the columns of both the heavy and the tabloid press. We shall also hear what the City, the Confederation of British Industry, engineering employers and the smaller business community think of the Budget.

Dare I say to the hon. Member for Middlesbrough (Mr. Bell) that I see the Budget—I have not been prompted by anyone to say it—as the first stage of a package. The second stage will be seen this time next year. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will accept that that is the strategy of the Budget. We have laid the foundations for the Budget of November 1996, and the benefits of today's Budget will arrive in people's pockets in April, May, June and July next year.

I accept that the benefits—which may be substantial—in next year's Budget will not arrive in people's pockets until, possibly, the 1997 general election campaign; indeed, I believe that will happen. We may be in an interesting position then, however: if the sound, stable economy of November 1996 allows the Chancellor to announce some goodies—if this year's satisfactory economic position is improved further—the election may be contested on the basis of whether the official Opposition support those extra tax reductions.

Mr. Jon Owen Jones (Cardiff, Central): Earlier, in an intervention, the hon. Gentleman commended the Chancellor for not attempting to bribe the electorate with their own money. Is he now saying that there is a better time at which to do that—this time next year?

Mr. Winterton: No, I am saying that, by this time next year, it will be clear that we have a strong economy. In terms of economic activity and strength, we shall be at the top rather than the bottom of league tables. I do not merely quote Tory party sources; I quote the International Monetary Fund and the OECD. Many people now predict that the United Kingdom's economy will become stronger.

In his interesting speech, the Leader of the Opposition emphasised that only a pathetic 1 per cent. tax reduction had been made, as against the 7p increase that had taken place under a Conservative Government since the last general election. Is it not appropriate, however, for the country to return to its people some of the money that has been, and is being, taken from them, if it can afford to do so? I predict that—given the responsible, prudent, constructive and progressive Budget that has been announced today—we shall build on the strength of our economy.

We want low interest rates and low inflation. We have that, and I predict that, before Christmas, there will be a modest reduction in interest rates. That will give further confidence to industry and commerce; our exports will benefit, there will be more investment and we shall have a stronger economy. That will enable us next year to repay to the taxpayers some of the money that they currently entrust to the Government of the day.

[Mr. Winterton]

I look forward to the future with confidence. If there is an aspect of the Budget that makes me a little sad and disappointed, it is the decision of the Chancellor and his advisers not to introduce a package to help the housing market. As many hon. Members know, I have championed the property-owning democracy for many years, and it is generally agreed that the housing market is in a very depressed state. We need to give it a kick-start—and we could do that in a way that I have suggested publicly in the House.

We could help first-time buyers by raising the MIRAS threshold from 15 per cent. to 25 per cent., and raising the threshold for tax relief eligibility from £30,000 to £50,000. The arrangement could be limited to five or 10 years, but it would kick-start the housing market without creating the property inflation of the late 1980s that led to the severe inflation problems faced by the Government as a result of certain decisions made by Lord Lawson when he was Chancellor.

I am prepared reluctantly to accept the Treasury's judgment. I believe that the Chancellor is right in saying that the housing market will recover in any event, as long as we have a low inflation economy with low interest rates. If I may be party political for a moment, however, I must add that I do not expect that improvement to feed through in time to assist the Government in a general election in the spring of 1997.

I feel that this Conservative Government owe a great deal to those whom they encouraged to buy homes—council houses, newly built houses and houses in the private sector. Home ownership has proved to be a successful policy, and has served the Conservative party well in many general elections; I only hope that the Chancellor's expressed belief that the housing market will recover is proved right. Sadly, I do not think that any such recovery will produce the confidence that will help the party to win the next general election.

My right hon. and learned Friend has felt the pulse of the nation. When I ask my constituents—and those in other constituencies that I visit, particularly in the north-west—about their main concerns, they cite the national health service, education and law and order. The order in which they mention those concerns may be reversed, but they represent people's priorities. The Government have allocated substantial additional resources to all three. An extra £878 million or so is being given to education, of which some £774 million will be channelled directly into local education authorities. I hope that the money will then be channelled into the classroom, so that children can benefit.

I was saddened by the attempt by the leader of the Liberal Democrats, the right hon. Member for Yeovil, to undermine that substantial additional tranche of education spending. I wonder what would appease him. What would he like us to do? Since 1979, the Government have dramatically increased the additional sums spent per pupil: spending has increased by some 50 per cent. in real terms.

Another subject close to my heart is the national health service. Opposition Members will doubtless accept that my commitment to the service is second to none in the House; it is shared by many, if not all, Opposition Members, and by a pretty good number of Conservative Members. I am delighted that my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor has decided to increase NHS spending by £1.3 billion in the next financial year. That is necessary if people's expectations are to be met and if we are to be able to take advantage of the huge advances in medical technology and medical science; so we should do just that.

Again, on law and order, as we know, there will be additional money for 5,000 more police officers. What is more—here I have a vested interest in relation to my constituency—the Government will provide resources for 10,000 closed circuit television cameras. Macclesfield's application for closed circuit television cameras in its town centre failed in the current year. I hope that any new application will be much more sympathetically considered, bearing in mind that additional sums are being allocated, and that it will be successful.

Again, my credentials for believing that the Government must be involved in infrastructure expenditure and have a duty to provide communications, whether by rail, road or air, to ensure that we are as efficient as possible, are, I think, second to none. Obviously, I have long supported the initiative that money should be attracted into infrastructure from the private sector. I hope that the private finance initiative will come up with the resources that the Government have estimated and have put to the House in the Chancellor of the Exchequer's Budget statement.

If industry is to be successful, if we are to increase exports and if, for instance, we are to take advantage of the channel tunnel—I mean not just the south-east but the north-east, the north-west, the northern region, Scotland and Wales—clearly, we must have considerable investment not only in our rail infrastructure but in our road infrastructure. I am delighted to support the proposal, and I encourage banks and other investors to find out how far they can go to take advantage of the private finance initiative to assist this country to be as competitive as possible.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has been prudent—perhaps I am repeating some of my remarks. I am one of those Conservative Members who would have been upset and concerned if the basic rate tax reduction had been more than the 1p that he announced. It would have given the wrong signals. It might have resulted in an increase rather than a decrease in interest rates, and therefore it would have done a disservice to this country's long-term economy.

I hope, however, that the Paymaster General will take back to the Chancellor of the Exchequer my congratulations on his imagination, prudence and responsibility. I sat on this Bench deeply concerned that we might have sacrificed a golden opportunity to give the Government a chance to continue governing this country after the next election. I have no hesitation in supporting this Budget and the prudent resolutions that will result from it, especially in relation to the matter raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Saffron Walden (Sir A. Haselhurst): the position of the elderly and of people who may need to use either private nursing homes or private residential homes in their declining years. My right hon. and learned Friend's imaginative proposals to enable those people to receive tax relief on the savings and policies that they will take out to help pay for that cost are long overdue and will prove to be popular.

I have met many people who feel considerable resentment because they have worked hard, been prudent and saved during their working lives but, having saved, have been expected to pay the full and heavy cost of nursing home care or residential home care. Such facilities—again, I have crossed with my party on this—were previously provided by the national health service free at the point of delivery in hospital geriatric wards. We can all say that that was not ideal and that people's quality of life there was not as we would have wished. That may be true, but I have come across some desperate cases where people who have saved £30,000, £40,000 or £50,000 have gone through that money in two and a half years because of the heavy cost of certain nursing home fees, especially if they required an exceptional level of care, with fees up to £500, £550 or even £600 a week. It does not take a great mathematician to know that £500 does not go into £50,000 that many times.

The move of which the Chancellor of the Exchequer has given notice today will be warmly received and will remove the anger and frustration of many people who have felt that, having have been prudent, all their hard-earned savings will go merely to pay for residential care.

I warmly welcome the pronouncements of my right hon. and learned Friend. He is building for the future and I look forward with immense confidence to the Budget this time next year.

7.46 pm

Mrs. Anne Campbell (Cambridge): As I listened to the Chancellor of the Exchequer this afternoon, I asked myself the questions: what does this Budget do for Britain and what does it do for my constituency? To try to visualise what effect this Budget will have, I tried to picture groups of my constituents and to assess their reaction to what the Chancellor said.

I think first about parents in my constituency who are extremely angry about local government funding and about the enormous cuts that took place last year. I think not only about their anger, but of their concern for educational standards, the level of cuts that schools have experienced, local library closures, cuts in community education and all the things that we care desperately about in our communities. I also think about parents who are dependent on child care, about the real lack of child care that we experience in this country, and about the difficulty that parents have in finding work that allows them to take proper care of their children because of the lack of public child care facilities.

I think about council tenants and housing association tenants because in Cambridge more than 4,000 families are on the waiting list for public housing. Nothing in what the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced today will help those people or give them hope for the future. That relates not only to people who are homeless, but to people who are inadequately housed.

During my advice surgeries, often, families with two or three children come to see me. They occupy two-bedroom flats, often they live on the second or third floor, where there is nowhere for the children to play. We should be doing something about the pressure and stress that those parents feel when they look after children in such conditions. We should be trying to help.

I know that many people are employed in temporary work. They are concerned about job insecurity. Nothing has been done in the Budget to help them. We have seen some measures to help small businesses, which certainly need more Government help. I want to describe a business that belonged to two of my constituents. The measures announced today would have done nothing to help them.

Yes, there are tax cuts and I believe that they will be welcomed by those on low pay who are finding life a struggle. However, that must be measured against the background of the 7p that has been put on taxes since the last election. The Budget has reversed just 1p of that. We have a 7p up and a 1p down Budget. I believe that taxes should not have been reversed in that way. I would have liked to see a reduction in VAT on fuel. That would have helped more people who are struggling now to make ends meet.

A short time ago I was visited by two of my constituents who ran a transport business. It was a very successful business which was expanding rapidly. It was the sort of company that the Government would feel was a shining light and an example to others of how to conduct a business.

Two or three years ago, the Bonfields found it necessary to buy new lorries, which were purchased on credit agreements. I understand from different manufacturers that the lorries proved to be of unmerchantable quality. They suffered multiple mechanical breakdowns, not so much in this country as in eastern Europe and elsewhere. My constituents found that, despite promises that had been given at the time, there were totally inadequate servicing arrangements, and the business rapidly began to lose money. It lost money to such an extent that the Bonfields went out of business.

When my constituents set about trying to sue the finance companies which had supplied the money to pay for the trucks, they found that, because of an exclusion clause in the contract—it was a completely standard contract between a finance company and a small business—they were prevented from taking any legal action.

My constituents were so concerned about that that they came to me to see whether I would lobby the Department of Trade and Industry about trying to improve the regulations applying to contracts between the larger finance companies and small businesses. I received an answer from the Department which told me that the Government, far from trying to tighten the regulations, were thinking of abolishing them completely. That illustrates well that the Government's attitude towards small businesses consists of just warm words. Describing small businesses as the engine of the economy is fine, and I believe they are, but we are not giving them the help they need if they are to conduct their business successfully.

So often we find that the stakes are raised in favour of large businesses and large finance companies and the small businesses have no teeth in the face of that. Small businesses could be given more help and, although I welcome what is in the Budget, we could be doing far more to ensure the survival of those important companies.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: Will the hon. Lady tell us what she would do for small businesses?

Mrs. Campbell: I just described a situation which arose because of a lack of regulation. Nobody wants red

[Mrs. Campbell]

tape, but we want to see proper protection for small businesses, particularly when they are dealing with large finance companies which are cleverly trying to raise the stakes to ensure that they do not suffer if anything goes wrong. That is unfair to the small businesses.

Today we have seen a small amount of help given to families with the child care allowance for those on family credit. I welcome that, but it does not go far enough and is not sufficient to help many of those families get out of the poverty trap. The child care allowance for those on family credit was introduced in a previous Budget and I believe that a pathetically small number of parents have been able to take advantage of it so far. The problem is not with the allowance but with the fundamental changes that are needed in the social security system which will allow people to climb out of the poverty trap.

The real problem is that, because of the way in which the tax and benefits system works, parents often find it more beneficial to be on benefit than to go out to work, even if that work is not particularly low-paid. This is some attempt by the Government to try to reverse that, but it does not go far enough and I do not believe that it will help many parents.

Over the past few years, we have seen a real rise in the number of single-parent families. Often that is not because parents choose to live as single-parent families. It has been found that 60 per cent. of single-parent families have been through divorce, separation or bereavement. Only 4 per cent. of those families are women under the age of 20 who have had babies out of wedlock. We should be giving families more help to climb out of the poverty trap.

I was struck by the case of another of my constituents who came to see me. It was a woman with two children who believed that she was in a stable relationship. She had a part-time job. Unfortunately, because of a breakdown in the relationship with her boyfriend, he threw her out of the property in which they were both living. She found that she was unable to continue working because of the way in which the tax and benefits system operated. It was a crazy situation. She found that the Government were paying her £600 a month in benefit, whereas, if they had instead been prepared to pay her £200 towards the cost of child care, she would have been able to continue working. That is the sort of absurdity that creates real difficulties for people.

Many such families are living in dire poverty. They do not have enough to eat and cannot buy proper clothes and shoes for their children. Surveys have shown that 90 per cent. of single parents wish to return to work. Cambridge has a high number of lone-parent families and, at the same time, the city has a skills shortage. It seems absurd that we cannot marry up the women, many of whom have high skills levels, with the jobs that need to be filled, because of the way in which the tax and benefits system works.

We want to see not just straightforward cuts in benefits and the fiddling around the edges that have been announced in today's Budget, but a real restructuring of the social security system, which will alleviate the poverty trap and allow parents to return to work without being worse off.

In Cambridge, we are taking an innovative approach by setting up a series of one-stop shops to give parents the advice they need when they are trying to get back to work. Such parents need advice on benefits child care, jobs and training. That information is usually scattered, and it is difficult for parents to travel around the city or to make telephone calls to obtain advice from different places. We are hoping that putting all that advice in one place will prove to be a real boost to parents who want to return to employment.

As I said earlier, there is major concern about the effect of the Budget on education. I have been doing a little arithmetic while hon. Members have been speaking, trying to work out what the local government settlement will mean for education in my county. Last year, it meant that Cambridgeshire county council had to cut its spending by £17 million. In fact, it took £10 million from its reserves, so the cut in expenditure was only £7 million. I say "only £7 million", but that still meant huge cuts in school budgets, with the loss of more than 100 teaching posts and many auxiliary posts. Some schools escaped the consequences by taking money from their reserves. However, unless there is a huge injection of money, there will have to be further cuts in the coming year.

There have also been huge cuts in the library service. Opening hours have been reduced and there have even been some full-scale library closures. My local library, which is celebrating its 100th anniversary, will, I am sad to say, close next year. It is well used by elderly people and those with young families. Indeed, from an early age all my children borrowed books from the library when learning to read. There have been huge cuts in community education. Youth Action, a club in the Cambridge area which teaches young people socially useful skills, has suffered huge cuts and there is now a danger that it will have to close.

What does the Budget mean for Cambridge and Cambridgeshire? The usual calculation is that the county gets about 1 per cent. of the money that goes into the general budget, so 1 per cent. of the £780 million that the Chancellor announced today will mean, if my calculation is correct, that Cambridgeshire will get about £8 million. However, we must remember that last year we had to cut expenditure by £17 million, so we are still short of £9 million on our 1994-95 settlement—and that is in cash terms, without taking account of inflation.

Many of the parents who have worked so hard writing to the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, the Secretary of State for the Environment and everybody else they could think of, will be bitterly disappointed. When today's announcement is translated into the effect on their schools, libraries and community groups, I fear that the cuts will be as bad as we had all imagined they would be. Although the £8 million will make up for some of last year's cuts, it is not anything like enough to reverse their effects completely. There will be a real reduction in the standard of education in Cambridgeshire as a direct result of the cuts that today's Budget has not reversed.

I want to raise two other matters. First, I welcome the additional help for elderly people who have to pay for residential care—although again I have to say that it is too little, too late. It will do nothing to help those who have to

sell their homes to pay for private residential care, because the amount by which they have to reduce their income to prevent them from having to contribute is too small.

I also welcome the increase in tax on tobacco. My personal view is that smokers cost the national health service millions of pounds for care that they would not need if they did not smoke, so it is right that they should be taxed to pay for that. Of course, not only do the smokers suffer from their own smoke: non-smokers inhale cigarette smoke which can lead to breathing difficulties and even cancer and heart disease. I hope that the tax increase will encourage people to stop smoking.

The measures in the Budget are minor. The Chancellor is fiddling while Britain burns. What was needed was a Budget to raise investment levels, to reduce unemployment—especially among the young—and to increase the real level of prosperity among our people. The Budget tackles none of those, and I do not think that the Chancellor intended that it should. He wanted a Budget that would set the Conservatives on course to win the next election. That will be a difficult task. It is five years since John Major was elected leader of the Labour party—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. I remind the hon. Lady that she must refer to the Prime Minister by his title or by his constituency.

Mrs. Campbell: I apologise, Madam Deputy Speaker.

It is five years since the right hon. Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major) was elected leader of the Labour party—

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Campbell: In a moment.

I want to explain what has happened since that momentous event. On average, there have been six tax rises every year; unemployment has risen by almost 500,000; average economic growth, excluding oil, has been only 1 per cent. per year; annual house repossessions have more than doubled; more than one third of those who bought houses in the year that the right hon. Gentleman became Prime Minister now have negative equity; the number of households dependant on income support has risen by 40 per cent.; the cost to taxpayers of benefits resulting from Government failure has risen by £750 per taxpayer; and recorded crime has risen by 12 per cent.

Mr. Bottomley: Will the hon. Lady give way now?

Mrs. Campbell: Not at the moment.

What has happened will not be easy to reverse through a simple Budget tax cut—and certainly not by a 1p in the pound tax cut. The Chancellor has failed dismally, as was evident from the expressions on the faces of his Back Benchers. We saw the looks of dismay as the Chancellor sat down and they realised that that was it. The underlying weakness of the economy and the trade deficit that was announced last Thursday—the worst ever—show why the Chancellor has been wholly unable to satisfy his Back Benchers. The lack of investment, job insecurity and the lack of any increase in prosperity will not be reversed by the Budget. It is no wonder that the Tories were so dismayed by what they heard.

8.7 pm

Mr. Barry Jones (Alyn and Deeside): I am glad to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge (Mrs. Campbell), who made a cogent and caring speech.

I wanted a Budget to create employment, to invest in our manufacturing industries and to create a climate of job security. There is a climate, but it is a climate of fear of losing one's job. Whether one is a humble labourer or a princely manager, that sense of fear intensifies as each month goes by. I do not believe that the Budget will dispel that fear in any way. That is my main complaint about and greatest disappointment in today's Budget. The fear of losing one's job exists even in the cradles of industrial activity in the northern regions, in Wales and in Scotland, just as it exists in the previously prosperous settlements of Hampshire, Sussex and Surrey.

I had hoped for a strategic Budget. I had hoped for a Budget for secure jobs. I had hoped for a Budget that would put manufacturing first, above all else. It should have been a Budget to restore Britain's manufacturing greatness to what it was in yesteryear. Instead, it was a Budget to restore the electoral fortunes of the Conservative party. It was a Budget that was clearly conceived in panic, designed to meet a coming electoral crisis and, I thought, crafted with old-fashioned political cunning. Certainly it was a speech delivered with great panache and steely resolve by the Chancellor.

The Budget speech was competently and confidently delivered by a Chancellor who, most of us would say, had earned a political reputation as a mugger—a mugger of teachers, policemen, doctors and nurses. I must say, however, that he is a cheerful bully—a very cheerful bully—but today he was a parliamentary conjuror. What were the balls in the air? They were taxes, concessions, impositions, cuts, statistics, benefits, promises and giveaways.

I summed it up in my own mind as the Budget of the short term. It does not deal with Britain's pressing problems, specifically that of getting young people back into work. In my view, that is a gigantic task, and the Chancellor ignored the challenge. One in 12 people are out of work; one in six young people in our country are now jobless; 41 per cent. of young black men are out of work; and 61 per cent. of young black men are jobless in Greater London.

Chronic long-term unemployment persists. I understand that more than 800,000 people have been out of work for more than a year, and that 650,000 18 to 24-year-olds are out of work. By any measure, they are the statistics of despair. They guarantee more crime—more drugs-related crime—and they demonstrate an unforgivable injustice. Those statistics put to shame recent Administrations who have received £120 billion of oil revenues since 1979. Those same Conservative Administrations have also received about £80 billion-worth of revenues from privatisation receipts. It is clear that this Budget is a great missed opportunity.

I wanted a Budget to get young people off the streets and to give them work, better training, hope and self-respect. If we do not find meaningful work for the tens of thousands of young people, our society will fall apart.

On the bigger estates in my constituency, there are homes in which neither father nor son has work. There are streets full of citizens who are out of work and have

[Mr. Barry Jones]

no reasonable prospect of gaining jobs. That is an injustice and a scandal. It is also a dangerous failing that bodes ill for the future of our society. In my county of Clwyd, some 13,000 people are now out of work. There are 2,500 unemployed people in my constituency, and Wales as a whole has a major problem with long-term unemployment.

The priority must be to create real jobs with real wages and real status. Too many young men and women now leave school and college with no prospect of meaningful employment. Too many housing estates are suffering a terrifying drugs problem; burglary is rampant; there is perpetual vandalism; pensioners suffer foul-mouthed verbal abuse; and women are fearful of going about their business.

Lack of employment is the main problem for 18 to 24-year-olds. The Budget offers no certain remedies for those who have no work, but fear stalks the employed in the now embattled steel and coal communities in my country of Wales. We have made huge sacrifices in our country. We have co-operated constantly in demanning; we have increased productivity and ensured flexibility at work, but the fear of losing one's job remains.

My own community of Alyn and Deeside in north-east Wales experienced Europe's largest ever redundancy scheme in 1980. There were 8,000 Shotton steel job losses in only three months. The losses occurred between new year and Easter. They were a severe blow to my constituency, and the effects of such titanic losses remain to this day. I can report that we have made a new economy, but it is not large or prosperous enough to offer work to all those who lost out in the steel closures. Many of the new jobs are part-time or for women only; many are unskilled and often pay lamentably poor wages. Fear and unemployment remain.

A further problem is that my excellent constituency district council of Alyn and Deeside is to be merged with another on 1 April to form the new county of Flintshire. The leadership of the unitary Flintshire county council fears that we shall start the new financial year with a large budget shortfall. Flintshire fears that the quality of services in, for example, community care and housing will decline or that council taxes will rise considerably. We are millions of pounds short. So that the new Flintshire county council might begin its life with a just and fair apportionment of money from the Welsh Office, I plead with the Chancellor, even at this late hour, not to starve Flintshire of cash. It simply wants fair play, so that it can continue to deliver first-class services and avoid a major increase in council taxes.

The Budget is supremely indifferent to the long-term needs of the economy. Our manufacturing base has shrunk, the balance of trade is wretched, our industries need investment, there are major skills shortages, our society is divided and there is a large underclass that has no prospect of meaningful work or prosperity.

The Chancellor was applauded noisily by Conservative Back Benchers as if he had performed a heroic parliamentary feat, but it was a hollow triumph, if triumph it was. When the cheering fades, the industrial landscape of a once great Britain will still be littered with the awesome wreckage of our once mighty manufacturing industries. The following list is frightening: the coal, shipbuilding, steel, aerospace, cement, brickmaking, motor, rolling stock and textile industries comprise a grim roll-call of decline, shrinkage and disappearance. They have experienced a blizzard of redundancies since the early 1980s.

A terrible reckoning lies ahead for the Government and the Chancellor. That reckoning will come at the election. Clearly, from what has been said today, that election will be in 1997—probably as late as May in that year—not 1996. But whenever the general election takes place, it will be a disaster for Her Majesty's Government—a disaster approaching Canadian proportions.

8.19 pm

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): The hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mr. Jones) did a service to the House in reminding us of the differential impact of unemployment on young people. If there is a discernible difference throughout the United Kingdom between young blacks and whites, as there is in Northern Ireland between young Catholics and young Presbyterians and young Protestants, such problems need to be tackled if we want to be fair to people. Whether it is a matter of expectations or of opportunity, we have a duty to ensure that one cannot tell whether someone is likely to find work because of the colour of their skin or the denomination under which they have been brought up.

I hope that, in Northern Ireland, we will not be able to say that a 16-year-old or 18-year-old young Roman Catholic will be three times as likely to be unemployed as a Protestant. I hope that, in London and other cities, we will not be able to say that, just because someone is of an Afro-Caribbean or Asian background, or just does not appear to be the normal sort of colour of people who have been here with different employment experiences, they are more likely to be unemployed. We must tackle the issue and show that there are reasons to work at school and to get training, and reasons why people should be chosen for jobs—their qualifications—rather than disqualified on prejudice.

I pay tribute to hon. Members on both sides of the House who have tackled such issues openly. The problem needs tackling in employment, in terms of clubs, in housing, everywhere, so that people are judged on their merits, needs, talents and abilities, and not on what appears to be the colour of their skin. I look forward to the time when the colour of someone's skin is about as interesting as the colour of someone's hair or eyes or height or weight. It may be noticeable, but it should not be what determines how people are treated.

I say to the hon. Member for Cambridge (Mrs. Campbell) that, besides a slip in her copious notes about the party in which the Prime Minister has been for all his time in Parliament, her arithmetic was not quite right to suggest that, for each year that my right hon. Friend has been Prime Minister, unemployment has grown by 500,000. I thought that we were celebrating the end of his fifth year as Prime Minister. If unemployment had risen by 500,000 each year that he has been in office, the figure would now be 2.5 million. It is less than that, and the figure was not zero when he took over.

So my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister deserves congratulations on helping to get unemployment down. Those congratulations should be shared with people in industry and the services, who have helped to create the

jobs. In the end, customers guarantee jobs. Indeed, customers around the world and in this country have caused the resurgence in our motor industry, and have helped by buying typewriters, electronic processors, computers and television sets made in this country.

Many things which we previously thought were always going to be made overseas are now being made here. I have in my pocket my Psion computer, which is made in Greenford in Middlesex. Who would have guessed that 16 years ago, during the last days of the Labour Government?

In this debate, many hon. Members have spoken about the major issues, and I shall not repeat what has been said, except to echo that if the so-called average family gains by £450 a year, that is a bonus, and it is far better to receive it in tax reductions than by artificial pay increases which lead to a resurgence of inflation.

We can rightly say that one area of agreement across the Floor of the House is on the belief that inflation is bad. It is bad for employment opportunities, and there needs to be the kind of rigour that we have seen during at least the past three years, and which it would be right to say that we saw in the last three years of the Labour Government up to 1970. In times in between, both the Labour party and the Tory party forgot about some of the essentials.

I turn to one or two details of the Budget. I welcome some of the changes to the taxation of motor vehicle fuels. To recognise the lower levels of pollution caused by liquified petroleum products and compressed natural gas is worth while, and builds on the changes made to charge a lower excise duty, and therefore a lower retail price for unleaded fuel.

I welcome what the Chancellor has done to take away the tax subsidy for super unleaded, which I regard as an unnecessary fuel. It is not important, nor does it have a real market share, and the sooner that people decide on commercial grounds to get rid of it, the better.

Having said that, for those who use petrol, I think that I am right in saying that about a third of vehicles are still refilled with leaded fuel. When I was at the Department of Transport as an assistant Minister from 1986 to 1989, it was calculated that only 10 per cent. of vehicles needed to use leaded fuel. That means that, for every vehicle that should use leaded fuel, probably twice as many use it unnecessarily. I recommend that people contact their motoring organisation or the car's manufacturer, and check whether their car can use unleaded fuel or can be adjusted to use it. That would be a saving in the pocket.

The Treasury team have missed one opportunity to extend the alteration of fuel duties on environmental grounds. They should look at what I call low-sulphur diesels—otherwise known as city diesel, which is not a proprietary name. I am aware, as a result of the parliamentary answer that I received today, that, in fact, most of its low levels of sales are made through one supermarket chain of stores.

If there were a sensible rearrangement of the duties on that low-sulphur diesel, not only would more people think of using it, but more of the major oil suppliers would think of making it available on their forecourts. As they get rid of the super unleaded, there would be an opportunity to provide the cleaner diesel.

I cannot go into the full air quality details in a short speech, but if the Government chose to make an adjustment at some stage during the year rather than waiting for the next Budget, it would be greatly welcome. At the moment, many people who have moved to diesel wonder whether they were right. I suspect that providing the opportunity for a low-sulphur diesel would be welcome, and the tax regime should give it some encouragement.

While on that subject, I hope that some vehicles which are used almost exclusively in towns and cities—taxis and metropolitan buses—should also be given great encouragement to use a low-pollution fuel. I suspect that it would be possible for such vehicles to move on to the use of liquified petroleum gas or compressed natural gas, which would produce far fewer pollutants than diesel. I do not know the difference between low-sulphur diesel and those cleaner fuels, but such a move would be sensible. Vehicles which are working virtually all day in built-up areas must be contributing a fair amount to pollution.

I congratulate the Chancellor on not giving supernatural adjustments to the married person's tax allowance. Back in the days when Lord Healey was Chancellor, he claimed that, instead of raising child benefit, he would raise the married man's tax allowance, on the grounds that it would help people with children. Half the couples receiving the married man's allowance have two earners, so there is no need to have a super-allowance, and half the people getting the married person's allowance do not have dependent children at the time, so, in those cases, children would not be helped at all.

Such help is very badly targeted. In time, I suspect that the best thing would be to be able to transfer the personal allowance from a non-worker of a married couple to the earner, as a way of applying some adjustment in a one-earner household.

That brings me to child benefit, and I urge the Government again to make two changes to it. I re-emphasise that my right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) is right in emphasising the remarks made by Lady Thatcher, that it is correct to have an allowance for children. When one goes from having two incomes and two mouths to feed to having—normally—one income and three mouths to feed, taxable capacity goes down, needs go up and an allowance is worth while and justified.

The second question is whether it should be a tax or a cash allowance. For two reasons, it would be better to provide a cash allowance. The first is that a tax allowance gives greater help to people on higher rates of tax—who justifies that? Secondly, a flat allowance is available whether someone is working or not, and whether they are separated or not. The money is a reliable source of income, and in practice, the only reliable of source of income in a household with children.

The mistakes we made were to say that it was to be set in theory by the Secretary of State for Social Security. In practice, it is not an income support measure, relating to means testing. It should be settled openly by the Chancellor as part of the Budget and in line with other tax allowances. That would avoid the Chief Secretary to the Treasury asking the Secretary of State for Social Security whether he really wanted an increase in child benefit, or whether that increase should be given to those who are really poor.

[Mr. Peter Bottomley]

In any one year, we should always try to give cash to those who are really poor. If we do that for a succession of years, we take away the citizenship of benefit for children. I would call it the child cash allowance, and have it settled by the Chancellor. I hope that, during the next year or two, the Government will do that.

I am glad that the Chancellor did not change the arrangements for mortgage relief. I am a great supporter of the idea that those who want to buy their own homes should be able to do so, regardless of whether they are housing association tenants or other social tenants, and whether or not they are starting for the first time. I am also a great believer in the idea that people who want to move from home ownership to being tenants should be able to do that, too.

Those who argue for house price inflation are, I believe, missing the point. We want to make homes affordable for people, and there is no reason why most of people's disposable income should go towards having a more expensive home. It would be better to put more of their money into a small business, or some other such investment, rather than all their assets and everything else being tied to the value of their home, while they make the highest mortgage payments possible.

I welcome the fact that the changes over the past two or three years have encouraged people to pay off their mortgages when they can. That strikes me as proper. Five or 10 years ago, the system encouraged people to have as large a mortgage as possible, and to keep it going as long as possible, well into retirement. That was perverse, and the present arrangements encourage people to pay off their mortgages as and when they can.

My last argument is about bringing the family life cycle and the family perspective into social and economic policy. The Budget can help with that. Over the past 40 or 45 years, we have often made the mistake of looking at still photographs of society and saying, "Here are the apparently unchanging elderly; here are the people who are out of work; there are the lone parents; there are the people of one ethnic background or another."

Instead, we should look at the things that people have in common—the ups and downs of needs and resources, as we change from being dependent children to being independent, and as we move to family formation, and sometimes to family deformation. We move from being in work to being out of work, from being ill to being healthy; we may become disabled, or we may retire. We may be retired and well, and then retired and looking after elderly parents, which is the lot of many people as they move into retirement.

Those predictable ups and downs affect each of us differently, but the general pattern is obvious. When we look at the children born today, we are looking at the pensioners of 55, 65, or 75 years' time. The arrangements that we make now give them signals about what would be good for them or for society, about what contributions they can make, and about what they can expect both privately and publicly.

We should ask the Government every five years or so to feed a family life cycle analysis into social and economic policy. That would be a way of trying to open up some of the targets that might be useful for people—and I can give one example of it that has nothing to do with the Budget.

When I brought the family perspective and the family life cycle into the treatment of drink-driving, we managed to cut out two thirds of drink-driving, and then two thirds of the deaths, in two years, with no change in law, in sentencing or in enforcement. It was a change of culture—the sort of change in understanding that leads to a change in behaviour, which in turn leads to a change in consequences. The same approach could be used in many other areas that matter.

Finally—I apologise to those who have heard this from me too often before, in private as well as in public—I do not approve of cutting the overseas aid budget. This country has been getting wealthier over the years. Our long-term commitment has been to give 70p in every £100 of our national wealth to countries far worse off than ourselves, yet at present we give about 31p, if that. As we become wealthier, we should give more, not less.

I recognise that, calculated on any proper basis, the cut is only about 5 per cent.—less than that made by the Americans or the Swedes, and, for all I know, by the Germans too. But it is this country for which we are responsible. Were I to take off the same proportion of three-line Whips as the Government have taken off overseas aid, I should be looking forward to taking off one vote in every 20, at my own convenience, as a way of expressing my views on overseas aid.

Whatever arguments may be advanced by some people who claim to be more right-wing than I—although I think that in fact I am more right-wing than they on most subjects, such as mortgage interest relief and the married man's tax allowance—I ask my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Treasury Bench to put the overseas aid budget back on some kind of path, however long-term, that leads towards meeting the Government's commitments. I shall go on saying that as long as I remain in the House.

8.33 pm

Mr. Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh, Leith): The Budget has already been called the "7p up, 1p down" Budget, and we shall continue to remind the people of this country that, after it, the typical family will still pay £650 more in tax than at the time of the general election.

We shall also point out that the fundamental reason for those statistics is the weakness of the economy, and the continuing high levels of unemployment. The faces on the Government Back Benches at the end of the Chancellor's speech showed that Conservative Members were not deceived about those basic facts, in spite of the Chancellor's bluster at the beginning of his speech, when he spoke of "our strong economic fundamentals", as illustrated by "consumer spending on a firm upward trend" and "our current account surplus with the tiger economies".

In his selective presentation of facts, the Chancellor omitted to say that our current account deficit was a record £1.2 billion with the non-European Union economies last month, and that our consumer spending in the most recent quarter grew by all of 0.1 per cent. That was because of continuing job insecurity, economic inequality and unemployment.

But the Chancellor could not conceal some more fundamental figures. Indeed, the public sector borrowing requirement of £29 billion is at the heart of the Budget—up £8 billion from his prediction last year. He said that the difference stemmed from lower inflation and lower growth, but inflation was more or less what he predicted, so he really meant that the reason was lower growth.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman's prediction of last year that growth would be 3.25 per cent. this year has today been reduced to 2.75 per cent. Unfortunately, some people say that even that may be too optimistic. For example, in the previous quarter, growth was only 2.1 per cent. With the build-up of stocks, there are also worrying signs that destocking may mean a cut in output in the next quarter and thereafter.

Today, Goldman Sachs even predicted a growth rate next year of 1.6 per cent. We must hope that it is wrong, but the growth figures are certainly gloomy, and in a spiralling decline. The result of those figures is the continuing high level of unemployment, illustrated by the staggering fact that one in five non-pensioner households has no adult in work, compared with one in 12 in 1979. The underlying cause of that, and of the low growth, is the failure of investment to take off in the economy—the continuing failure of investment that we have seen for many years under the Conservative Government.

It is significant that the Chancellor did not give the investment figures in any detail today. He did not say that, over the most recent quarter, investment had increased by only 0.6 per cent., and he did not point out that business investment has increased by only 4 per cent. since the trough of the recession—less than the increase after all previous recessions this century for a comparable period.

The only figure the Chancellor gave was the better figure for manufacturing investment, on which he placed great emphasis. The only investment figure that he gave had increased by 12 per cent. However, last year's levels were absolutely flat, so the increase was from a very low base. Even that increase will probably result only in the replacement of worn-out machinery, not in creating new capacity in the economy.

The fundamental problem in the economy is lack of capacity; that is what leads to high unemployment and low growth. That is the problem, and that is the question that the Budget should have addressed. Yet there were no measures to help investment. In fact, there were several measures with a negative effect on investment, especially in connection with the training budget.

The Chancellor would have been far wiser to examine the Labour party's proposals to put investment at the heart of the Budget process—for example, by increasing capital allowances in the first year for new plant and machinery, and for new capacity in general. Our proposals for regional development agencies would bring more investment into small businesses, as would our proposals to re-examine the idea of tapering capital gains tax, so that long-term investment would be encouraged.

In fact, the Government should have dealt with the whole area of corporate taxation. Our investment has declined by almost 4 per cent. since the Government came to power, and dividend payments have increased correspondingly, from 1.9 per cent. of GDP in 1979 to 5.4 per cent. today. As I have said before, the Government were considering that problem until Lord Hanson told a previous Financial Secretary to the Treasury, now the Secretary of State for Health, that he was a socialist. Then the whole matter was forgotten. The fundamental problems in investment have been totally ignored in the Budget today, but the Labour party puts them at the heart of its economic policy.

Unemployment would be helped by more investment, but other specific measures should have been taken. Once again, the Labour party put forward a specific proposal to fund the abolition of long-term youth unemployment through a windfall tax on the utilities. This proposal was dismissed today by the Chancellor, who showed poor reasoning in doing so.

One of the points that the right hon. and learned Gentleman made was that such a tax would result in increased prices, but there is a regulatory regime for the utilities which can fix prices. There is no reason why a windfall tax should lead to increased prices in gas or electricity. A previous Conservative Chancellor, Lord Howe, imposed a windfall tax on the banks, so there is no reason—even in terms of the Conservative party's history—why that should not be done.

Labour sees the evil of unemployment—I mention again the staggering fact that one in five non-pensioner households has no adult in work—and that is why Labour has prioritised an attack on unemployment with the first tax gains through the windfall tax. We will carry forward the proposal, so that no young person is without a job, a training opportunity or the right to full-time study after being unemployed for six months. I would have to emphasise that there are four options, and that all four will be made available to all young people.

The Government should have looked at many other measures proposed by the Labour party, from whom all the creative thinking on the economy is coming. Another aspect of unemployment is the question of how much people earn when they get into work. The minimum wage is one of our central policies, but we also propose in the long run to have a starting rate of tax of 10p rather than 20p. Anybody earning under £7,000 a year will not be helped in any way by the widening of the 20p band. But if that widening of the 20p band was replaced—for the same amount of money—by a 10p band, it would give a great incentive for many people to go into work at that end of the income scale.

Let us remember that people at the bottom end of the income scale are being taxed most heavily by the Government. The bottom 20 per cent. of people are now paying 39 per cent. of their income in tax, while the top 20 per cent. are paying only 35 per cent. I would have liked to see more measures in the Budget to help people at the bottom end of the income scale.

One measure I welcomed was the extension of the child care disregard. There is a slight improvement there, but it does not address the fundamental problems that the child care disregard has thrown up. I asked a question which referred to Scotland, and was told that only 2,000 families had benefited in the first year of the scheme. The problem is that many people cannot get the benefit of the disregard if they are on maximum family credit or anywhere near it. That problem has not been addressed by the extension of the disregard from £40 to £60. Some of the poorest people on family credit will still not be able to get the advantage of the disregard.

There are many other problems with the disregard. For example, it only applies to children up to the age of 11—I wonder why that is? It also applies per family rather

[Mr. Malcolm Chisholm]

than per child, and it does not cover the full costs of child care. Nevertheless, I welcome the extension, which is a slight step forward.

Unfortunately, it was outweighed by the fact that the Chancellor could not resist making an attack on single parents in his speech today. I suppose that we should be thankful for small mercies—he did not abolish the lone parent premium or the single parent benefit paid when single parents go into work. Full details will be given tomorrow, but I understand that the Chancellor has frozen those benefits.

But he did so by talking about "closing the gap" between single-parent families and couples, as if single-parent families were somehow advantaged. I could not believe my ears when I heard that. Single parents have a slight additional premium of £5 because of their additional costs. An obvious example of that is fuel bills. The same fuel bills have to be paid, whether by a single-parent household or by a couple.

The Chancellor's rhetoric, that somehow single parents were advantaged, was pandering to the lowest prejudices of certain people, and I was very disappointed by that. I would have liked to see measures to help far more lone parents into work. Some 40 per cent. of lone parents have incomes of less than £100, while the figure is 4 per cent. of families that are couples.

Perhaps the Chancellor should remember that before he makes any more remarks about the so-called "privileged position"of lone parents. If the benefit is being frozen, I certainly hope that Labour will unfreeze it, because the single parent benefit is a work incentive for lone parents. The lone parents premium is also related to in-work benefits.

Another group picked on in the Budget—equally disgracefully—were asylum seekers. The measure had been announced before, but it was repeated by the Chancellor. Some of the most vulnerable people in society will be deprived of benefit in January to provide some meagre savings to the social security budget. That measure will, of course, be vigorously opposed by Labour in the new year.

I agree heartily with the hon. Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley), who pointed out that there was to be a cut in the overseas aid budget. I know from my post that that cut is objected to by a large number of my constituents, and the Government are underestimating people if they think they can get away with such a cut without increasing their unpopularity.

The priorities of the Conservative party have been shown most clearly in the proposals on inheritance tax, and the repeated intention to do away with capital gains tax in time. The Government are giving money to some of the richest people in society by raising the threshold for inheritance tax. Only 16,000 families at present pay inheritance tax with the threshold at £154,000, and that threshold is now being increased to £200,000.

Millions of pounds are to be given away to some of the richest people in society, while VAT on fuel—which affects the poorest members of our society—is left at 8 per cent. What kind of Government put more emphasis on giving extra money to people who inherit £200,000 than to pensioners and other people on low incomes who need reductions in VAT?

The Government should bear in mind the whole question of home heating, particularly at this time of year. I would have liked to hear something about the home energy efficiency scheme, which I hope is being continued. In his Budget speech last year, the Chancellor said that funding for the scheme would be increased by £10 million a year, and I hope that that is the case. The funding should be increased by far more, and the all-party warm homes group—of which I am a member—proposed that the present budget be doubled. That would help not only people living in cold homes, but the economy as well.

There are a whole series of measures in terms of modernising and improving houses which could help people in need and the economy. But I am afraid that housing in general is another area that will be badly affected this year. I do not know the figure for Scotland, because it is not out yet, but I anticipate that there will be cuts in funding for housing in Scotland again, as there have been in the past few years.

I welcomed some of the measures in the Budget. As the Leader of the Opposition pointed out—contrary to what some Conservative Members may say—Labour welcomes the changes which apply to elderly people who go into nursing homes. As a Member from Scotland, I also welcome the cut in the excise duty on whisky. The duty should never have been put up last year, and the Chancellor did so only in a fit of pique, because the Opposition had defeated the Government on VAT on fuel. In doing so, we brought about the only tax reduction in this Parliament until today.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: I do not wish to anticipate the hon. Member's speech, but is it not perverse that the increase in the duty on spirits led to an income for the Treasury that was £53 million lower than it excepted? The Government were not just defeated on the rate of VAT on fuel, but also by the increase in duty—and consequent reduction in Treasury income—on whisky and other spirits.

Mr. Chisholm: I have to agree with the hon. Gentleman. I also agree, unusually, with Adam Smith on that point. He said that one often reaches a point at which revenues go down. If taxes are too high, they encourage smuggling, people buy less and we end up with less revenue. I think that revenues from spirits were £62 million lower in the first five months of this year. Perhaps that was the main fact that influenced the Chancellor.

I do not mind what influenced him. He certainly moved duty in the right direction. I should have liked to see more done in terms of alcoholic content. Whisky is taxed at twice the rate of wine. The excise duty on whisky should continue to be reduced. I should like to see it reduced by, say, 4 per cent. a year until it was equal with duty on wine. However, so far as it goes, I welcome the reduction.

The whisky industry is a massive industry in the Scottish economy. It is the biggest net exporter, and a massive employer. Some 15,000 to 20,000 people are employed directly by the industry, but there are another 40,000 related jobs. The materials for the whisky industry are from Scotland or the United Kingdom in general rather than imported. It is an important industry. I am glad to be able to welcome something, even though I would have liked the Chancellor to go further.

Many of the other tax changes give with one hand and take away with the other. A good example of that is the emphasis on the private finance initiative, which in many ways we support. We should like to make it work better. Howeber, the Government are using it as a cover for reductions in vital capital expenditure. The Chancellor openly admitted that the Government were reducing capital expenditure programmes.

For example, the health capital programme for England will be reduced by 17 per cent. They are trying to fill the gap with the PFI. It is by no means certain that the gap will be filled, because the Government's promises so far about the PFI have not come to a great deal.

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Michael Jack): Does the hon. Gentleman believe that the announcement today of a £35 million project for a new hospital for the South Buckinghamshire and Amersham health authority is illusory, or a real illustration of just how well the PFI can work?

Mr. Chisholm: Obviously, some money has come from the private finance initiative. It is not illusory. I am aware of the PFI in health. In Edinburgh, a project for a hospital costing £100 million is out to tender. We also have an extension to the Western General hospital for £60 million. I have serious concerns about the PFI in health. The Health Secretary said last week that it would not affect clinical services, yet in Stonehaven in Scotland, a whole hospital, including clinical services and everything else, is being put out to the private sector. In general, I support the PFI, but I do not support its use in the health service, except under strict conditions.

Dr. Lynne Jones (Birmingham, Selly Oak): Earlier today, I had a meeting with the chair and chief executive of one of our local hospital trusts. They expressed great relief that their capital investment was more or less through the pipeline, and they would not be caught up by the bureaucratic mess that is the private finance initiative. We have to consider the long-term cost. Private business which puts up the capital will expect a return on its investment. That will create greater debt servicing costs than straightforward public sector borrowing.

Mr. Chisholm: I thank my hon. Friend for that point. The on-going costs are fundamental to the PFI in the health service. Over time, it will be more expensive to pay for the lease of a building, and that will have effects on patient care because it will affect the revenue budgets. I have serious anxieties about the PFI in the health service. The Chancellor talked about delays in traditional capital expenditure programmes, yet the long-drawn-out tender process of the PFI creates the most enormous delays. There are many problems connected with it.

Another example of giving with one hand and taking away with the other is in local government expenditure. It is widely believed that the council tax will rise way beyond the rate of inflation to cover some of the cuts that have been made today. Promises were made about two specific areas of expenditure that affect local authorities—the police and the education service.

We do not yet have the Scottish details. The situation in Scotland is different from that in England. In Scotland, it will be difficult for local authorities to put more money into schools or policing if their general allocations from central Government are cut. Certainly, in Scotland, local authorities receive a general block of money for such services, and it is up to the council to do the best it can.

I feel that the promises will turn out to be deceptive in Scotland, and that may well be the case in England, too. I am told that a promise of 1,000 extra police in England was made three years ago, and we now have 1,000 fewer police than in 1992. We shall wait and see, with some scepticism.

There were slight tax reductions in the Budget today which will be welcome to people, but they do not compensate for the tax rises that they have put up with during the past three years. Although there are some slight improvements in the tax situation, there are no improvements in the general economic situation. That is our fundamental concern as we look forward.

The economic statistics all look very bad, in spite of what the Chancellor said at the start of his speech. I hope that some of the more dire predictions do not turn out to be true, but I fear that the economy will not begin to recover until we have a new Government. That cannot come too soon.

8.56 pm

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney, North and Stoke Newington): We are approaching the Christmas pantomime season. I hope to take my son James to see Cinderella at Hackney Empire. As the Chancellor reached the climax of his speech and his announcement of 1p off income tax, we felt like shouting, "Look behind you", as if we were a pantomime audience. His colleagues massed on the Benches behind him looked gutted. A desperate Tory party had been looking to the Chancellor to bribe the electorate with ludicrous cuts in the basic rate into voting Tory at the next general election. We could see from their faces that they did not believe that 1p off the basic rate was enough.

Nothing would be enough to drive the British people to vote for this discredited Administration one more time. People have only to look around them to see what has happened to manufacturing industry, to see the rise in unemployment, to see job insecurity, to see hospital closures and to see what has happened in education. Nothing will be enough. Yes, Tory Members looked gutted.

I intend to draw attention to some of the more cruel and inhumane aspects of the Budget. First, it is astonishing to hear the Chancellor and Tory politicians talk of cutting housing benefit for the under-25s, as though people of that age leave home on a whim, or as a casual act.

Hundreds of thousands of young people leave home, often because they face terrible overcrowding. In my constituency, it is not unusual for families of five, six or seven to be crowded into two-bedroom council flats. Grown boys and girls in their 20s might share a bedroom. Many young people under 25 are forced to leave because of severe overcrowding in the family home, particularly in inner cities.

It is well known to those who deal with the single homeless that many young people leave because they are being physically or sexually assaulted, the family has split up or there are tensions and stress. It is irresponsible for the Chancellor to fashion his policy on housing benefit as

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though the under-25s are leaving their family homes on a whim and only slight tinkering with financial incentives is necessary to change the pattern.

As a direct consequence of cutting housing benefit for the under-25s, many more people in that age group will find their way on to the streets and into a floating life in hostels. Those who read the accounts of the Rosemary West trial will realise how easy it was for young, homeless, hopeless people to be drawn into the life there and to disappear. No one knew where they had gone or cared what had happened to them. This cut in housing benefit for the under-25s can only feed that stratum of society. Young people with no jobs, hopes or strong family connections will be left to drift without the means to build a life for themselves. It is a particularly cruel and unfair cut in social security.

On the cuts for lone parents, the Government say that the right approach to lone parents is to give neither preferential nor adverse treatment. That is all well and good, but the measures in the Budget amount to adverse treatment. Of course it is more expensive for a single parent to bring up a child than it is for two people. There are all sorts of extra costs, be they fuel or child care.

My hon. Friends have welcomed the increase in the child care allowance, but the allowance is taken up by only 23,000 families and it is not available in respect of children over 11. What on earth is a mother to do with children of 12, 13, 14 or 15? Leave them at home without child care, I suppose, and then get done by *The Sun* for leaving them "home alone". The child care allowance is a little step forward, but whittling away one-parent benefits and the lone parent premium are acts of pure political vindictiveness and spite.

The Chancellor announced with pride the cut in allowances for refugees and asylum seekers. What that means is that, come 8 January, literally thousands of people in London—families with children—will be without means of support. I had to step out of this debate for a short time to take part in a meeting in which refugee organisations were planning to set up soup kitchens and other means of supplying the basic needs of people who will be without means of support on 8 January—all to enable the Government to amass money for tax cuts.

We heard much about the private finance initiative in the run-up to the Budget and today. The P in PFI stands in my view for pure wishful thinking. How can the Chancellor talk of an illustrative list of 1,000 projects worth more than £25 billion in his Budget speech? What is such a list if not pure wishful thinking?

It is a fantasy to imagine that the private finance initiative is some magic way to provide, at no cost, more money for capital programmes. The initiative is perhaps appropriate for certain types of public investment in which there is a natural revenue stream, such as transport. As a colleague said, however, private finance means that the private sector will want some sort of revenue stream in return. I cannot see how, if the private sector has to borrow the money more expensively and is looking for a revenue stream in time, the initiative can turn out to be cheaper than public sector funding.

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury, the hon. Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack), seems to be nodding. He is very attached to the private finance initiative. We will wait for the big Jack launch tomorrow, but, like all the Government's private finance initiatives, it will consist of the Government's announcing the same scheme—as they do year after year. It will not prove as simple as the Chancellor imagines to push many of them through the pipeline. The initiative is not appropriate to large areas of public expenditure and will not produce concrete schemes.

On that elusive factor that the Chancellor's Budget was supposed to generate—the feel-good factor—I note that the Financial Secretary to the Treasury has a constituency in the north of England. He might not be aware that what has happened to the housing market is the biggest single element underpinning the lack of such a factor in London and the south-east.

It is interesting that, in successive Red Books, the Government have tried—whistling in the dark—to claim that an upturn in the housing market is just around the corner. In last year's Red Book, we were told:

"On balance the housing market indicators point to renewed recovery."

In this year's Red Book, we learn:

"House prices are 2 per cent. lower . . . while turnover is over 13 per cent. lower."

When the Government predict the same modest housing market recovery this year, we know what weight to give it.

The Government can take 1p off the basic rate of income tax—or 2p or 3p—but for home owners in London and the south-east, many thousands of whom have massive negative equity and many more thousands of whom are in houses that they cannot sell because the housing market is so flat, there will be no return to any feel-good factor until the housing market begins to turn. That will not happen this side of a general election.

I began by talking about Christmas pantomimes. In a sense, this Budget was a pantomime. It had little to do with the underlying strength of the economy, with the country's real needs, with bridging the enormous gap between rich and poor which has built up after 15 years of this Government or with investment. The pantomime had everything to do with this discredited Administration's last desperate hope of winning the general election. We could tell from Conservative Members' faces tonight that they believe that the Chancellor has blown it. I hope for the country's sake that their estimation of their Chancellor's Budget was right.

9.5 pm

Dr. Lynne Jones (Birmingham, Selly Oak): I agreed with much of what the hon. Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley) said. During his speech, I wondered whether he was planning to join my hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Howarth) on our Opposition Benches.

I would single out the point that the hon. Member for Eltham made about overseas aid. Like most hon. Members, I have had much lobbying from constituents who are concerned at our failure to honour the commitment to spend 0.7 per cent. of GDP, the United Nations target, on overseas aid. This year it is 0.31 per cent. of GDP and it is set to fall. It will be no relief that the leaked figure of a 12 per cent. cut turns out to be more like 5 or 6 per cent.; that is still far too high. We should increase the overseas aid budget.

I also listened to the speech of the hon. Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton) and, like him, I congratulate the Chancellor of the Exchequer on resisting the calls earlier this year from the Bank of England for an increase in interest rates. I also share the hon. Gentleman's feelings about the scale of the tax cuts that have been announced in the Budget. Many Conservative Members must have been severely disappointed by the low rate of giveaways in the Budget but, in one sense, perhaps the Chancellor was more responsible than most of his Back Benchers wanted to him to be. To that extent, I congratulate him.

Another way of looking at the Budget is to say that the economy is in a far worse state than Conservative Members are prepared to acknowledge and that the Chancellor could not risk giving away more than he has because of the concern that that would have caused in the markets. The priority of most business people is a cut in interest rates, not taxation. That is because they do not share the Chancellor's view, which I think he mentioned five or six times in his speech, that Britain was the enterprise centre of Europe or that we have a modern dynamic economy.

The view of business and finance is more along the lines of the west midlands business survey produced by Price Waterhouse, a Birmingham-based company. The survey showed the lowest level of business confidence since the winter of 1990, and said:

"Continuation of this for a further six months could constitute the prelude to a recession."

That is hardly in line with the Chancellor's view that all the factors are in place for a continuing recovery.

Although the Conservatives had the bonanza of North sea oil and privatisation receipts, our economy does not have the fundamentals in place.

Mr. Jack: If life is so bad, why did the Chancellor say in today's statement that investment in manufacturing industry had risen year on year by 12 per cent.?

Dr. Jones: It is because we must consider the base from which it is rising. In the fourth quarter of 1994, business investment was at its lowest since 1955. Although there has been an increase since the recession, it is still not up to the business investment that we had in 1990. We cannot be proud of that record.

Mr. George Stevenson (Stoke-on-Trent, South): Does my hon. Friend agree that one of the fundamentals of the Chancellor's speech was his blatant attempt to convince the country that the Government had been in power for only the past three years and not for 16 years, during which time they have created most of the problems which the Chancellor now claims credit for trying to put right?

Dr. Jones: My hon. Friend is right. The Chancellor claims credit for the recovery after the Government steered us into a recession, first by joining the exchange rate mechanism at a sterling rate that could not be sustained. When we were finally bounced out of that, he claimed that the Government were responsible for the recovery. The policies responsible for the recovery were the exact opposite of those that the previous Chancellor of the Exchequer claimed were important to maintain low inflation and our competitive edge.

We have had export-led growth but, because of the failure to invest in our economy—business investment and public sector investment in research and development—we do not have the fundamentals in place, which is why the recovery is now faltering. That is why the Chancellor maintains that he has succeeded in slowing down the growth of the economy to a more sustainable rate. He means a sustainable rate of growth of some 2.5 to 2.75 per cent., which is lower than the growth that we have experienced in the overall post-war period. It is certainly not the rate of growth that we need to tackle unemployment and put confidence back into the economy.

The slump in the housing market and the failure to invest are caused by lack of confidence. People are worried about their jobs. Those in work are worried that they may lose their jobs, and the Budget has done little to deal with unemployment. That is why we must look at the whole tenor of the Government's policies over the past 15 or 16 years. The Chancellor said that a low-tax regime was important for a successful economy, but nothing could be further from the truth. Business taxation has been low under this Government, but that low taxation has not been used to invest in our economy. In other countries, where business taxation is higher, those businesses have for some reason maintained much higher investment than exists in this country.

I urge the Government to look at the reports produced by both the Trade and Industry Select Committee and the Science and Technology Select Committee, in which they have suggested measures to encourage investment and the long-term view to be taken by our financial institutions. I am disappointed that the Government did not look at ways of managing business taxation to give incentives for long-term investment. That does not necessarily mean a cut in business taxation; one could argue that increasing business taxation in line with that in more successful economies such as Germany and Japan would bring in some revenue. That would also provide scope for tax incentives for the retention of earnings and long-term investment. Many hon. Members on both sides of the House believe that there is a need for capital allowances to get our business community to invest.

Even if we succeed in upping our investment rate, it is likely that that would not create more jobs. That policy would, however, succeed in stemming the haemorrhage of jobs from manufacturing and would ensure that the manufacturing sector grows and output increases. That is a priority for the wealth-creating base of this country. That policy would, however, merely ensure that unemployment did not increase in the manufacturing and the wealth-creating sectors. It would do little to create more jobs.

We should look for job-creating opportunities through investment in infrastructure projects, for which the business community is desperate. There is a great need for investment in transportation and construction, particularly housing. That brings me on to the private finance initiative.

I believe that the PFI is nonsense. It is a device designed to massage the public sector borrowing requirement to make it look as though Government borrowing is coming down. If we used private finance, all the signs are that, in the long term, it would be more expensive to the taxpayer. One need only consider what has happened in the social housing sector to appreciate that.

For some time, housing associations have been able to borrow on the private markets to top up the Government grant, and thus provide social housing. Those associations have to pay a higher rate of interest to provide those

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homes than would be charged to a local authority were it permitted to do the same. It is pure dogma that prevents local authorities from borrowing on their capital assets.

I know that, in my city of Birmingham, the private sector would be only too willing to lend to the city council to finance projects that reaped returns in income from rents and the benefit of getting people back to work. Birmingham, as in many other parts of the country, has thousands of empty houses. Conservative Members have perpetuated the myth of large numbers of empty council houses. In Birmingham, there are about 1,800 empty council homes—1.8 per cent. of the stock. That is about the minimum number when stock is subject to normal turnover, and most of those properties are let within days or weeks. There are, however, 16,000 empty homes in the private sector in Birmingham. That is due to the slump in the housing market. The Budget contains nothing to shift those homes in the market so that people can live in them.

There is insufficient demand in the private market. Councils such as Birmingham should be given permission to repurchase a proportion of those homes and make them available for letting. That would provide homes for those who need them and create work in the construction sector, and get people off the dole. That policy would take some excess homes out of the market and help to create more demand in it.

No such policies have been proposed in the Budget. Not even minimal help has been offered, for example, by allowing local authorities to spend their accumulated housing capital receipts. I admit that Birmingham city council does not have very much in the way of such receipts, but it certainly has the ability to raise capital on the market, and it should be allowed to do so.

Problems would also arise if private finance were used to fund transport infrastructure projects. If private finance were used to invest in the railways, in the end the cost of raising that private capital would be a great deal more than if it had been raised by the public sector. Who would have to pay? Either the taxpayer, in the form of subsidy, or the rail passenger, in increased fares.

It is time that the Government looked at the way in which they define our public sector borrowing requirement. It is right that we should reduce our borrowing; we should not borrow for consumption or to pay for benefits. But borrowing to pay for investment in our future is common sense—any business would agree. If we are to reduce unemployment, we need public sector investment in infrastructure.

We also need investment in another public sector, and I shall spend a few minutes talking about next year's local authority budgets. We have heard the much-lauded announcement of an increase in spending on education which, on the surface, is to be welcomed. But, overall, the resources that go to local authorities are to be increased by about 0.5 per cent., which is insufficient to deal with pay and price increases and the other unavoidable consequences of factors such as pay increments.

In Birmingham, it is estimated that, with those sort of spending targets, we would face a cut of between £60 million and £68 million in our budgets next year, on top of the £45 million-worth of cuts last year. Nearly 40 per cent. of the budget involves education. Birmingham city council already spends £21 million more than the Government standard spending assessment. That figure is taken care of in the increase in spending on education. But what is given in one hand is taken away with the other.

It will be impossible for a council such as Birmingham to make cuts of £60 million and maintain its commitment to the £21 million that it is likely to spend over and above the SSA—we would like to spend even more. We shall be spending at the Government SSA level, but that will mean big cuts. That is a kick in the teeth to the council in Birmingham, which has given top priority to education at the expense of other services, including social services which have faced big cuts. Those cuts will result in job losses.

The Government always say that it is important that people should keep more of their own money and that they want to give taxpayers their money back. That may be true of spending that comes out of taxation, particularly unnecessary spending due to high levels of unemployment. If the Government had invested the wealth of North sea oil and had encouraged business investment in wealth creation, we would not have the current high levels of unemployment for which the taxpayer has to pay: the taxpayer pays for the Government's economic failure.

There are other spheres of expenditure where the taxpayer receives poor value for money. I can single out expenditure on the military, which is considerably above the European average. It would have been far better if the Government had, over time, switched money from the defence budget—which is not really a defence budget but a military budget—as happens in other parts of Europe. No one in the House would wish unnecessarily to reduce our military spending so that we do not have a reasonable defence capability. We still have 26,000 troops in Germany. There is scope for moving expenditure and investing in civil employment. There is plenty of scope for us to reduce the defence research and development budget and invest the money in civil R and D—we should do that. We could transfer funding to the DTI and science budget.

Although I would change some aspects of Government spending, however, the taxpayer generally receives excellent value for money. Taxation is a good buy, and by reducing Government spending in some areas we are not doing our best by our citizens. We spend about 6 per cent. of gross national product on the health service, while America, whose citizens rely on private insurance, spends double that amount.

In the case of services in which over-provision leads to inefficiency, collective provision through the taxpayer is the most efficient method. Even after the Government's introduction of the internal market—an unnecessary bureaucracy—our national health service is still effective. The same goes for many services that are provided through local authorities, such as social services and education. Cutting the funds with which local authorities provide those services does the taxpayer no favours: rather than having more money in their pockets, people will have to fork out far more than they have contributed in the past.

As a result of last month's decision to remove the safety net for unemployed people with mortgages, the Government expect to save some £200 million in a full year. Those affected, however, are no longer confident that they will be helped with their mortgage interest

payments if they lose their jobs, and are having to take out private insurance. Notwithstanding one building society's initiative, the majority of societies cannot provide mortgage protection policies free of charge, and premiums will be £4 or £5 a week for the average mortgage. That cut in public expenditure means that citizens will be worse off.

It is said that we cannot afford to maintain the welfare state as we have in the past. The example of long-term care has been cited. The Chancellor announced some changes in the way in which people will pay for such care. Many people must now sell their homes to pay for accommodation of that kind—not just residential care but nursing care. In the past, the national health service made long-term care available, but apparently we cannot afford that now.

What use is a reduction in inheritance tax to people of modest means whose only capital asset is their homes? Now they are having to sell those homes. It is good that they can now keep a little more money than they could before, but why should they have to pay for nursing care? Why should they have to give up their modest savings?

The Government are setting up future business for the private insurance companies. The Chancellor's partnership plan is entirely in line with proposals advanced by a company called PPP, or Private Patients Plan, as can be seen in a parliamentary briefing paper entitled "Long-term Care and the Role of Private Provision". It is making the sort of proposals that the Chancellor of the Exchequer is suggesting today—a partnership scheme where the Government will top up private sector insurance.

What will people have to pay for such insurance? The document says:

"Savings of £60,000 will be needed to cover the cost of care for a five year period as opposed to a single insurance premium of £9,000 or £70 per month".

The failure to maintain the fabric of our welfare state is resulting in ordinary individuals of modest means having to take out private insurance policies, and paying out about £70 a month. Tax cuts of the magnitude that we have had today will not make up for the sort of sums that people are having to pay for these private insurance premiums.

All the time, whenever there is an undermining of public sector provision and its replacement by private insurance, people get a much worse deal than through the state provision. For example, people moving out of the state earnings-related pension scheme are discovering that they are far worse off as a result of taking out private insurance plans.

Private insurance companies are rubbing their hands with glee because, as a result of the erosion of the welfare state, people are having to take out private insurance policies to cater for all sorts of eventualities that previously would have been paid for from the welfare state. When, therefore, the Government talk about getting off the backs of taxpayers, they should tell people that they may get tax cuts—although under this Government, because of the Government's economic failures, people have had only tax increases—but that they will have to pay several times over for those cuts in making private provision. They will pay more and receive less, and that is just typical of this Government and of the 16 years of misrule that they have presided over. The Budget will not do anything to recommend the Government to the electorate. The sooner we have a general election, the better.

Debate adjourned.—*[Mr. Burns.]*

Debate to be resumed tomorrow.

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

Ordered,

That Mr. Alan Milburn be discharged from the Committee of Public Accounts and Ms Angela Eagle be added to the Committee.—*[Mr. Burns.]*

EUROPEAN LEGISLATION

Ordered,

That Mr. George Stevenson be added to the European Legislation Committee.—*[Mr. Burns.]*

Legal Aid

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Burns.]*

9.32 pm

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): It has been an interesting few minutes when, instead of thinking about legal aid, I have listened to the authentic voice of the Labour party. I hope that Conservative central office will fillet that speech and use it for the next election campaign.

I should like to congratulate my hon. Friend the Minister on his powers of prophecy because, when we last had questions to his Department, he said that I returned

"with consistency to this subject."—[*Official Report*, 20 November 1995; Vol. 267, c. 331.]

That was almost an incitement to call for an Adjournment debate, which I did with pleasure. I make another prophesy: whatever he and I say tonight will somehow not be reported in any of the national papers tomorrow morning, but, who knows, we may make the legal journals.

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): Should one notice that our hon. Friend the Minister is moonlighting and that, with his promotion to the Department for Trade and Industry, as soon as he has finished speaking, he is certain to get in the news pages as well as into legal journals?

Mr. Marshall: I gather from that that congratulations must be in order. I did not know what the moonlighting was; perhaps we can have elucidation as the evening progresses.

Everyone would agree that widespread public concern exists about the operation of the legal aid scheme. That is confirmed by an editorial in *The Daily Telegraph* on 12 January 1995, which said:

"It has been clear for some years that the traditional system of legal aid is no longer sustainable . . . the Budget has been the fastest growing area of public spending . . . which is not surprising since nothing formally inhibits the consumption of public provision for the cost of legal services."

We have to ask ourselves whether it is right that the legal aid budget should rise more quickly than spending on social security, the health service or any other Government expenditure.

I should like to pay tribute to one or two of our national newspapers which have done a wonderful job in pointing out to the public some of the difficulties inherent in the current legal aid system. I should like to pay tribute to the work of *The Sunday Times* for its articles on the legal aid lottery, and the *Daily Mail*, which has done a good job in pointing out some of the idiocies in the legal aid system.

The legal aid system has seen substantial increases in expenditure while, at the same time, the number of households eligible for it has decreased. In 1979-80, 77 per cent. of households were eligible, by 1989-90 it was 58 per cent. and today it is 48 per cent. We have seen those two conflicting trends—the substantial increase in expenditure and the substantial reduction in the number of families eligible.

There is one issue above all else which creates a vast amount of annoyance among the general public and that is the way in which the seemingly wealthy are able to exploit the legal aid system. There was the case of Mr. Hashim, the former head of the Arab Money Fund, who was involved in a civil claim for over £33 million. He received legal aid despite owning several mansions in Britain and abroad. The cost of that legal aid was not petty cash. According to written answers in *Hansard*, Mr. Colin Ross-Munro, his QC, received £671,111. Two other juniors and another QC received £646,891. The poor guys in all this were his solicitors, who received only £644,000. The experts, however defined, received £835,000.

We must ask ourselves why council tenants in constituencies such as mine and that of my hon. Friend the Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley) pay taxes which are then used to pay the legal aid bills of nasty shysters living in much better accommodation than they are. It is socially wrong that the seemingly rich, living in large mansions, should have their legal aid bills paid for by taxpayers living in worse conditions.

The case of Mr. Hashim is not an isolated incident. Mr. Ernest Saunders—his case was determined yesterday, so it is no longer sub judice—received legal aid which cost £1,342,465 in the original Guinness trial. Mr. Saunders is a remarkable man. He is the only person on this earth who has been cured of Alzheimer's disease—Guinness is good for you; it gets rid of Alzheimer's disease. Since then, he has been pictured skiing in Switzerland with his wife, he has been known to fly across the Atlantic on Concorde, and he gives lectures, no doubt for fat fees. He told the press that he will receive a pension of £70,000 per annum from Guinness. Despite all that, he recently received a second instalment from the legal aid fund to pay for his appeal.

I hope that he does not suffer from amnesia as well as Alzheimer's, because one of the things that surprises me about Mr. Ernest Saunders is that he has also had a case in the European Court. One does not receive legal aid for cases in the European Court, so he is obviously able to pay for that, but when it comes to the British courts, oh dearie me, he cannot fund it and goes off to the legal aid fund. Why should those enjoying a less affluent life style than Mr. Saunders pay for his legal bills?

Then there is Mr. Graham Foxley, who was guilty of massive corruption at the Ministry of Defence. He lived in a house worth £500,000 and owned a fleet of cars. Yes, you have guessed it, Mr. Deputy Speaker, he managed to get legal aid. He stung the taxpayers twice, first as a corrupt civil servant and then as a defendant on legal aid.

The litany of the seemingly wealthy who have been able to obtain legal aid is too long. Mr. Asil Nadir succeeded; Mr. Bryce Taylor, who was reputed to have made a substantial amount of money from taking sneak pictures of Princess Diana, had legal aid; Mr. Peter Clowes and Mr. Kenneth Sinar had it. It is wrong that apparently rich individuals—some of whom may have lied about the sources of their income, others of whom may have transferred their assets to their wives or trusts—should succeed in obtaining legal aid, paid for by the taxpayer.

The Lord Chancellor issued a consultative document about legal aid to the seemingly wealthy. Earlier this year, the Minister said that he was assessing the results. He said in response to a written question:

"There were 50 responses to the consultation exercise held earlier this year on the grant of legal aid to the apparently wealthy. Since that time there have been 14 inquiries on this issue from Members of Parliament or the public."—[*Official Report*, 20 November 1995; Vol. 267, c. 21.]

We want to know when the exercise will come to end and when there will be a decision. Nothing causes greater aggravation among our electors than the fact that those who fail to get legal aid have to watch other people, who seem to be better off than them, milking the system.

The second issue of concern is that there are few prosecutions for fraudulent applications for legal aid. In 1993, there were 1 million applications, but I have been told by the Attorney-General that there were just three prosecutions for fraudulent applications. Many of the people applying for legal aid are in fact applying for criminal legal aid. They are not the good boys of society. They would have had to be dishonest at some stage in their lives or they would not be before the courts—yet just 0.003 per cent. of applicants are prosecuted for making fraudulent applications.

The third problem with legal aid is another about which I feel very strongly. A legal aid certificate in a civil case amounts to little short of blackmail. In a civil case it helps to have a good case, but it is even better to have a legal aid certificate. I recently received an answer from the Minister about the number of payments made by the legal aid fund to a successful unassisted party. In 1990-91 it was as low as 119. The greatest number was in 1993-94, when in 186 cases the legal aid fund had to pay costs to someone who had won his case.

The difficulties created by a legal aid certificate were highlighted in two cases this year. One was the case of Green *v.* the Ministry of Defence. The MOD paid a sum into court, but the legal aid fund continued with the case. The court decided that the MOD was right, but the legal costs of £80,000 that it suffered will never be reimbursed.

The other high-profile case involved Kevin Taylor *v.* Manchester Corporation and Sir James Anderton. One of the issues that led to a settlement in that case was the pace at which legal costs were escalating. It became clear that it was probably cheaper to settle the case than to engage in a fight to the death.

There can be a real problem for ordinary individuals. Someone who came to see me at my constituency surgery had been sued by a business partner. His lawyer told him that he had a strong case; his accountant told him that he had a very strong case; so he decided to fight it. He won the case, but was hopelessly out of pocket because of his expensive legal costs. Of course, his legally aided opponent did not have any costs awarded against him. Although he won the case, it would have been cheaper for him to give way and to give money to someone who was not entitled to it.

In another case, a constituent who came to my surgery had been given planning permission to build a garage and had bought all the materials for it. That constituent's next-door neighbour, however, said that the garage interfered with his right of light. His neighbour applied and received legal aid. My poor constituent, who did not qualify for legal aid, realised that he was on a hiding to nothing because, if he fought the case and won, he would have to pay his own legal costs and, if he lost the case, he would still have to pay his own legal costs.

People in the legal profession have said that there is a fear that, under the legal aid scheme, certificates are perhaps given more easily than they should be. I have heard barristers say that the legal aid fund will occasionally support a case which they recommend the client not to contest.

It is significant that the Bar Council, which one would not think of as an organisation that would seek to suppress the level of legal activity, has said:

"the Legal Aid Scheme should be focused on cases of real merit with prospects of a worthwhile recovery. Both limbs of the merits test in civil cases should be tightened, focusing attention on real prospects of success and on whether the proceedings are reasonable".

If that is what the Bar Council is saying, we ought to listen because, when lawyers tell us that there should be less litigation, they are sending us a message.

The legal aid fund is part of a much wider problem, which is that the costs of litigation are too high. As *The Daily Telegraph* said in its editorial:

"The inflation has been caused not merely by the unrestricted influx of taxpayers' money. The large and increasing fees charged by lawyers are mainly a function of the chronic wastage of the system. Until the legal profession tackles its own indefensible costs, the tax payer will be fleeced".

I believe that there are three sorts of litigants: the very wealthy who can afford to go to court; those who are legally aided; and the large number of people in middle England, middle Scotland, middle Wales who may be celebrating tonight—

Mr. Peter Bottomley: And middle Northern Ireland.

Mr. Marshall: And middle Northern Ireland who cannot afford the luxury of legal action.

Lord Woolf has been asked to reduce the costs of the legal system. I welcome anything that can reduce the costs of litigation, because there is no doubt that many people just cannot afford the risk of going to court. I think that he also needs to look at the delays and ask whether some issues would be better settled outside rather than in the courts.

The legal aid system in theory is wonderful because under it, no one should be denied justice because he is too poor. That was an excellent concept, but the tragedy is that the present system no longer meets that objective. That is why, during the past year, there have been 190 questions tabled on legal aid, mainly in this House with a few in the House of Lords.

Reform is long overdue. One must sometimes ask whether lawyers are the best people to institute that reform because they may see things in a slightly different way from the rest of us. There is also some concern about the fact that legal aid in Britain is open to everyone living here. The Minister has said many times that our system of legal aid is the most generous, by which we mean the most expensive, in the western world. There are people who receive legal assistance in the United Kingdom who would not have received it in their own country. I think that that is also a source of some concern.

Finally, although I am not usually kind to lawyers, I do think that one ought to make one point about the legal aid system that a number of practitioners in the profession would make: sometimes, there is a rather lengthy period between the case being heard in court and people being paid. The Government have asked that small business men should be paid quickly. Many of those who take part in the legal aid scheme are relatively small business men and one would hope that the legal aid fund might be able to settle bills slightly more quickly than they have sometimes been settled in the past.

[Mr. Marshall]

I thank the Minister for his tolerance and congratulate him on the promotion to which my hon. Friend the Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley) referred. Perhaps my hon. Friend the Minister can elucidate on the matter in his speech, since my hon. Friend was slightly elliptical in his comments.

9.49 pm

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (Mr. John M. Taylor): Nobody has ever accused me of being elliptical before.

Mr. John Marshall: I was referring to my hon. Friend the Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley).

Mr. Taylor: Oh, our hon. Friend, if you please. Perhaps, none the less, I may be forgiven for addressing that point last, if time permits, because my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall) has raised a serious subject and he is entitled to a proper answer. A description of my circumstances can be postponed.

I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing the Adjournment debate and on giving me the opportunity to explain the reasons why reform of the legal aid scheme is needed and to outline the Government's proposals for change.

As the House will be aware, the Lord Chancellor published a Green Paper on the future of legal aid in May. I should like to emphasise that that Green Paper was intended to canvass views on the options that had been identified, and to encourage interested parties to put forward alternatives or additions to them.

The response has been impressive—more than 180 replies. Some were predictable, and some were negative, but others were constructive and innovative in proposing additional or alternative reforms. Hon. Members may rest assured that all the responses received by the Lord Chancellor's Department are being given full and serious consideration.

Before I move on to discuss the Government's proposals, I should like to remind the House of the problems that the Government and Parliament must face in the way in which legal aid operates. My hon. Friend has already touched on some of them. Legal aid has about quadrupled in 10 years. In a total bill of more than £1 billion a year, we are spending some £500 million on crime, £400 million on civil cases and £350 million on family matters. That is not just due to volume and inflation. Real costs have risen and the worrying conclusion is that we are spending more and getting less in real terms. It cannot be allowed to continue.

There is criticism from all sides that too many trivial or ill-founded cases are being litigated, which no sensible person who had to meet his own costs would pursue. That is not just bad for the taxpayer, but it is unfair to those who are threatened with being chased through the courts by legally assisted people who bear little or no risk themselves.

We are told that unaided opponents often cave in rather than face the cost of contesting a case, and that assisted persons receive too great a degree of protection against costs under the current scheme. That is said to place some unassisted persons at an unfair disadvantage, it removes any incentive to try to keep costs down, and once legal aid is granted, there is little incentive to consider non-court-based solutions to legal problems.

The Lord Chancellor and I share those concerns. The Green Paper seeks views on whether the existing protection against costs orders for assisted persons would be appropriate in a reformed scheme. I can assure the House that options for adjusting the costs balance in respect of liability for costs are receiving very close scrutiny as part of the reform process. If my hon. Friend wishes to write to me with any specific suggestions that he may have, they will certainly be taken into account.

Another problem with the current legal aid scheme is its rigidity in the services that it can provide. It is designed primarily to pay lawyers' bills and court costs. Thus, legal aid money cannot be used to fund alternative services, such as specialist advice agencies, mediation and other forms of alternative dispute resolution—despite the fact that those alternatives can be more effective and cheaper and, if recent research by the National Consumer Council is to be believed, are often preferred by the public over traditional legal services.

The rigidity of the scheme also means that there is no effective way in which to target help on priority areas. A consequence of that narrow and rigid focus is that areas of the law outside traditional legal practice are not well provided for. Therefore, inadequate attention is paid to problems in areas of what the Green Paper calls "social welfare law", such as housing, debt and social security. Yet such problems loom unusually large among those who qualify for legal aid, and who arguably are most in need of help.

Finally, I am concerned about quality. Advances have been made in the form of continuous training of lawyers, accreditation schemes, improved complaints procedures and the Legal Aid Board's progress in franchising solicitors firms that meet its quality standards. None the less, it remains a fact that any lawyer can take on any type of case under legal aid, even if he lacks experience or knowledge in the area concerned. In buying services the Government owe it to the taxpayer and the user to act as an intelligent purchaser, and to ensure that they buy services only from providers who are competent in their field.

The legal aid Green Paper proposes tackling those problems in a number of ways. First, the legal aid budget would be predetermined. Allocations would be made to meet national priorities and subsequently refined to meet local needs identified with the help of regional legal services committees made up of local representatives.

Secondly, the services to meet those needs would be provided through contracts under which potential suppliers would agree to provide a certain level of service for an agreed price and to a satisfactory standard.

Finally, there would be no artificial restraint on who could bid for contracts, provided that the potential supplier could show that the service that he could provide would meet the need, and would be cost-effective and of good quality. Advice agencies with special expertise in areas of social welfare law would be able to bid for block contracts, meeting a need that solicitors do not currently satisfy.

The overall aim of the legal aid Green Paper is to ensure that priorities for expenditure are set and assistance is given to those who have the greatest need. My hon.

Friend raised a number of points about individual cases in which he feels that legal aid was inappropriately granted to those who did not have a real need for help, or who were apparently wealthy.

While it would not be proper for the Lord Chancellor to intervene in the way in which the Legal Aid Board handles any particular case, or for me to comment on the reasonableness of a grant of legal aid in individual cases, I shall say a few things about the granting of legal aid to the apparently wealthy. My hon. Friend has shown much dogged persistence in his concern about the subject; let me tell him at once that the Lord Chancellor and I share that concern, and are determined to take steps to ensure that legal aid is provided only to those who properly qualify for it.

In the medium term, we shall address that issue through our general strategy on legal aid. But our strategy for dealing with the problem is not confined to the Green Paper. A year ago, we issued a consultation paper entitled "Legal Aid for the Apparently Wealthy", and in April the Lord Chancellor announced the measures that he proposes to take. Let me remind my hon. Friend what they are.

First, a special investigations unit should be established to handle means assessment in both civil and criminal cases where the applicant's financial circumstances are unusually complex. The Lord Chancellor invited the Legal Aid Board to advise him on establishing such a unit, and on the practical arrangements necessary to run it.

Secondly, legal aid regulations should be amended to provide those assessing the means of applicants for legal aid with a discretionary power to include in the means assessment the assets of friends, relatives and children where those appear to be providing a significant material advantage to the applicant.

Thirdly, there should be further examination of the practical implications of regulations allowing the trial judge in criminal cases to release, in specific circumstances, details of the statement of means of an applicant for legal aid.

Fourthly, applicants for legal aid should be required to transfer ownership of any assets that they fail to declare in their application to the legal aid authorities, so that the money disbursed in legal aid can be recovered from those assets. Fifthly, there should be a limit of £100,000 on the equity value in a house that is ignored in the legal aid means assessment.

Setting up a special investigations unit will obviously take a little while, but its remit will be not only to handle means assessment in both civil and criminal cases where the applicant's financial circumstances are unusually complex, but to identify overseas assets of British nationals and of non-British nationals who apply for legal aid in this country. Cases referred to the unit will not be limited to applicants who appear to be wealthy, but there will also be people whose financial circumstances are so complex that it has proved difficult in the past to make a clear assessment for legal aid contribution purposes. That point is more important in respect of criminal legal aid, where there is no upper limit for financial eligibility levels.

This is my swan song as the Lord Chancellor's junior Minister, and it seems to me to be entirely appropriate that it is taking place on the Adjournment of the House on the subject of legal aid reform.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at one minute to Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 29 November 1995

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Famagusta

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—[*Mr. Streeter.*]

9.34 am

Mr. Tom Cox (Tooting): I should like to thank you, Madam Speaker, for granting this debate, which will be followed with interest in this country and certainly in Cyprus. The elected mayor of Famagusta has travelled from Cyprus to listen to the debate and is in the Strangers Gallery. I extend a warm welcome to him. I should like to declare my interest. I am the chair of the Cyprus group of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association. My hon. Friend the Member for Mansfield (Mr. Meale) and the hon. Members for Edmonton (Dr. Twinn) and for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) are the other officers of the group. Many hon. Members from all parts of the House are on the all-party Cyprus group.

Cyprus has a long historical relationship with the United Kingdom. It is a member of the Commonwealth and the UK is one of the guarantor powers for the island. The country is known and loved by many millions of British people who have visited it over many years. It is most certainly not some faraway country with which we have no links or know little about. Many of us know that President Clerides served with great distinction in the Royal Air Force during the last war, and that many Cypriot men and women bravely fought alongside members of our armed forces.

In 1974, the Turkish army brutally invaded Cyprus. That led to the division of the island and 21 years later it is still occupied and divided. Over the years there have been many discussions that I and many hon. Members had hoped would lead to an honourable settlement under which the rights of both Greek and Turkish Cypriots—I stress, both Greek and Turkish Cypriots—would have been respected and protected. Sadly and tragically, nothing has happened over the past 21 years to bring about a settlement. That is why I sought this debate.

In seeking to overcome problems one has to make a start and over many years Famagusta has been given as the example of where that start could be made. Since the 1974 invasion it has been a ghost town. No one lives there and no business is conducted in the town, yet before 1974 it was one of the most popular areas in Cyprus because it had beautiful beaches and hotels and a thriving business community lived and worked there. All that could return, and it would benefit the people who would live there—the Greek and true Turkish Cypriots whom I wish to see once again becoming the inhabitants of Famagusta.

I have said that Famagusta could provide the start for a settlement and I should like to repeat some of the comments that have been made over the years. In November 1978, just four years after the invasion, a joint British, Canadian and American group produced a document entitled, "Framework for a Solution of the Cyprus Problem". It proposed the immediate resettlement of Famagusta. Paragraph 12 of the document states:

"In order to promote an atmosphere of goodwill and to resolve pressing humanitarian problems, the . . . (Famagusta) area shall be resettled under UN auspices in accordance with the attached agreements. Such resettlement shall be initiated in phase with the resumption of full intercommunal negotiations on a comprehensive agreement".

In his 1978 report, the then Secretary-General of the United Nations said:

"The time may now be ripe for a concrete attempt to deal with some important aspects of the existing stalemate on the ground, thus creating an opening for further significant steps.

The status of Famagusta which obviously should not be kept in its present empty and decaying condition, may provide an opportunity of the kind. Since Famagusta is situated in the immediate vicinity of the buffer zone and is patrolled by UNFICYP troops, it would be seem natural to envisage United Nations assistance in this connection".

There was a high-level agreement between the then President of the Republic of Cyprus, Mr. Kyprianou, and the leader of the Turkish Cypriots, Mr. Denktash. It said:

"Priority will be given to reaching agreement on the resettlement of Famagusta under UN auspices simultaneously with the beginning of the consideration by the interlocutors of the constitutional and territorial aspects of a comprehensive settlement. After agreement on Famagusta has been reached it will be implemented without awaiting the outcome of the discussion on other aspects of the Cyprus problem".

That agreement between President Kyprianou and Mr. Denktash was signed on 19 May 1979. Despite all those talks and agreements, nothing has happened.

United Nations Security Council resolution 550 was passed on 11 May 1984. It says that it

"considers attempts to settle any part of Famagusta by people other than its inhabitants as inadmissible and calls for the transfer of this area to the administration of the United Nations".

That is why I said earlier that I and our friends on the Conservative Benches want both Turkish and Greek Cypriots living once again in Famagusta. Regrettably, however, nothing happened in the six years after the framework document to which I referred was agreed and recommended in November 1978.

We now reach May 1993 and the report of the Secretary-General of the United Nations, who proposed

"a package of confidence-building measures as a first step towards an overall settlement. A key issue in the set of proposals was the opening up of the fenced area of Famagusta to resettlement by its original inhabitants. The area would be placed under UN administration and the owners of property there could obtain possession of their assets. Both Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots would be able to enter the area freely and intercommunal contact and trade would be encouraged. The proposal was accepted by the Greek Cypriot side from the outset but the Turkish Cypriot side failed to give a positive response."

On 4 April 1994, the Secretary-General reported to the Security Council that

"the Turkish Cypriot side had not provided the response necessary to make an agreement on the implementation of the confidence-building measures possible".

[Mr. Tom Cox]

So again, sadly, nothing happened, but the Secretary-General clearly stated who had stopped the progress that we had all been looking for.

In his report to the Security Council on 11 April 1994, the Secretary-General underlined

"the need to conclude an agreement on the implementation of the confidence-building measures".

Against that background and all the recorded facts, can there be any doubt who has stopped the progress that could and should have been made? Is the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office in any doubt? Are the British Government in any doubt? The UN and the Republic of Cyprus clearly support and work for the reopening of Famagusta.

What role does Famagusta play today in the life of Cyprus? None whatever. As I have said, it is a ghost town. Nothing is sadder or more distressing than to go into that region of Cyprus, to stand on high buildings, to look into Famagusta, as I have, and to be with Greek Cypriots who say, "That used to be my home, that used to be where I worked." Twenty-one years after the invasion of Cyprus, that is still the tragic position: Famagusta is a ghost town.

Are the British Government, one of the guarantor powers, happy with that? If not, what are they doing to promote the reopening of Famagusta? I and many other Members of Parliament want there to be meaningful involvement by the British Government. They cannot say, "Oh, we have no role to play," or, "There is too much opposition to this proposal." The only opposition is from Mr. Denktash, but again, as with everything concerning a possible honourable settlement in Cyprus, there is always opposition from Mr. Denktash. The views of the UN, of the United States Congress, of the European Parliament and of the Council of Europe are all on record. They all say the same thing: it is Mr. Denktash and his supporters in Turkey who stopped the progress that we want.

I talk, hon. Members talk and, most certainly, the Republic of Cyprus and the UN talk of the full return of Famagusta to its position before the 1974 invasion. The Minister and his officials must not waste their time talking about a gradual return, some of the town being returned and some of it still remaining under the control of Mr. Denktash. That suggestion is totally unacceptable to hon. Members and to the Republic of Cyprus. So I beg the Minister not to waste his time with such suggestions.

We seek, as the United Nations has sought, the full return of the town of Famagusta to the people to whom it belongs—Greek and Turkish Cypriots. With that return must come the full withdrawal from the town and the area of the Turkish army, its place being taken by United Nations peacekeeping forces.

The case for the return has long been made, and we must ask the Minister why it has not happened. I am sure that the House would like to hear his views. For years, when Cyprus has been discussed in the House, the Government, who have been in power for 16 years, have always made the same statement: "Of course we want a settlement, and we fully support the efforts of the United Nations."

Many of us reply, "Good, but what are you doing to create an initiative leading to discussions and to a settlement for Cyprus and its people?" When has an initiative, any initiative, come from the Government over the past 16 years? It is now 21 years since the invasion, and for 16 of those years the Government have been in power. What can they say now to show their own initiative on Cyprus?

I have here a concurrent resolution published by the United States Congress on 16 March 1995, called, "Supporting a resolution to the long-standing dispute regarding Cyprus". No doubt the Minister has seen it. I could quote at length from that document, but one sentence says it all:

"President Clinton appointed a Special Presidential Emissary for Cyprus".

President Clinton and the United States Congress are now to take an active role on the Cyprus issue. What will be the Government's response? Do they welcome that or will they obstruct it? What is their view? I hope that the hon. Gentleman will tell us.

We all know about Turkey's role in Cyprus. Last week Mrs. Ciller, the Prime Minister of Turkey, was in London and met our Prime Minister. She can offer nothing to help him in our coming general election, but we all know what she wanted—this country's support for Turkey's application to join the European customs union, and in her forthcoming election campaign.

We all know how high-level politics are conducted; there are trade-offs. So my question to the Minister is: what did Mrs. Ciller offer? Did she commit Turkey to work genuinely now for an honourable settlement in Cyprus? And what did the Prime Minister ask her to do? I hope that the Minister will tell us.

At the beginning of my speech I mentioned Cyprus and membership of the Commonwealth, and a statement on Cyprus was made at the recent Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting in New Zealand. It gave total support to the United Nations resolutions on Cyprus—resolution 365, passed in 1974, resolution 550, passed in 1984, and resolution 939, passed in 1994. The Heads of Government also called for the

"withdrawal of all Turkish forces and settlers from . . . Cyprus, the return of the refugees to their homes"—

a statement that was fully endorsed by the conference.

The Commonwealth, the United States Congress and the United Nations all say the same thing. So when shall we at long last start to see commitment and support from the Government for those statements? If the Government support them, there can be no other issue, as I have tried to outline by detailing what successive Secretaries-General of the United Nations have said.

The reopening of the town of Famagusta would start off the actions and policies that would lead to the end of the division that, tragically, still exists in Cyprus, and to the end of the long suffering of both communities, Greek and Turkish. The challenge now is for the Government. What will they do now to back up the attempts that have been made, especially with regard to reopening Famagusta?

9.55 am

Dr. Ian Twinn (Edmonton): I congratulate the hon. Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox) on obtaining the debate, and thank you, Madam Speaker, for granting it. A debate on Famagusta and its occupation for 21 years by Turkish troops is long overdue. But before I make my speech I declare an interest, in that my family and I were the guests

of the town council and the mayor of Famagusta for three days in the summer—although, sadly, we could not reach Famagusta itself.

Famagusta was the third largest city in Cyprus, with 60,000 people in its municipal area. Those people are now refugees—some living in other parts of Cyprus, some in my constituency in north London, some in Australia and some in the United States. They are spread around the world, and they have not been back to their homes.

I have not been to Famagusta itself, but like the hon. Member for Tooting I have stood at the barbed wire, looked down into the town and talked to the United Nations troops who keep us out. I have seen the Turkish troop emplacements keeping watch on us as we look down at the ghost town of Varosha, a suburb of Famagusta that was cynically fenced off by the Turks so that it could not be occupied.

Varosha now stands crumbling and overgrown; in people's homes the curtains blow in the wind and their goods—washing machines, televisions and other personal possessions—have been looted by Turkish troops. Family photographs still stand there in place.

I am sure that no hon. Member who meets refugees from anywhere in the world can fail to be moved by their personal circumstances, but Greek Cypriots can go to the dividing line, the green line, today and see their homes, their gardens and their fruit trees—but they cannot get to them. At the same time they know that their possessions are not being used by anyone else, but are being wasted in the most cynical way by the Turkish Cypriot administration that has taken possession of more than one third of the island of Cyprus.

That administration is unrecognised by anyone other than Turkey, which has tens of thousands of troops ensuring that it keeps possession of that part of the island. As many as 80,000 settlers have also been brought in from Turkey, in a mass movement of population unprecedented in 20th century Europe. The House should state firmly its total opposition to what has happened in Cyprus over the past 21 years.

The story of Famagusta is the story of Cyprus, and the House cannot discuss the town separately from the issue of what has happened in the whole of Cyprus. The future of Famagusta depends on the future of negotiations and on reaching a settlement which will allow Turkish and Greek Cypriots to live together in peace on their island. It is their island; it does not belong to the 80,000 settlers or to the 40,000 troops. It belongs to Cypriots.

As an officer of the Cyprus committee of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, along with the hon. Member for Tooting, I feel very strongly that I am here to argue for the interests of all Cypriots—not for Greek Cypriots and not for Turkish Cypriots. There is a balance to be achieved. Both communities in Cyprus have every right to expect to live their lives in peace and be able to go to their home areas, to enjoy their own property, whether they are Turkish Cypriots who cannot get down to Paphos where their land was, or Greek Cypriots who cannot get to Famagusta, Kyrenia or Morphou. None such restriction is acceptable. We have a duty to continue trying to achieve a solution in Cyprus which allows all Cypriots to enjoy their own island.

The history of the past 21 years in Cyprus is littered with messages of good will from politicians from around the world. We have already heard that it is littered with UN resolutions. The UN resolutions cannot be objected to; they are wonderful and say exactly what we want to achieve. Yet 21 years on, we have achieved none of it.

Declarations of good will are not enough by themselves. Varosha is still a ghost town. The hotels along the beautiful Famagusta sea front are empty, and when people try to see them, even from the sea, Turkish gunboats appear to turn back local residents. The same is true of Morphou at the other end of the island. It is totally inaccessible to the people to whom it belongs. The same is true of Kyrenia since people fled from the original invasion, never to return and see their homes. We must ask our Government to do everything that they can in the world community to ensure that the Turkish troops and the settlers leave, and that Cyprus is returned to the people to whom it belongs.

None of that of course will be easy—we know that. We can go into great detail about the nature of the 1960s constitution, why it broke down and how the two communities failed to work together. But whatever conclusions we reach, wherever we want to apportion blame, some of the blame has to come back to Britain. We have a strong responsibility in Cyprus. We helped to construct the constitution. We have been close advisers in the post-independence era. We have a duty as one of the three guarantor powers of Cyprus to ensure that it is returned to democratic health and that Turkish and Greek Cypriots are able to enjoy their own land.

So we cannot stand back as a country, whatever some British people say they want. We cannot cynically stand back and allow Cyprus to carry on in the way that it has. Cyprus is divided; it is the only European country divided by barbed wire where troops keep two parts of the same population apart. The capital city of Nicosia is divided. It is a beautiful and wonderful city, and I have been privileged to see both sides of it in recent years. Indeed, I have seen both sides of the same street which had a derelict area in the middle. That is a heart-rending experience for anyone.

One day, I am absolutely sure that the nightmare of Cyprus will end. It is not a question whether Cyprus will remain divided for ever. That will not happen and those people who believe that an acceptable solution has been found in the division of Cyprus—we have heard such sentiments expressed from both sides of the House in the past—are deluding themselves. The interests between Greek and Turkish Cypriots are so strong, the island so small and the economic necessity of getting together so significant, that one day there will be a solution. Therefore, we must turn our minds to what can be done to bring the two communities together.

It is not right for us as foreign politicians in Cyprus to dictate the solution. The days of Britain doing that around the world are over—perhaps that is rather a good thing. We can, however, stand behind both communities and give them the reassurances that they need and ensure that any solution will be fair.

My involvement in Cyprus is very much concerned with helping in any way that I can to bring the two sides together and ensure that a solution becomes possible. I certainly do not accept Turkey's pre-eminent role in that region as being a barrier to a solution in Cyprus. I am afraid that too many people accept that the power which Turkey represents is too important to cross in a region where we look for stability. The occupation of Cyprus by troops is not legitimised by Turkey's obvious power.

[Dr. Ian Twinn]

While supporting both sides in efforts to get together for talks to try to reach conclusions on what a solution may be, we have at times all been guilty of encouraging the legitimate Government of Cyprus to make concessions, which have been readily accepted as a fact by the Turkish Cypriot Administration. But nothing reciprocal has followed and negotiations have broken down. In subsequent negotiations, the Government's concessions have been taken on board and more has been demanded. There has been a ratchet effect, which we saw with the confidence-building measures and the suggestion that one eighth of Famagusta—the fenced Varosha area—should be made over to some sort of free town.

That was a good idea if it was to be based on moving forward to a solution for the whole of Cyprus. Many of us thought that if that area was just to stand alone as a small gesture, it was not worth having. I am afraid that we are in a such a position now. It is very difficult to imagine anyone putting their money into redeveloping the small, fenced area of Varosha, which would be surrounded by Turkish troops and have inadequate safe access for Greek Cypriots. It has been empty for 21 years, shrubs and trees grow in the roads, buildings are crumbling, and it would cost a lot of money and several years' work to make it inhabitable again.

I would like Famagusta—a much larger area than Varosha—made over as a free town. I would like it to become an economic free zone. It has a tremendous future. That change could happen regardless of whether it would lead to an immediate solution within Cyprus, provided that it was administered by the United Nations as a UN town where there was equal access for both communities.

I speak purely in a personal capacity. As someone who believes passionately in the operations of the free market, perhaps the House will forgive me for thinking that it is a jolly good chance to demonstrate that the free market can bring together people of two communities. Such a move cannot happen with just Varosha because it is too small and insecure for people to commit their capital to it. But that is not what we should be arguing about today. We should be arguing about achieving a solution in Cyprus, not only Famagusta. I do not want Famagusta to be traded off to allow the rest of the northern part of Cyprus to remain occupied—that is not acceptable.

I have been impressed over the years by the position taken by my right hon. and hon. Friends in the Government, who have readily understood that Britain has a moral duty in Cyprus and that the status quo in Cyprus is not acceptable. That has to be countered by the fact that we are not a power which can tell the Turks, with the use of military might, to go back where they came from. We have to work in co-operation with our European Union partners and I am glad that we are.

I am also pleased that a firm commitment has been made to begin negotiations six months after the intergovernmental conference, and that Cyprus can look forward to joining the European Union whether or not the Turkish Cypriots want to join. I would much rather the Turkish Cypriots were part of it. None the less, no one can be allowed to blackmail processes surrounding Cyprus's entry into the EU.

I am also encouraged by the fact that the Americans are now turning their minds to what happened in 1974. Given that, and with the President of the United States of America here today, he might like to consider America's part in the events of 1974. With the Congress now thinking positively and in a quite unified way about the future of Cyprus, and with the President putting some energy into the issues in Cyprus, perhaps the President will talk to his Secretary of Defence about the influence that the American defence institutions have on the Turkish military. If the President commits himself to that, it will be the most positive thing that he could do to achieve a settlement in Cyprus.

I shall certainly continue to work hard to ensure that we have a solution. The solution, however, must be just and fair for all Cypriots.

10.9 am

Mrs. Barbara Roche (Hornsey and Wood Green): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox) on his success in obtaining today's debate. He is well known among hon. Members for his commitment to Cyprus and for having brought the situation there to the attention of the House over many years.

I had the great honour and privilege—I declare an interest—to be a weekend guest at the Morphou municipality's rally in October. The municipality is operating in exile because Morphou, like Famagusta, cannot be visited by Greek Cypriots. People whose roots were there for generation after generation cannot visit their homes. They are prohibited from visiting the graves of their fathers, grandmothers and grandfathers, and they cannot tend the orange groves that have been in their families for generations.

It is appropriate that today—21 years after that terrible invasion and occupation of 1974—we are debating the reality of life in Famagusta. What was once a prosperous and thriving place with an extremely successful tourist industry is now a ghost town. For the many tourists who visit Cyprus each year, it must be absolutely inconceivable that there is a part of this beautiful and successful island where nothing moves and where people have given way to rats.

We must examine the overall situation in Cyprus. Twenty-one years after the invasion, many people are still refugees in their own country. There are, of course, no refugee camps in Cyprus because the Republic of Cyprus has absorbed its refugees. They are very successful members of society who play their full part in the political, economic and social fabric of their country. As far as the international community is concerned, that has almost played down the urgency of finding a solution for the problem.

Cyprus is a small country—a small island. It is a member of the United Nations, a member of the Commonwealth and an independent country occupied by a foreign power. At the last count, there were about 400 tanks on that small island, which is an obscenity. That is not right, and it cannot be tolerated.

In the illegally occupied far north of the island there is the scandal of the enclaved people, whose human rights are violated daily. That has been catalogued by the United Nations. There is also the scandal of the missing people. Many families in my constituency—I know that I always say this, but it bears repeating—do not know what has happened to their missing relatives. The time for this debate is short, and I do not want to take up the time of

other hon. Members who wish to speak, but in his reply on the future of Famagusta I should like the Minister to concentrate on those missing people.

What will be Britain's role in finding a solution? Britain is a guarantor power and has a very special relationship with Cyprus. In the past 10 years, however, Ministers have paid very few, if any, visits to examine the situation in Cyprus rather than consider the Government's defence role. Will that record change? It is important that Turkey and the illegal regime of Mr. Denktash do not have any veto on Cyprus's application to join the European Union. Some of the Prime Minister's remarks do not fit well with that aim. I should like to hear the Minister give a clear assurance that there will be no veto, nor a de facto veto.

It is important when we debate the situation in Cyprus that we do not merely say that we will support the best endeavours of the United Nations, although those are vital. Britain's importance in the region calls for something more, and we can play a unique role in negotiations with our American partners. In our language, we must not fall into the trap of talking about the situation in Cyprus as if it is some sort of intercommunal dispute between two parties, because it is not. It is a dispute between the sovereign, independent Republic of Cyprus and an illegal regime backed by a foreign occupying power. Our language must be correct.

If we take those actions, I am sure that we will find a just solution for the beautiful places that once were and can again be Famagusta and the island of Cyprus.

10.17 am

Mr. Edward O'Hara (Knowsley, South): I, too, congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox) on securing this important debate. It is a well-timed debate because tomorrow is St. Andrew's day. St. Andrew is closely associated with the town of Famagusta, and there is great affection among the people of Famagusta for the monastery of Apostolos Andreas, far up in the north-east of the enclaved Karpa peninsula. It may behove the House today to remember the plight of the people who are trapped in that enclave.

Andrew is also the name of Mr. Pouyouros, the mayor of Famagusta, whom we welcome to London today and whose name day is tomorrow. It is therefore particularly appropriate that we have this debate today. I declare an interest. I was briefly the guest of the municipality of Famagusta and that of Morphou at the demonstrations earlier this summer, and I was proud to be able to support the demonstrations against the injustice of the present occupation of northern Cyprus.

I should like to explain the terms Famagusta and Varosha, because there is some confusion about them. Early-day motion 110 deliberately refers to Famagusta-Varosha. Famagusta in Greek is Ammochostos, which means "town covered with sand". That shows the long history of occupation of this site, which goes back more than 30 centuries to the iron-age settlement of Enkomi, through the classical settlement of Salamis—associated with Homeric heroes in ancient history—to the Byzantine era, when the name Ammochostos first appeared.

Famagusta was the name bestowed on the town during the Venetian occupation. It was then one of the biggest harbours and trade centres in the eastern Mediterranean and Othello's tower, which was built into the massive walls of old Famagusta, was the inspiration for Shakespeare's play. When the town was conquered by the Ottoman Turks in 1571, the Greek inhabitants were ejected from the walled city of Famagusta, but they did not leave the area and settled in the suburbs. "Varosh" is the Turkish word for suburb, so Varosha refers to the suburbs of Famagusta.

In modern times, Famagusta has two meanings. The name refers to the old walled town of Famagusta, which dates back to medieval times, and to the walled town and suburbs of Varosha. Famagusta can mean both, and it is important to have that clarified on the record. The British occupied the town in 1878, and I shall mention that again in my concluding remarks.

In the course of its history, Famagusta became one of the jewels in the economy—if not the greatest jewel—of Cyprus. It was not only an important trading centre, but—in more modern times—an important tourist and holiday centre. Golden Sands beach in Famagusta bay is one of the finest beaches in the Mediterranean. The tourist industry was inhibited by the EOKA troubles in the 1950s, but after the independence of Cyprus in 1960 the tourist industry of Famagusta really took off.

In 1974, on the eve of the Turkish invasion, Famagusta was a flourishing economic and cultural centre, and we should remember that a high level of culture had developed there. It is important to note that Famagusta was not overrun in the first invasion of northern Cyprus in July 1974, after which the Turkish army should have withdrawn under the treaty of guarantee. Under that treaty, the Turkish army had the right to intervene to facilitate the restoration of the status quo. When the coup d'état was overthrown in 1974 and the legitimate Government reinstalled, the writ of the Turkish invading forces expired and they should have withdrawn. But they did not, and on 14 August 1974 they launched a second invasion and Famagusta was overrun on 16 August.

It was obvious that the Turkish tanks were overrunning the fertile Mesaoria agricultural plain, and they also took the high and low roads between Famagusta and Nicosia—two of the most important roads on the island. When the Turkish army occupied Famagusta, it expelled the Greek inhabitants. There was a tragic exodus of refugees, and the town was fenced off. The town was not resettled, and Famagusta is almost unique in this sense. It became a ghost town—a term that has been used today and which was coined by a Swedish journalist in 1977 who recorded his visit to the town thus:

> "The asphalt on the roads has cracked in the warm sun and along the sidewalks bushes are growing.
>
> Today, September 1977, the breakfast tables are still set, the laundry still hanging and the lamps still burning.
>
> Famagusta is a ghost-town".

As my hon. Friend the Member for Tooting said, if one goes to an elevated position at Dherenia—the closest village to Famagusta beyond the barbed wire—and looks through binoculars at the skyscraper hotels of the ghost town of Famagusta, one sees the tragic waste of an economic jewel. Adjacent to the barbed wire at Dherenia, there is a house that belongs to the family of a friend of mine, Mikis Xenophontos Ioannou. He would have been here today if business had not otherwise detained him in Cyprus. Xenophontos means the son of Xenophon, and old Xenophon—Mikis's father—rebuilt his house hard up

[Mr. Edward O'Hara]

against the barbed wire. That house is still there on the free side of the barbed wire, and that is one of the strongest indications one could have of the attachment that people have to the land that they rightly regard as their own.

I shall read a short excerpt from a poem which gives expression to that feeling. The poem, by Clairi Aggelidou, is called "The Day of Return":

"Save the key. It unlocks the house
When you go, you can open it up.
Keep it in a place that's safe
and do clean it up
now and again.
So it will be ready
when they say
'you can return . . . ',
I won't return, like I thought,
you will,
once more you will see
the orchard and the walnut tree
I planted . . .
Guard the key.
Our yard will smell
of jasmin flowers
the Vine will be in fruit
though untrimmed for years."

Two more lines of the poem read:

"Do not cry.
Just guard the key well."

That is a tragic expression of the feelings of the people of Famagusta for the town which they look upon but to which they cannot return. Mikis Ioannou himself has written much moving poetry about his home town of Famagusta.

I have strong feelings about the town, because I spent some of my formative years in the area. I was a young soldier between the ages of 19 and 21 in the Famagusta area, and Famagusta was, in a sense, my home town. I walked the streets of Famagusta and Varosha, and I recognise the hotels that I can see through binoculars. Mr. Pouyouros was, in a sense, my mayor when I lived in Famagusta, and he has been the mayor of Famagusta from 1953 to the present day. I hope to see the day—I vow to see the day—when Mr. Pouyouros walks freely and with full dignity through the streets of Famagusta once again as its mayor.

The situation in Cyprus is tragic, and the situation of Famagusta within Cyprus is tragic, too—it is a tragedy within a tragedy.

The second invasion was not an afterthought but a land grab, by which those occupying 37 per cent. of the territory secured two thirds or more of the productive capacity of Cyprus, which is contained within their territorial mass.

As the seizure of Famagusta in 1974 was the keystone of the invasion, so Famagusta could be the key to a solution. One might suppose that it has been kept as a bargaining point.

My hon. Friend the Member for Tooting listed the various high-level statements and resolutions between 1978 and 1994, so I will not burden the House by repeating them. In conclusion, I suggest that, after all the years of prevarication, it is time that progress was made on the solution to the Cyprus problem and that a commencement of that solution should be the occupation and resettlement of Famagusta by its legitimate inhabitants—not as a fenced-in enclave, as Mr. Denktash insists, but in the form suggested by the hon. Member for Edmonton (Dr. Twinn). Again, I will save time by not alluding further to that suggestion.

At a time when we have seen progress in South Africa, the middle east, Bosnia and, today, in Northern Ireland towards what we hope are solutions to apparently intractable international problems, we must be optimistic and determined that progress can also be made towards a solution to the problem in Cyprus. As my hon. Friend the Member for Tooting said, the United Kingdom has multiple responsibilities in that respect. As the former colonial power, a senior member of the Commonwealth, which has expressed its support for the United Nations resolutions, a member of the Security Council and of the European Union, I call on the Government to show the renewed determination shown by the American Congress and President Clinton to finding a solution in Cyprus.

In the terms of early-day motion 110, I call

"upon Her Majesty's Government to press for the restoration of the fabric and infrastructure of Famagusta-Varosha and the resettlement of the town by the legitimate Greek and Turkish residents under the auspices of the United Nations, so that the two communities,"—

Turkish and Cypriot—

"by demonstrating that they can live and work together in peace and friendship, may engender that inter-communal trust and confidence upon which a wider and deeper solution to the Cyprus problem may be securely founded."

10.32 am

Ms Joyce Quin (Gateshead, East): Like all other hon. Members who have spoken, I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox) on applying for and being granted this Adjournment debate on Famagusta and Cyprus. Once again, my hon. Friend has revealed to the House his extensive knowledge of the situation in Famagusta and Cyprus and his arguments have been backed up by the very evident knowledge of all hon. Members from both sides of the House who have spoken.

Many of us feel that Cyprus does not, perhaps, command much public attention, although people might feel that they now know something about it, rather unexpectedly, because of the evil machinations of one Francis Urquhart in "The Final Cut".

We have heard a rather more accurate picture of events in Cyprus, and much genuine concern about the need to get the reunification process started again and some real progress, from hon. Members on both sides of the House. Many important points have been made in the debate and I echo the comment of my hon. Friend the Member for Tooting, and other hon. Members, who said that Famagusta-Varosha is the best place to begin the confidence-building process and progress towards the peaceful reunification of Cyprus.

The history of Famagusta-Varosha is a sad one, as has been pointed out. Although I have not visited the area or viewed it from the barbed wire, which the hon. Member for Edmonton (Dr. Twinn) described, I have none the less been struck by some of the accounts of

"palm trees piercing through cracked tennis courts and leaning on crumbling rat-infested seaside villas",

and

"here a padlocked Barclays Bank . . . there a gutted sandwich shop listing the prices of 20 years ago".

There is no doubt that Famagusta epitomises the tragedy of the separation and division in Cyprus. People in both communities have been deprived of their homes, indeed of their roots, and forced to move from places in which their families have lived for generations. Even today, people can go to the green line and see their home, but they cannot occupy it.

Like other hon. Members, I pay tribute to the mayor of Famagusta. It is striking that the structures of local government have been kept in place, despite the fact that Varosha is a ghost town. The spirit of a unified Cyprus, which remains strong, is embodied in the work of the mayor and his colleagues, who try to ensure that the community that they once represented in Famagusta survives and has some hope for the future.

As has been said, the area has become the focus of confidence-building measures in Cyprus—measures to try to create conditions for future reunification. It is still true, however, that the level of mistrust is very high. Indeed, I read only a week or so ago press reports of young people shouting insults to each other across the green line that divides the country. Perhaps it is not surprising, although it is highly regrettable, that there is a climate of bitterness—a climate that is not always conducive to long-term living together.

I am also struck, however, by the number of people in Cyprus who want to embark on the confidence-building approach and who see an opportunity to do so in the immediate future. I strongly agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Mrs. Roche), who drew attention not merely to the political but to the economic potential of such measures. As has been said, the area concerned had huge economic potential 20 years ago as a tourist resort and was a centre for service industries and other types of economic activity.

Confidence-building measures would be of immense importance to Turkish as well as to Greek Cypriots. The adjoining area of Turkish Cyprus is not well off economically. We hear many accounts of the increasing economic disparity between the Turkish and Greek Cypriot areas. Greek Cypriots are said to earn, on average, three times as much as Turkish Cypriots and the discrepancy seems to be growing. There is enormous economic potential that can be mobilised for the future.

I look forward to hearing what the Minister has to say in his reply. I hope that he can give us a progress report on the attempts to move towards confidence building and to finance some economic activity in the area. We know that money is available in the European Union for activities in the Mediterranean. Also, when Cyprus moves towards European Union membership, it will be eligible for EU support. I hope that the Minister will address that point.

In the past few days, we have read many accounts about the European Mediterranean agreement, which brings together a large number of Mediterranean members of the European Union and their neighbours. It includes Cyprus and Turkey as well as Greece, as a Mediterranean member of the European Union. We believe that that is an important framework which can be used to bring both political and economic benefits to the region. We applaud the fact that within the European Mediterranean agreement there are commitments to democracy, human rights and the rule of law as well as to free trade and economic co-operation. We are keen for that to be built on in future.

My hon. Friends have referred to the question of European Union membership for Cyprus. The Labour party is anxious to promote that as much as possible. Indeed, we hope to be in government when we welcome Cyprus into the European Union and to take part in the negotiations with Cyprus, which are due to start six months after the end of the intergovernmental conference which begins next year.

Cyprus's move towards membership of the European Union could be an important part of bringing about the peaceful reunification of the island. For that reason, we want progress. We are aware of the situation in respect of the customs union with Turkey. Although we will continue to express our grave worries about human rights in Turkey, we accept that some moves have been made.

We also understand the dangers of fundamentalism in Turkey and of Turkey's looking too much to the east, rather than the west. I accept those points, but none the less reiterate what my hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green said and hope that the Government, as well as the United States, will put pressure on Turkey not only in respect of human rights but to adopt a favourable attitude toward Cyprus's membership of the European Union. As several hon. Members have said, we do not want Turkey to have a veto over Cyprus's membership of the European Union. European Union membership can be part of the solution to the Cyprus problem and we must keep that in mind.

We believe that the future lies with a reunited Cyprus which respects human rights and different cultural and religious traditions and allows them to flourish in the Cyprus and the European Union of the future.

10.42 am

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. David Davis): Cyprus matters to the United Kingdom. It is rightly the regular focus of attention in the House and the hon. Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox) has found an ingenious and appropriate avenue for the discussion of the problem of Cyprus. I congratulate him on that and join him in welcoming the mayor of Famagusta to our proceedings.

This has been a wide-ranging and rather long debate, so I shall be pressed for time. To a large extent, it has also been measured and well informed. I commend hon. Members for that. My hon. Friend the Member for Edmonton (Dr. Twinn) made a particularly wise contribution.

Famagusta is a window on the serious problems that beset the island of Cyprus. The city, as many hon. Members have said, is a symbol of the long dispute between the two communities—a dispute which has led to the tragic division of the island. The hon. Member for Tooting ranged wide in his speech. The House has said that it expects me to range beyond the troubled boundaries of Famagusta and to recap on Government policy on Cyprus. Indeed, the hon. Member for Tooting asked me what we are doing to promote a settlement. I shall, in the time available, endeavour to answer as many questions as I can on those subjects.

The natural advantage of a good harbour has meant that Famagusta has been at the centre of events that have shaped the eastern Mediterranean. The ancient walled city has been the target of many imperial ambitions. As one

[Mr. David Davis]

of the main emporiums of the Levant in the middle ages, it is not surprising that it became an ethnic and religious melting pot. It is, of course, the "Sea-port Town in Cyprus", the backdrop to the "Cyprus Wars" in "Othello". It is no stranger to war—tens of thousands perished on both sides in the siege laid by the Ottomans in 1570-71, to which the hon. Member for Knowsley, South (Mr. O'Hara) referred.

Famagusta retained its economic importance into modern times. In 1960, when Cyprus became independent, it was the island's third city with large Greek and Turkish Cypriot communities. The modern commercial town facing the beach became a tourist riviera and thus a significant contributor to the Cypriot economy. The city was the island's principal port until 1974.

The fate of Famagusta and the suburb of Varosha, or New Famagusta—I am grateful to the hon. Member for Knowsley, South for explaining the details of those names—after the Turkish intervention touches a raw nerve for many Cypriots. Its significance for both communities is not difficult to understand. The walled city of Famagusta was a Turkish Cypriot enclave which endured its share of sufferings in the intercommunal violence of the 1960s and 1970s. The 35,000 people who fled Varosha in August 1974 were a substantial portion of the total number of Greek Cypriots displaced during the tragic events of that summer.

The Turkish decision to fence off Varosha and effectively prevent any settlement has created, as many hon. Members have said, one of the strangest sights in Europe. The spectacle of crumbling luxury apartments left to rot for the past 21 years—a ghost town, as hon. Members have called it—is a symbol of the Cyprus problem.

Who has benefited from this monument to waste? Certainly not the Greek Cypriots, who have been deprived of their property for so long; nor the Turkish side, which has to guard a decaying ghost town. It might seem perverse that the international community insists that Varosha, as a fenced-off area with no settlement, retains its special status, but the fact that it is a closed area keeps alive the hope that, one day, its original inhabitants might return.

The Security Council of the United Nations, in its resolution 414 of 15 September 1977, made clear its concern that any moves by Turkish Cypriots to settle Varosha would harm the prospects for a settlement. That is still the position today. The international community has been periodically alarmed by reports of plans to move into parts of Varosha. We continue to believe that any action of that sort in the absence of a settlement would be a setback.

Against that background, it is not hard to understand why Varosha has been at the centre of efforts to reconcile the two communities since 1974. In the sad logic of prolonged disputes, the simple fact is that the Turkish side has something which the other side wants back. In the aftermath of the events of 1974, there were hopes that a solution to Varosha could be found quickly. We have heard a good account of that from the hon. Member for Tooting. As a closed area, there were no serious practical obstacles to handing Varosha back, but repeated efforts to make progress have yet to find an acceptable means to end this absurdity once and for all.

There have been various ideas for resettlement under United Nations control. Indeed, each phase of the all too fitful intercommunal talks has involved a negotiating package for Varosha. Just over a year ago, it seemed that both communities were finally prepared to commit themselves to arrangements which would allow Varosha to come alive again.

During 1993-94, the United Nations Secretary-General and his representatives worked with both communities on a package of confidence-building measures, or CBMs in the Foreign Office jargon. The proposals envisage the resettlement of Varosha as an area for bi-communal contacts and enterprise and the reopening of Nicosia international airport. Both would remain under United Nations control. The package contained real benefits for both communities. The United Nations worked non-stop to close the gap between the sides. Unfortunately, in the end, neither side managed to seize the opportunity. Success would have cleared the way for direct contacts on the basis of a settlement.

Failure meant each side retreating into familiar recriminations. In June 1994, Mr. Denktash set out—admittedly at a very late stage—the circumstances under which he could accept implementation of the confidence-building measures. I can well understand the frustrations of the Greek Cypriot side at that response. I can understand that, after months of waiting for Mr. Denktash to say yes, they felt frustrated when he replied, "Yes, but".

However, we believed that, even at that stage, there was value in pressing on with efforts to reach an agreement on the confidence-building measures. We still believe that such an agreement can only be helpful in achieving the wide objective of a settlement in Cyprus. We believe that the package is still viable, and Mr. Denktash's decision in January to accept the CBM package was a welcome, albeit belated, move. Both leaders would earn the plaudits and the encouragement of the international community if they returned to the CBM package.

As to the Turkish position, I was asked about the meeting that took place between my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and the Prime Minister of Turkey, Mrs. Ciller, last week. They both agreed that it was high time for progress on the issue, and my right hon. Friend left Mrs. Ciller in no doubt about the role that we expect Turkey to play. Turkey can exert a positive influence on Mr. Denktash and we made it clear that we want that to happen.

Mr. Anthony Coombs (Wyre Forest): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Davis: I am very short on time and I am afraid that I cannot allow any more interventions.

Why is the situation in Famagusta and Varosha important to the House and to Britain? Human compassion for those of both communities who have suffered is of course one reason, but the wider Cyprus problem and the search for a settlement is an issue at the centre of British foreign policy.

Cyprus has long been important to British interests. I could spend a good deal of time talking about the history of our relationship, but it has been already been recounted by other hon. Members. We do not need to look very far for evidence of the closeness of our relationship. Cyprus draws 1 million British tourists to its shores every year.

People of Cypriot origin are part of the landscape in Britain—especially in London—and they have made a welcome contribution to British society.

We also have an important and substantial trading relationship with Cyprus. Some 10 per cent. of all exports to Cyprus—worth £230 million—are British and our imports from Cyprus amount to £136 million. It is also necessary to recall that our two sovereign base areas in Cyprus remain of fundamental strategic importance to the United Kingdom and the west. The Gulf war was a strong and a recent reminder of that fact.

A distinguished British observer of the Cyprus scene during the past three decades has commented:

"Nobody won and everybody lost by reason of this futile conflict".

I agree. The division of Cyprus since 1974 has been damaging and wasteful, as Varosha itself illustrates. It cannot go on. We have always said that the division of the island is unacceptable. Our efforts and those of the international community continue to aim for a solution based on reconciliation between the two communities.

We are bound by history and by a moral duty to do all that we can to help to find a solution. The international community also plays it part, but neither we nor it hold the solution in our hands. Only the main protagonists, the two Cypriot communities, can decide what arrangements they can live with, but we can and must assist with advice, encouragement, support and even a degree of arm-twisting—hon. Members know that I am not very familiar with that—if we judge that it will help.

My hon. Friend the Member for Banbury (Mr. Baldry) took the House through recent developments when we last debated Cyprus. He said then that the status quo was not acceptable, and he was right. I shall now recap events and bring the House up to date on the Cyprus situation.

The United Nations Security Council resolution 939, passed on 29 July 1994, called for a fundamental and far-reaching reflection on ways of approaching the Cyprus problem in a manner that would yield results. It also called for the earliest possible implementation of the confidence-building measures that are so important for the future of Varosha.

In October 1994, the UN Secretary-General invited the two community leaders to talks with his representative in Cyprus. That offered a welcome opportunity for the two leaders to meet face to face and to discuss the issues between them. We were hopeful that a new willingness to compromise was emerging. President Clerides adopted a useful and a positive approach to ways of achieving a settlement, and Mr. Denktash reaffirmed his commitment to a bi-zonal, bi-communal federation. We were disappointed that nothing concrete emerged from the meeting, but we remained hopeful that those contacts might form the basis of further contacts.

The United Nations continued its contacts with the two leaders, encouraging them towards a common perception of the kind of trade-offs needed to make real progress. The build-up to elections in northern Cyprus in April inevitably produced a pause in international efforts. As the House knows, Mr. Denktash was re-elected. We shall not let him forget that, during his election campaign, he said that he saw himself as the candidate best fitted to negotiate a settlement for the Turkish Cypriot community.

The House will be aware of the exploratory discussions between representatives from both communities in Cyprus which took place in London in May. The objective of the talks was to generate momentum behind the UN efforts to find a settlement. We felt that that might be achieved through confidential contacts away from the intense gaze of publicity in Cyprus. Both groups met American and British representatives to talk over the issues and to share views on the paths and obstacles to progress. They also had direct discussions with each other.

If I say that there was a helpful exchange of views, hon. Members will know that that is diplomatic language to describe meetings which did not yield as much as we had hoped, but it does not mean that that approach to the issue was worthless. We and the Americans still believe that confidential contacts can provide a way forward. However, I stress the word "confidential"—both communities must resist the urge to play to the gallery.

The British high commissioner and the US ambassador in Nicosia have unstintingly maintained contact with both leaders and urged them to focus on the main ingredients of a settlement. The US presidential envoy, Richard Beattie, will visit Cyprus next week to follow up the London talks. It is important to remember that there are a number of strands to the international efforts to find a settlement. We welcome the appointment of Dick Beattie and we have been fully and closely involved in his activities and initiatives—including the May talks in London—and in preparing the ground for his forthcoming visit to Cyprus. The London talks were a product of our collaboration with the Americans. They were a brave attempt, but they did not constitute a new, self-standing initiative. As I have said, they support the mission of the United Nations Secretary-General.

That is also true of progress on the route now mapped out for Cyprus's accession to the European Union. The House might find it helpful to have an account of where we are on that route. The Republic of Cyprus applied to join the European Union in July 1990. The European Commission submitted an opinion on Cyprus's application in June 1993. The opinion confirmed Cyprus's European identity and character and its vocation to belong to the Community. It also clearly envisaged that the accession process would provide an opportunity to resolve the central elements of the intercommunal dispute—I was pleased to hear the Opposition spokesperson confirm that view today. The opinion states:

"the fundamental freedoms laid down by the treaty . . . could not today be exercised over the entirety of the island's territory.

These freedoms and rights would have to be guaranteed as part of a comprehensive settlement restoring constitutional arrangements covering the whole of the Republic of Cyprus".

In Corfu in June 1994, the Heads of Government of the European Union agreed that Cyprus would be involved in the next stage of enlargement. That view was reaffirmed at the Essen European Council in December 1994. The Commission reviewed the question of Cyprus's accession to the European Union in February, and that review confirmed Cyprus's suitability for accession.

A further step was taken at the Foreign Affairs Council on 6 March. The council's conclusions outlined the circumstances under which accession negotiations will start, six months after the end of the 1996 intergovernmental conference. The Council called for progress in the intercommunal dispute and noted that some useful points had been identified recently.

[Mr. Davis]

The European Union's Association Council with Cyprus has since set out a substantial pre-accession strategy, with a structured dialogue. The first ministerial meeting between the 15 European Union countries and Cyprus took place on 21 November. The dialogue on political issues and the pre-accession strategy will serve to bring Cyprus closer to the European Union before formal accession negotiations begin.

Significant progress has been made on the road to Cyprus's accession to the European Union, and we have been at the forefront of that progress. Indeed, in March 1995, President Clerides singled out Britain among EU member states for our helpful contribution regarding Cyprus. We are grateful for his compliment. We have indeed been working hard on Cyprus's behalf.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. Time is up.

Fire Services (North Worcestershire)

11 am

Mr. Anthony Coombs (Wyre Forest): I want to draw attention to a matter of great controversy and sensitivity in my constituency—proposals to change fire cover in the Wyre Forest and north Worcestershire area.

I start by paying tribute to the firemen of the Worcestershire and north Worcestershire area, who do a magnificent job. Indeed, two members of the Hereford and Worcester brigade lost their lives in 1993, fighting a fire in Hereford.

The proposals by the chief fire officer, as part of what he called a "zero-based fire cover review", in September 1995 are unacceptable to people in my constituency, and reduce fire cover to an unacceptable level. It is proposed to close the retained station at Bewdley, and to halve the full-time complement at Kidderminster, reduce the number of its appliances and remove its hydraulic platform.

That has caused a huge amount of controversy. We have received a petition of 25,000 signatures against the proposals. The Wyre Forest district council has a special working party to act against them. The proposals have been the subject of innumerable meetings and letters to me and to Hereford and Worcester county council. I hope that, even at this late stage, the people responsible in the fire authority will review their proposals, which are unacceptable.

I understand that the county council has set up a working party, which is due to report by the end of January 1996. Although, under the Fire Services Act 1947, the proposals must ultimately go to the Home Office for approval, I hope that those proposals will be withdrawn before that becomes necessary.

Although much has been said about the financial background to that matter, I do not believe that the financial background is the principal cause of the proposals about which so many fears have been expressed. Indeed, several councillors have said that, even were they able to spend more money on the fire service, it would continue to be intent on those wrong-headed proposals. Nevertheless, I should say one or two things about the background to the financial position of the fire service in Hereford and Worcester.

Hereford and Worcester is bottom of all shire counties in its standard spending assessment per head allocation for fire—about £16.80 per head, by contrast with an average for the shires, let alone the metropolitan areas, of about £20.55. That effectively means that, instead of the county being able to spend about £14 million a year—which is what is actually spent, because the county council spends money in addition to the allocated SSA—which would have been the case had Hereford and Worcester been given an SSA at the county average, only £11.5 million is spent related to the SSA.

Mr. Michael Spicer (South Worcestershire): I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way in an excellent speech, in which he makes an important argument on behalf of his part of the county. I am the Member of Parliament for the other part of the county, which is covered by the same fire service, which, as my hon. Friend knows, was enormously stretched this summer in, among other things, putting out those enormous fires on the Malvern hills.

I have a problem similar to that of my hon. Friend. The fire service is starting to speak about closing Pebworth fire station in the same way as the Bewdley fire station in my hon. Friend's constituency. In the context of what my hon. Friend is saying, I wanted to ask him about funding.

Is it not peculiar—I have previously drawn this matter to the attention of the Minister—that the way in which fire services must spend their money is calculated on the basis of risk analysis, but the money that is made available for them is calculated on the basis of historic spend? There is a mismatch between the budgeting process and the funding process. Is that not at the back of my hon. Friend's argument?

Mr. Coombs: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. To give an idea of the scale of the problem we have, not only is there a gap of 21 per cent. between the shire average SSA and the Hereford and Worcester SAA, but that gap has grown historically. Even if the plan is implemented by the chief fire officer, the gap will increase to about 30 per cent.

I know that Baroness Blatch has spoken to members of Hereford and Worcester county council about that matter. I know that the Government are reviewing the area cost adjustment, which militates against counties in our region. I also know that the Government, with the Department of the Environment, are reviewing the mechanism by which the fire service SSA is calculated.

I am worried that the Hereford and Worcester county council fire brigade appeared not to know what the nine options were that had been laid down in that working party for the review of the SSA. However, as my hon. Friend the Member for South Worcestershire (Mr. Spicer) says, there is a significant difference between the options.

For instance, option 1, which, on fire safety, would give greater credence to the number of premises and plans that were covered by the fire service and, on fire prevention, would give greater credence to the number of pupils in schools, would mean that an SSA settlement for Hereford and Worcester would be increased by 23 per cent. on 1995-96 figures, or by £2.7 million, which would reflect current spending in the way we require.

There is a strong case for, not an activity-based approach, but a fire station-based approach, based on the number of homes and the sparsity of population in much of the area. I urge Ministers to get on with considering such a redistribution of resources. I hope that we shall hear something good when we hear the local government finance settlement, which we expect tomorrow.

It is an irony that the proposals, far from saving money, will cost about £340,000 to implement and £240,000 a year from then on. They involve the redundancy of 28 whole-time personnel from Kidderminster—half the whole-time personnel—the removal of a whole-time pumping appliance and the hydraulic platform there, and the closure of the Bewdley retained station, in a way that has caused uproar.

Those proposals are wrong-headed for several reasons. First, they are a perverse redistribution of resources, even within the county. Kidderminster, which, in the period July to September 1995, had 762 turn-outs, will be downgraded, whereas Bromsgrove, which had only 427, will be upgraded to the same level as Kidderminster, in spite of the fact that it had only slightly more than half the number of calls. With the closure of Bewdley, Kidderminster, even on a downgraded basis, will now be expected, with half the whole-time personnel, to cover an area not of 50 square miles, as hitherto, but of 90 square miles.

The boundaries set within Bewdley between those areas that are designated C in the review and those that are designated as lower-risk D areas lack all logic, owing more to the squares of the Ordnance Survey map than to any idea of the community and the physical geography. The Lakes residential estate is regarded as a C risk area, whereas St. Anne's middle and first schools, where there are a great many vulnerable young people right next to the Lakes industrial estate, are regarded as being in a D area.

The fact that Kidderminster has been downgraded from B to C status does not reflect the very many small factories, many with chemical and electrical processes, in the town. The matter has been drawn to my attention by firefighters in the area.

Moreover, the proposals completely ignore the historic nature of Bewdley, the proximity and complicated nature of its buildings, the high proportion of elderly people in its population, and the presence of tourist attractions such as the Severn valley railway and the safari park, which not only increase the risk of fire but make access difficult, particularly during the rush hours and at tourist peak times.

I shall concentrate on two specific problems. The first relates to response times. If a fire service is to be credible, its fire engines must be able to reach a fire within the time laid down. The centre of Bewdley is designated a C area, which means—according to Home Office recommendations—that one fire engine must reach a fire in between eight and 10 minutes. If the proposals are implemented, that fire engine will have to come from Kidderminster.

In a letter dated 11 September, the chief fire officer told me that that could be done in eight minutes. On 19 September, he elaborated on that, saying that it could be done

"at a speed of no more than 30 mph, with no lights or two-tone alarms, obeying traffic regulations and in a rush hour."

His deputy took the same line, saying that trials had been carried out showing that the journey could be done in eight minutes and 45 seconds. Most people, including firefighters, do not believe that; although the distance is only about three miles, they do not see how it could be achieved.

I have discovered the answer, however. Apparently, the calculation is done on the basis that the clock stops when the vehicle is stationary. It will not be of much comfort to someone in a fire to be told, "We can get to you in eight to 10 minutes, provided that our fire engine is moving all the time." If the vehicle is held up by traffic lights or a traffic jam, the period could be much longer, and lives could be put at risk. That, I feel, reveals the absurdity of the fire officer's argument that response times will be acceptable.

It is suggested that, in the event of a fire in, for example, a block of flats, a hydraulic platform can be transported from Bromsgrove to Kidderminster—a distance of at least six miles—within that period of eight to 10 minutes. According to Mr. R. E. Smith of Kidderminster, who drives that hydraulic platform,

"If he thinks the hydraulic platform can provide adequate cover from Bromsgrove"—

[Mr. Coombs]

"he" being the chief fire officer—

"he is wrong. I drive the appliance. He doesn't. I doubt if Mr. O'Dwyer has even the slightest idea how long it would take an appliance such as the hydraulic platform to get from Bromsgrove to Kidderminster."

He is sure that it would not be possible to take the platform to the scene of the fire within the required time, particularly during rush hours.

My second point relates to the cost of fire cover. If the full-time team of firemen in Kidderminster and their pumping appliance are to go—and, according to best practice, there should be two appliances for each fire, so that back-up is available—retained crews will have to be called out for every fire. It has been estimated by the Fire Brigades Union that turn-outs by retained firefighters would increase by no less than 398 per cent. in my area.

First, that is likely to increase costs, which should be allowed for in the review. Secondly, it will affect recruitment. As a firefighter asked in a letter to me, what employers will allow their fire officers to have four times as much time off as they had before? Thirdly, because retained firefighters cannot reach a fire as quickly as non-retained full-time firefighters, the speed of attack and the effectiveness of firefighting will be reduced.

I am also concerned about the way in which the fire brigade, the fire authority and the county council have consulted on these controversial proposals. This is not the first time that such consultation has taken place; in 1988, 1993 and 1994, the townspeople of Bewdley—with my support—repelled attempts to close their fire station. Although the circumstances of the town were exactly the same then as they are now, special circumstances of the kind that I have outlined were identified by professional officers on the fire review team, and it was decided that the station should remain open.

The same circumstances obtain today. Indeed, the original fire cover review report—produced by three senior officers and others for the chief fire officer earlier this year—specifically states that, although in statistical terms there may well be a case for closing the Bewdley fire station, as there has been on all the previous occasions,

"Having paid due regard to these influences, it is our professional opinion that the fire station at Bewdley is maintained as at present.

The town is of historic importance, and many of the properties are of architectural value. The attractive riverside properties provide a backdrop to a thriving community reliant upon the tourist industry."

The report refers to the River Severn and the safari park, which attract hundreds of thousands of visitors each year—people who contribute significantly to the county's economy. It adds:

"The hotels, restaurants, shops, guest houses and leisure facilities that line the narrow streets of Bewdley present a substantial fire risk and the potential for rapid fire spread with dire consequences is ever present. It is for these reasons that we cannot recommend the closure of Bewdley fire station."

That is said every time the closure is proposed. It was said this year, and completely ignored by the chief fire officer.

I understand that the document was given anonymously to the chairman of the Wyre Forest working group which is studying the proposals. He—Councillor John Gordon—openly gave it to the chairman of the county council's fire services committee, who photocopied it and gave it back to him. At 4 o'clock on 27 November, the police raided the home of this gentleman, who was doing his best to help the people of Bewdley to retain their fire service, saying that they were dealing with the theft of a document.

Initially, the chief fire officer denied any knowledge of the document. Then his deputy said, "Okay, it does exist, but only minor grammatical changes have been made." In fact, the main thrust of the proposals had been completely changed. The first version said, "Do not close Bewdley fire station"; the second said, "We are going to close it."

On 30 October, the Home Office—in the person of Baroness Blatch—wrote to me saying that the Home Office would give permission for changes to the fire service only

"when representations have been considered by the authority."

The authority appears to be ignoring even the advice of its own professional officers, a group that it set up specifically to examine the fire cover review. I do not believe that it can be proved that the consultation exercise has been carried out thoroughly, and I hope that that will weigh heavily with Ministers if these wrong-headed plans are ever submitted to them. Even at this late stage, I sincerely hope that they will not.

I ask the Government to review the SSA allocations for fire cover, and the way in which the area cost adjustment is calculated. If the county council rejects the proposals and reduces fire cover in the Wyre Forest area, saying that it is unnecessary and expensive, without a jot of popular support, that would be potentially dangerous.

11.19 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Timothy Kirkhope): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre Forest (Mr. Coombs) on securing this debate on the fire service in Worcestershire. May I also welcome to the debate today my hon. Friend the Member for South Worcestershire (Mr. Spicer), who I know is most interested in these matters?

The Government have a high regard for the fire service, a regard that is shared by the general public. In its report on the fire service earlier this year, entitled "In the line of fire", the Audit Commission stated that the fire service can be proud of its record in responding to incidents, that it has high levels of skill and professionalism, is staffed by able managers and courageous front-line staff, and is held in great esteem by both the general public and individuals who have needed its assistance.

I whole-heartedly endorse the commission's comments and, indeed, have a personal reason for being pleased to be here today: my late father was a member of the well-known National Fire Service at the beginning of the war. The photographs in our family album show him with rather more primitive equipment than is at present deployed by the fire services of this country, but nevertheless those photographs give my family a great amount of pride.

One of my earliest memories is of being taken to Newcastle's Pilgrim street fire station by my father and being allowed to descend the pole—not the greasy pole of politics—and to see the firemen polishing the bells on

their fire engines. I do not know whether they still do that in my hon. Friend's constituency, but it is a matter of great pride to me that I have those early recollections.

My hon. Friend referred to Government funding of the fire service, and to SSAs. There are two underlying issues in relation to fire service funding: whether the total public expenditure provision for local government is sufficient; and, given that total, how we distribute it in terms of SSAs among the local authorities.

The total provision has to be broadly consistent with our restraint on public expenditure as a whole. I am sure that my hon. Friend is aware of that need. The Government concluded that, for 1995-96, local authorities as a whole should have an increase of 0.8 per cent. when compared on a like-for-like basis with 1994-95.

That is not as much as many would have liked, but in our view the settlement for 1995-96 was realistic in the current economic climate, in the context of low inflation and the requirement that pay increases in the public sector should be met from increased efficiency. It reflected a balanced and reasoned judgment on the understandable desire for more local authority expenditure and on what the country can afford.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment, as my hon. Friend has mentioned, will be making an announcement tomorrow on the provisional local government finance settlement for 1996-97. My hon. Friend referred to the distribution formula for the fire service element of SSAs. We have indeed been looking, with the Department of the Environment and local authority associations, at the formula for 1996-97, taking account of matters such as pensions, fire safety and other factors that the associations wish to raise.

Mr. Michael Spicer: Does fire safety include the concept of fire risk, which is at the root of the budgeting arrangements in which the fire services have to engage?

Mr. Kirkhope: My hon. Friend has raised that matter with me once before, and I undertook then to look at it. I am still doing so, and understand that it is a possible area to be considered.

It is important to remember that a shire county is not limited in its spending on its fire brigade by the fire service share of its SSA. What matters is the overall SSA for the county council. It is for the county council to decide its priorities for spending across all its services, bearing in mind its statutory and other responsibilities.

Before I refer specifically to the fire service in north Worcestershire, it would be helpful if I explained the framework within which decisions about fire cover are taken. It is important to remember that the fire service is a local authority service—it has been since the Fire Services Act 1947 transferred firefighting functions from the wartime National Fire Service, to which I have already referred.

Statutory responsibility for providing an effective and efficient fire service to meet all normal requirements rests with the local fire authority. It is for the fire authority—Hereford and Worcester county council, in this case—to decide how much of its overall budget to spend on its fire service to comply with its statutory responsibilities.

As to the Government's role, my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary has various duties under the Act. He monitors performance through Her Majesty's inspectorate of fire services, and is responsible for promoting high and consistent standards in such matters as training, equipment, promotion and recruitment. As my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre Forest said, under section 19 of the Act, my right hon. and learned Friend is also required to be notified of the fire authority's establishment—the number of its fire stations, fire appliances and firefighting posts—as at 1 January each year. Of particular relevance to the debate is the fact that the fire authority may not reduce its establishment, although it can increase it, without my right hon. and learned Friend's consent.

My right hon. and learned Friend has a specific and limited role in considering applications under section 19. He grants approval where the following conditions are satisfied. First, the proposals must have been sufficiently widely publicised, in sufficient detail and with adequate time, to enable any interested party to make representations; my hon. Friend referred to the question of consultation and representations. Secondly, the representations must have been considered by the fire authority; thirdly, after taking advice from Her Majesty's inspectorate of fire services, my right hon. and learned Friend must be satisfied that the nationally recommended standards of fire cover will be maintained.

I must emphasise that it is not the role of my right hon. and learned Friend to decide whether the proposals that a fire authority makes represent the best arrangements for fire cover. Her Majesty's inspectorate of fire services is available to advise the authority on that matter. Ultimately, however, responsibility rests with the fire authority, which is accountable in law for the service that its provides.

The 1947 Act does not define the test of an effective and efficient fire service, which a fire authority must provide to meet normal requirements for fire cover. But it is long-standing practice to interpret that by reference to the nationally recommended minimum standards of fire cover. The standards are not just nationally recommended; they are nationally agreed in the Central Fire Brigades Advisory Council, which was established by the 1947 Act and on which the relevant fire service organisations are represented. They were also reviewed by the Joint Committee on Standards of Fire Cover in 1985 for the Central Fire Brigades Advisory Councils for England and Wales and for Scotland. The standards enable all concerned to know where they stand as regards the minimum level of service that they should be delivering.

The Audit Commission's report called for greater local flexibility in the application of the fire cover standards. It did not say precisely how the standards should be changed, and recognised that no change should be considered without careful research. The issue is being considered by the Central Fire Brigades Advisory Council, but it is a complex matter, on which much work will be needed.

Following the 1985 review of standards, all fire authorities in Great Britain reviewed their risk categorisation and the resources necessary to comply with the nationally recommended minimum standards. I am aware that an extensive review of fire cover was completed by the Hereford and Worcester brigade, and the results were circulated recently for public comment. I understand that the recommendations of the review could, if implemented, have significant implications for fire

[Mr. Kirkhope]

cover in my hon. Friend's constituency and elsewhere, and that they include proposals to close the fire station at Bewdley and to remove a pumping appliance that is staffed by full-time firefighters, and a hydraulic platform from Kidderminster.

The implementation of those recommendations, which involve a reduction of fire cover, would, as I have explained, require an application under section 19 of the 1947 Act for my right hon. and learned Friend's approval. It is a matter for the county council to consider what action it proposes to take in respect of that review, in the light of the representations that it has received and advice from Her Majesty's inspectorate of fire services. I hope that this will also take account of my hon. Friend's references to various other factors, such as response times, the interesting timing system and the earlier report surrounding the circumstances of Bewdley fire station.

My right hon. and learned Friend has already received a number of representations—including, of course, one from my hon. Friend, about the fire cover review. I can assure my hon. Friend that, should the county council make application to reduce fire cover in any part of the county, my right hon. and learned Friend will take those representations into account in reaching his decisions. I am sure that the county council will wish to give careful consideration to the points that my hon. Friend has made today.

It being half-past Eleven o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put, pursuant to Order [20 November].

PRIVATE BUSINESS

SELECTION

Ordered,

That Mr. Ray Powell be discharged from the Committee of Selection and Mr. George Mudie be added to the Committee.—*[Mr. Conway.]*

Oral Answers to Questions

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Gibraltar

1. **Mr. Garnier:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he last visited Gibraltar to discuss United Kingdom-Gibraltar relations. [850]

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. David Davis): I visited Gibraltar on 7 and 8 November this year and had a range of discussions with Gibraltarians.

Mr. Garnier: I congratulate my hon. Friend on his recent visit to Gibraltar which was, by all accounts, a most successful visit. Is my hon. Friend aware that drug smuggling and tobacco smuggling through Gibraltar have decreased drastically over the past six months? Can my hon. Friend give any reasons for the dramatic fall in those illegal trades?

Mr. Davis: I thank my hon. and learned Friend for his flattering commendations. The reason for the fall in those trades is that Government action has closed them down. One of the most notable outcomes of my visit to Gibraltar was hearing about the fact that 8,000 Gibraltarians turned out on the streets of Gibraltar to support the Government's action in closing down those criminal activities. In my judgment, that shows very strong support for the Government's actions in a community of just 30,000 people.

Dr. Marek: Will the Minister give an absolute assurance that Gibraltar is within the European Union and that, for every circumstance, the boundary of the European Union runs around Europa point and not across La Linea?

Mr. Davis: The hon. Gentleman is quite right. Gibraltar is within the European Union, but of course for some purposes, particularly free movement of goods, it falls outside the customs boundary. I think that is the point that the hon. Gentleman is seeking to make.

Mr. John D. Taylor: In view of the improvement that the Minister has stated in relation to criminal activity in Gibraltar, what progress has been made in easing access between Spain and Gibraltar?

Mr. Davis: Some progress has been made. Over the few weeks after that reduction in criminal activity, there was a 70 per cent. increase in the throughput of people coming into Gibraltar across the border. That amounts to some 70,000 people coming into a community of some 30,000 and was a material improvement. We have maintained our pressure on the Spanish Government because the delays are still too long, and we wish them to improve further.

Nigeria

2. **Mr. Mark Robinson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Government of Nigeria concerning human rights in that country. [851]

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Malcolm Rifkind): We support the unprecedented decision of the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting in Auckland to suspend Nigeria's membership. We also agreed with our European Union partners on 20 November a range of additional measures to mark our concern.

Mr. Robinson: The abuse of human rights in Nigeria has gone on far too long. Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree with me that the Harare declaration, which the Prime Minister pioneered two years ago, has been most important in bringing the Commonwealth states together in their condemnation of the regime in Nigeria?

Mr. Rifkind: My hon. Friend is correct. The Harare declaration was important in itself. However, the suspension of Nigeria for human rights reasons emphasises that the declaration was not simply a form of rhetoric but that it led to significant action.

Mr. Robin Cook: Can the Secretary of State confirm that, in June this year, the Government gave a licence for the export of CS gas and rubber bullets to Nigeria? If he feels unable to confirm any individual sale, can he at least confirm that such products can no longer be exported under the new terms of the arms embargo? Does he agree that the most comprehensive arms embargo would be to cut off the cash flow from oil to the Nigerian military? At Monday's meeting of the Council of Ministers, will he support the German and Swedish proposal for an examination of the impact of oil sanctions on the Nigerian Government?

Mr. Rifkind: On the hon. Gentleman's first point, I cannot comment on a specific licence application, but I can certainly confirm that, as a result of the total arms embargo now imposed, no weapons of any kind can be provided to the Nigerians so long as that embargo continues. We have not excluded the possibility of oil sanctions. It is important for the hon. Gentleman to remember that the major importer of Nigerian oil—40 or 50 per cent.—is the United States. It is therefore important to see whether there is a likelihood of unanimity for such an imposition in the Security Council. We have not ruled it out. It deserves further consideration.

Arms Exports (Iraq)

3. **Mr. Ronnie Campbell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the Government's policy on arms exports to Iraq. [853]

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Jeremy Hanley): We comply with United Nations Security Council resolution 661, which prevents the sale to Iraq of any weapons or other military equipment. In 1984 we introduced guidelines forbidding the export of lethal equipment, which were much tougher than those of any other major defence exporters. After 1984 the UK accounted for less than 3 per cent. of Iraq's defence-related imports.

Mr. Campbell: Does the Minister agree that, now that Scott is due to report his findings, if any Ministers are found to be to blame for, or involved in, that gun run, they should resign?

Mr. Hanley: The hon. Gentleman is right. The United Kingdom's policy on arms exports to Iraq from 1984 to

1992 is being considered by Sir Richard Scott. We shall take careful note of any conclusions and recommendations in Sir Richard's report, but we have no intention of commenting on the report until it is published.

EU Intergovernmental Conference

4. **Mr. Betts:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he intends to publish a White Paper outlining Her Majesty's Government's priorities for the 1996 intergovernmental conference of the European Union. [854]

Mr. Rifkind: This is still under consideration.

Mr. Betts: If there is to be no White Paper—we have had no guarantee today—will the Secretary of State explain how the House is to hold Ministers accountable until the negotiations begin? Is the Foreign Secretary effectively saying that he cannot produce a White Paper because to produce anything at all would split the Conservative party down the middle? Will not the interests of the British people and the House have to take second place to the interests of the fragile unity within the Conservative party?

Mr. Rifkind: The hon. Gentleman's comments are pretty absurd. Tomorrow, I shall give evidence to the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs precisely on the intergovernmental conference and our policy with regard to it. So there are many opportunities, which have been used in the past and will continue to be available, to ensure that the House is kept informed. We have not excluded the possibility of a White Paper, but I regard that as one of a number of ways of ensuring that the House is fully informed and able to contribute to our deliberations.

Mr. Fabricant: Will my right hon. and learned Friend confirm that, if he were to publish a White Paper, one thing that he would not say is that we would give up our regional, environmental, social and industrial privileges—our veto? Does he agree that any thought of giving up our veto would have a damaging effect on jobs? Is he as amazed as I am that the Labour party is suggesting just that?

Mr. Rifkind: Labour Members are suggesting that, and have committed themselves to it. Curiously, however, the Leader of the Opposition omitted to mention that point in his speech to the Confederation of British Industry on the social chapter. If he wanted to win industry to the Labour party's point of view, he could at least have come clean about the Labour party's current policy, which would make the social chapter subject to qualified majority voting.

Mr. Robin Cook: Can the Foreign Secretary confirm that Britain is alone among the countries of Europe in resisting a common policy on racism as part of the revision of the treaty? We have the largest ethnic minority population in Europe. Why do the British Government oppose measures that would protect members of our ethnic minority population from discrimination when they travel in Europe? Does the right hon. and learned Gentleman not understand that, by opposing a European commitment against racism, the Government are opposing the interest of British residents and damaging Britain's standing among our European partners? Is that not just another case in which the Government are sacrificing British interests and British influence to please the right wing of the Conservative party?

Mr. Rifkind: That simply is not true. As the hon. Gentleman well knows, this country has the most effective race relations legislation in western Europe. There is no qualification with regard to our commitment to eradicating racism in all its forms. The Home Secretary made it clear not that he was opposed to ensuring the eradication of racism but that this is a genuine and open discussion on the best way to achieve that objective.

United Nations

5. **Mrs. Ann Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the future of the United Nations. [855]

Mr. Rifkind: The United Nations will remain the principal mechanism for the resolution of threats to international peace and security, and the forum for addressing a wide range of global problems.

Mrs. Winterton: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that NATO has been much more effective than the shambolic United Nations in the former Yugoslavia? Does he also agree that if the UN is to play any meaningful role in the world in future it must undergo a fundamental root-and-branch reform as a matter of urgency?

Mr. Rifkind: NATO, of course, has operated in Bosnia at the request of the United Nations because the UN does not have the kind of military capability that is available to the Atlantic alliance. I agree that the United Nations financial arrangements need to be reformed. There is much waste and extravagance and the UN must be funded in a form that ensures that member states do not fall into arrears, because that has been undermining the UN's capacity to carry out its proper role.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: I am sure that, like others, the Secretary of State was much encouraged by the vigorous rejection of isolationism by President Clinton this morning. Does the right hon. and learned Gentleman agree that the future effectiveness of the United Nations will depend on the whole-hearted commitment of the United States to that organisation? Will he take every opportunity to press that point on his counterpart in the American Government?

Mr. Rifkind: The United States Government, and President Clinton in particular, need no such reminding. The problem with United Nations funding in respect of the US contribution arises because of he behaviour of Congress, which up to now has declined to authorise the appropriate funding despite the urging of the Administration. That is where representations and pressure need to be directed.

Mr. Churchill: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that the effectiveness of the United Nations depends more on the United States' active involvement than on that of any other Government? Will he warmly congratulate the President of the United States on his fine address today to both Houses of Parliament in the Palace of Westminster? Above all, will my right hon. and learned Friend congratulate him on his categorical condemnation

of the forces of appeasement and isolationism, and wish him well in his battle with those elements in Congress that support such policies?

Mr. Rifkind: I unreservedly pay tribute to President Clinton for his fine address this morning. The United States and the United Kingdom work well together and enable the great democratic forces to be as successful as they have been in recent times. The way in which the President emphasised the close bonds between the United States and the United Kingdom was very much in tune with the way that this country sees the transatlantic alliance.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: The Foreign Secretary has gone some way towards dispelling the myths of the isolationists on both sides of the Atlantic. Is he prepared to pay tribute to the quiet work of the United Nations through, for example, UNICEF and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees? Those organisations have carried out valuable work over many years. Are the cuts in funding to United Nations agencies which were announced in yesterday's Budget in the interests of today's rhetoric by the Foreign Secretary?

Mr. Rifkind: Of course I pay tribute to the work done by UNICEF and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. The hon. Gentleman mentioned reductions that were announced yesterday. Most of them are possible because of the reduction in the forecast of what our contributions to the various multilateral organisations ought to be; therefore, I do not think that the programmes to which he refers will suffer in any way as a result of the announcements.

Iraq

6. **Mr. Robathan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the situation in Iraq. [857]

Mr. Hanley: The situation in Iraq remains poor for ordinary people. This is the direct result of the regime's failure to implement UN resolution 986, which would permit the sale of oil in return for humanitarian goods, or to meet its other UN obligations.

Mr. Robathan: The House will note that this matter is to be discussed in an Adjournment debate later today. Has Iraq the ability to be a prosperous country and has it good natural resources? How much is the present regime spending on armaments and internal repression? Will my right hon. Friend confirm that there will be no move by the Government to relax sanctions because, far from encouraging democracy, liberty or prosperity in Iraq, that would be an endorsement of Saddam Hussein's evil regime?

Mr. Hanley: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his question because it helps to expose the true nature of the Iraqi regime. It is within Saddam Hussein's power to sell up to $1 billion-worth of oil every three months to provide humanitarian aid and medical supplies for his people. The relaxation of the import embargo depends on Saddam's complying with all relevant resolutions, but many matters remain cause for concern: Kuwaiti detainees, who are still unaccounted for; the human rights record, which is appalling; the internal economic blockade on Kurds and Shi'as; the mutilation of army deserters. Iraq is also involved in state-sponsored terrorism and has failed to account for more than 600 missing Kuwaiti and third-country nationals.

Mr. Dalyell: The Minister's description of the situation being "poor for ordinary people" just does not do justice to the appalling nature of the position. The Foreign Office has a full briefing of my visit to the children's hospital in Baghdad—two years ago, admittedly—when I saw rows of infants expiring, and the same was found at Um-Kasr. In its preparation for tonight's Adjournment debate on sanctions on Iraq, will the Foreign Office at least read carefully the letter that the Foreign Secretary has had from a much more recent visitor, Riad El-Taher, in which he describes the position and outlines Iraq's difficulty in complying with a United Nations resolution that is impossible for the people to accept, regardless of whether they support Saddam?

Mr. Hanley: The hon. Gentleman's views on Iraq, on Saddam Hussein and on his regime are known to the House and, no doubt, we will hear more of them tonight. All I can say, however, is that we are conscious of the suffering of ordinary people in Iraq. Saddam, not the UN, is responsible for that suffering. Food and medicines are not subject to sanctions and, therefore, we ask again for Saddam Hussein to adopt United Nations resolution 986 and to allow Iraq to export some oil in return for humanitarian goods. He can do so. It is not impossible for him to do so. He could receive at least $2.5 billion net in the next 12 months, after charges for the resolution. He does not do so. I urge the hon. Gentleman to spend some of his time urging Saddam to help his people.

French Nuclear Tests

7. **Mr. Hall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations Her Majesty's Government received on nuclear testing by France during the recent Commonwealth summit in New Zealand. [858]

Mr. Rifkind: The Government not only received but made representations during the recent Commonwealth summit.

Mr. Hall: What vital national interest is served by the Government's change in policy from not condemning the French nuclear tests to supporting them? Given the Foreign Secretary's warm welcome of President Clinton's address this morning, how did French nuclear tests help to lift the nuclear cloud that threatens our children's bright future?

Mr. Rifkind: If the hon. Gentleman represented a party that had genuinely changed its view on nuclear weapons, he would understand that all the nuclear powers are committed to working towards a comprehensive test ban treaty, but it is not unreasonable to be sympathetic to the problems faced by our French allies as they bring their testing procedure to a conclusion. As in nuclear power, we understand that these are complex and sensitive issues, and we will not run to criticise a good ally that is committed to a comprehensive test ban treaty but believes that this is a necessary prelude to the completion of negotiations.

Sir Peter Emery: Will my right hon. and learned Friend emphasise yet again that the commitment of the

French to signing the nuclear test ban treaty in the spring is of the greatest importance and needs to be emphasised absolutely for the people who are critical of it?

Mr. Rifkind: That is the strategic objective. It is likely that the French nuclear tests will be finished in a couple of months from now and then the concentration will be on the global negotiations, to which France is as committed as any other country. It is difficult to understand why the Labour party seems to relish attacking a nuclear power when it simultaneously tries to persuade the British public that it supports the British nuclear deterrent.

Mr. Jack Thompson: The Foreign Secretary will be aware that, in July this year, the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe met in Toronto. One of the topics that was debated was French nuclear testing. He will also be aware that the only people who voted against the resolution to condemn the nuclear testing were the French, obviously, and the British Conservatives. Does he believe that the British Conservatives and the French are the only ones who are in step and that the rest of the world is out of step?

Mr. Rifkind: I believe that it is the British Government's responsibility to come to a decision that is consistent with our national interest, not simply to join a pack hounding a good friend and ally regardless of our own beliefs on the issues at stake.

European Political Union

8. **Sir David Knox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he next expects to meet his counterparts in the European Union to discuss greater political union. [859]

Mr. David Davis: My right hon. and learned Friend and I regularly meet our counterparts in the European Union at the Foreign Affairs Council. The next meeting will be held in Brussels on 4 and 5 December.

Sir David Knox: Does my hon. Friend agree that the closer the co-operation within the European Union, the greater the influence that Britain can exert in international affairs?

Mr. Davis: The Government's perspective on the European Union is that we intend to improve it by increasing prosperity and competitiveness, enhancing internal and external security, making enlargement possible and rebuilding popular support. We get support from all our allies in connection with all those factors.

Mr. MacShane: Does the Minister accept that reform of the common agricultural policy, on which we now spend about £3 billion—£60 for every man, woman and child in the country—can be achieved only through co-operation with political allies in Europe and by asking them to drop the veto in that area, so that Europe can move forward on that front, especially in allowing the entry of the east European nations, which will not be able to enter Europe if the CAP is maintained in its present form?

Mr. Davis: The hon. Gentleman is surprisingly ill informed. The great majority of common agricultural policies are already decided by qualified majority voting. He is simply trying to cover up his party's willingness to give up the veto on Britain's behalf.

Mr. Cash: Does my hon. Friend agree that it is not enough simply to talk about co-operation, or about allies? Does not political union really mean a legal framework within the rule of law, which—through majority voting, and in line with the arrangements promoted by 12, if not 14, of the other member states—would impose a state of affairs in which the British people would no longer be able to conduct their sovereign Parliament or make their own choices in general elections? Does he agree that we cannot contemplate that prospect, that we shall not do so at the intergovernmental conference and that we shall not give in to the pressures from Germany and elsewhere? Do we not need a White Paper to set out the British Government's position well in advance, so that the other countries know exactly where we stand, and we can explain our position to the British people?

Mr. Davis: There is no doubt whatever about the British Government's position on qualified majority voting. I have made it clear, as has my right hon. and learned Friend, many times both at the Dispatch Box and to several Select Committees. It is clearly the case, and will remain the case, that decisions at the IGC are made by consensus, not by majority voting. So long as that applies—it will apply so long as we have any say in the matter—we shall stick to our guns on that subject.

Mr. Spearing: With regard to the future of the political union that already exists, has the Minister noticed the section in the reflections group's first report about the place of national Parliaments? In particular, has he noticed paragraph 107, which mentions notice to national Parliaments of documents presented to the Council of Ministers—including those in the home and justice pillar, which of course do not come under our present scrutiny procedure? Does he agree that the suggested period of four weeks would have avoided the recent difficulties over the Home Affairs Council, and the document that the Commission presented there?

Mr. Davis: I cannot comment immediately on the Home Affairs Council but, as I think the hon. Gentleman already knows, in the reflections group I have argued in favour of the Scrutiny Committee's comments on the declaration 13 position that he described.

Mr. Dykes: As greater political union presumably means sovereign countries working closer and closer together in agreed integrated structures, including some majority voting, on which we robustly insisted for the single market, why is that so dangerous? Could the Government not occasionally say that it is a good idea?

Mr. Davis: My hon. Friend is right in one respect; we supported qualified majority voting for areas in which we thought it would be useful in removing protectionism and protectionist tendencies within the European Union. That has promoted one of our country's greatest successes in Europe—the development of the single market.

Public Interest Immunity Certificates

9. **Mr. Jamieson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many public interest immunity certificates have been signed by Foreign Office Ministers since 1990. [860]

Mr. Rifkind: Seven.

Mr. Jamieson: Will the Secretary of State assure the House that he and his Department will not be following

the example set by his colleagues in the original Ordtech directors' trial, in which the right hon. Members for St. Albans (Mr. Lilley) and for Mole Valley (Mr. Baker) signed public interest immunity certificates to prevent information from landing in the hands of the directors' defence counsel, simply because, in the weeks leading up to the 1992 general election, that information would have proved at very best that the Government were turning a blind eye to the re-arming of Saddam Hussein?

Mr. Rifkind: The hon. Gentleman is talking complete rubbish. As he well knows, public interest immunity certificates have existed for many years. Ministers do not have the last word on whether the documents covered by such certificates should be made available in a criminal trial. It is for the judge to decide, having taken into account the balance of public interest. That is the right and proper approach.

BBC World Service

10. **Mr. Dowd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action he proposes to take following the publication of the National Audit Office report on the BBC World Service. [861]

13. **Mr. Donald Anderson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the future of the BBC World Service. [865]

Mr. Rifkind: I welcome the National Audit Office recommendations, which will lead to improved efficiency. The Government have a strong record of support for the World Service. Funding is up by 50 per cent. in real terms since 1980. The reductions announced yesterday apply to its capital allocation, and there is virtually no change in the amount of resources provided to cover its operating costs.

Mr. Dowd: Is the Secretary of State aware that the NAO praised the World Service for its improvements in management and performance since 1992? Such improvements are made more difficult by what he omitted to mention in his answer—the operating cash level has been frozen. Therefore, there will be real terms reductions in World Service funding, coupled with the 20 per cent. reduction in capital allocation which was announced yesterday. Does he not realise that a great British asset, which enjoys support throughout the House, is being undermined by demented Treasury accountants? When will his Department more robustly defend this valuable British institution?

Mr. Rifkind: I have paid no lip service to the BBC World Service. It is a superb service that quite rightly draws support from both sides of the House. I would never do anything to damage the ability of the BBC World Service to remain the premier service of its kind anywhere in the world. The reductions announced yesterday were almost exclusively with regard to capital allocation and were part of a wider Government policy to encourage the financing of capital expenditure through the private finance initiative.

The hon. Gentleman might like to know that the managing director of the BBC World Service said:

"We are already looking positively as to how the Private Finance Initiative can be applied to our capital plans and I am hopeful that we can make significant progress".

The hon. Gentleman should bear that in mind and cheer up.

Mr. Anderson: Does the Foreign Secretary recall with shame the grave damage done to our national interests overseas in the early 1980s by the slashing of British Council and overseas service budgets? With the 20 per cent. cut in capital expenditure, only a hope that the private sector will make up the shortfall, and with no provision for the knock-on effects of leasing on the capital budget, are we not in danger of repeating that historic mistake?

Mr. Rifkind: The hon. Gentleman should reflect on the fact that, since 1980, funding for the BBC World Service in real terms—not just in cash terms—is up by 50 per cent. When the hon. Gentleman criticises what the Government announced yesterday, he might bear it in mind that the chairman of the BBC said:

"We accept that it cannot be seen in isolation from the totality of the Budget."

The BBC knows perfectly well that when private finance is being used for capital allocation throughout the public sector, it is not unreasonable that it also seeks to cover its capital requirements to a considerable extent in that way. The BBC World Service is prepared to look at the matter positively. Why cannot the hon. Gentleman do so?

Mr. Harris: Although I welcome and accept much of what my right hon. and learned Friend has said, does he nevertheless accept that a 20 per cent. cut in the capital programme of the World Service means a reduction of £5.4 million? Is he confident that that shortfall can indeed be met by the PFI? If he can assure the House on that point, he will carry most hon. Members with him.

Mr. Rifkind: My hon. Friend makes a fair point. We are not expecting the BBC World Service to cover all of its capital requirements through the private finance initiative. It will have some £62 million available over the next three years on the basis of the allocations that were announced yesterday. In relation to the proportion for which we are looking to private finance, I can only emphasise that the managing director of the BBC World Service said that he was hopeful that it could make significant progress. It is therefore entirely reasonable for the Government to take the matter forward on that basis.

Mr. Batiste: What does my right hon. and learned Friend consider the impact will be of the BBC's freedom to operate internationally on a commercial basis in television and multimedia? Is not this a massive market opening up for the BBC, and is not the BBC well placed to take full advantage of it?

Mr. Rifkind: Yes. I draw particular attention to the BBC Worldwide TV News, which is already available in 43 million homes and in 111 countries. The truth of the matter is that the BBC World Service already attracts more listeners than the world services of all other countries combined. It is the Government's policy to ensure that that remarkable achievement is maintained.

Mr. Shore: Precisely. The BBC World Service is a great international service and an enormous asset to this country, and what we are talking about is precisely the capital investment which will give it the further audibility and visibility that will enable it to continue to be heard and watched by millions of people overseas. We have no greater asset internationally than the World Service. Does the Foreign Secretary also understand that he is cutting the third year of a triennium of investment? One cannot

muck about with a three-year programme at the end of year two and expect people to be able to attract alternative finance in the remaining 12 months. Will the Minister go back and think again about refraining from damaging a great national asset?

Mr. Rifkind: I respect the right hon. Gentleman's clear and genuine commitment to the BBC World Service. If he is as committed as we are to improving the audibility of the World Service, which I believe he is, he might have paid tribute to the fact that we have a £166 million investment programme to improve the audibility of the BBC World Service. The sum announced yesterday to be achieved through the private finance initiative for next year is £5 million. If the BBC itself is hopeful that that can be done, perhaps the right hon. Gentleman, on reflection, will regret the vehemence with which he put his question.

Mr. Lester: I am second to none in my support for the Budget in the sense that my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor wants to make this country the enterprise centre of Europe. Does my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary accept that many of us realise that the diplomatic corps, which the Budget has assisted and reduced, the World Service and the British Council are very much part of Britain's influence in the world, from which our trade flows? Does he accept that some Conservative Members are worried about any damage whatever to that element of the British effort in the wider world?

Mr. Rifkind: I agree with my hon. Friend. That is why we have protected the operating costs of both the BBC World Service and the British Council from the economies that are being made elsewhere in the public sector. I entirely endorse the objective that my hon. Friend has stated. If we did not take the same view, we would have subjected the operating costs of the BBC and the British Council to cuts. We have not done so. That is an indication of our good faith.

Sir David Steel: While the Foreign Secretary rightly extols the virtues of the BBC's Worldwide TV News, has he noted the point made in the Lothian lecture this week by Mr. Jon Snow, that withdrawal of that service from access to China and its replacement by Mr. Murdoch's channel was not a good example of British interests being solved by private finance?

Mr. Rifkind: That is not the private finance initiative to which I referred earlier, as the right hon. Gentleman perfectly well knows. The BBC World Service receives an allocation of about £170 million. It determines its priorities within that and its ability to transmit to individual countries. We wish it well in the work that it does. I have not the slightest reason to believe that any announcements made recently will inhibit the BBC in maintaining its extraordinary achievements of the past 20 years.

Nigeria

11. **Mr. Winnick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on present relations with the Nigerian rulers. [862]

Mr. Hanley: As my right hon. and learned Friend said earlier, Nigeria is currently suspended from the Commonwealth. We are acting in conjunction with other Commonwealth countries and our EU and other partners.

Mr. Winnick: Is it not perfectly clear that the response of the Nigerian rulers to the country's suspension from the Commonwealth has been one of total indifference? Just a few minutes ago, the Minister justified the sanctions against the murderous regime in Iraq, and I understand and appreciate why. Why are we adopting a different attitude towards the murderous regime in Nigeria?

Mr. Hanley: The two countries are different, their histories are different and the reaction to both has been different. The hon. Gentleman will be well aware that the sanctions imposed on Iraq are UN sanctions, and he will be aware also that we are still working on an effective reaction to what Nigeria has carried out recently. We have a unique arrangement in the Commonwealth to impress on Nigeria the seriousness of its actions, and we will work to do more until Nigeria wakes up to the realities and reforms itself.

Mr. Ian Bruce: Does my right hon. Friend agree that, in taking action against Nigeria, we must be careful not to take action against the Royal Dutch Shell Company which might result in the Nigerian rulers not having to pay Shell its share of the oil revenues? Does my right hon. Friend also agree that we must not allow the rulers of Nigeria simply to sell the oil on the open market and gain more funds for their terrible regime?

Mr. Hanley: My hon. Friend is right. We must leave to Shell the actions that Shell should take. I had extensive discussions with the chairman of Shell very recently, as did my right hon. and noble Friend the Minister for Overseas Development. There is little doubt that the project which Shell has now set up will help relieve the abject poverty in Nigeria. All of our projects in Nigeria have a long lead time, and revenues from the gas sales are unlikely to flow until early next century, but to cancel the project now would be to impoverish Nigeria for many years to come.

Rev. Martin Smyth: Will the Minister confirm, in the light of an earlier response from the Foreign Secretary, that we have not been making direct representations to the Nigerian Government? Does the right hon. Gentleman share the belief of many people in the United Kingdom that we ought to be making representations for the sake of the Nigerians who live among us and because of our concern at the way in which people are being treated in that country?

Mr. Hanley: I can say to the hon. Gentleman only what my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary said earlier. We have noted the calls for the severing of trade links and for an oil embargo, and we are considering a wide range of options with our European Union and other partners. We have not ruled out anything at this stage. An oil embargo could be policed effectively only by a naval blockade of Nigeria, and we are looking to the international community to adopt the measures which we and others have already taken. All of that will maximise the pressure on the Nigerian regime.

Middle East

12. **Mr. Carrington:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress is being made towards achieving peace in the middle east. [864]

Mr. Rifkind: Despite Yitzhak Rabin's tragic death, the peace process is continuing. Shimon Peres' commitment

to peace is clear—Israeli troops were redeployed from Jenin on 13 November, six days early. We are also hopeful that there will be progress on the Syrian track.

Mr. Carrington: In the light of the tragic death of Prime Minister Rabin, will my right hon. and learned Friend impress on the Israeli Government that they need not give concessions to the hardliners in Israel? In particular, will he impress on the Israeli Government the urgent need to stop Jewish settlements being built in Arab Jerusalem?

Mr. Rifkind: I believe that the Israeli Government themselves are disinclined to make concessions of the kind to which my hon. Friend refers. The new Israeli Prime Minister has emphasised that the pursuit of peace is his single most important priority. He appears to have been developing a good relationship with the Arab Heads of Government around Israel, and he is also thinking positively about trying to get the Syrian-Israeli negotiations moving again.

Mrs. Jane Kennedy: How much of the international aid pledged to the Palestine National Authority has so far been released? Can the Secretary of State explain what effect the cut in the overseas aid budget that was announced yesterday will have on Britain's ability to keep her promises in that regard?

Mr. Rifkind: We have committed ourselves to about £83 million-worth of bilateral and multilateral aid to the Palestinians. A lot of that has already been provided. When I was in Gaza recently, I indicated an extra £3 million-worth of aid and do not anticipate any change in those proposals as a result of the announcement yesterday.

European Intergovernmental Conference

14. **Mr. Hain:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on progress made by the reflections group in preparing the agenda for next year's intergovernmental conference. [867]

Mr. David Davis: I expect the study group to present its final report to the Madrid European Council in December.

Mr. Hain: Is not one of the greatest threats to Europe and its competitiveness the huge burden of mass unemployment? Should not one of our major objectives be to get Europe back to work? At next year's intergovernmental conference, will the Government therefore support a proposal to amend the treaty on European union to include in its objectives a commitment to full employment?

Mr. Davis: I noticed that the hon. Gentleman moved from the Whips Bench before he asked his question, and now I can see why. The greatest threat to employment in Europe is Europe's inability to compete. The leader of the Labour party knows that, which is why he made his disingenuous speech to the Confederation of British Industry a little while ago. The right hon. Gentleman was trying to represent Labour policy as the ability to pick and choose between which parts of the social chapter it would take. He ignored the fact that most of the social chapter is decided by qualified majority voting, so he would not have a choice, and that the part that is not decided by such voting would be given over to it by Labour policy. He was trying to put a disingenuous fig leaf in front of the greatest threat to Britain's ability to compete—Labour policy.

Mr. Wilkinson: Is not the single greatest deficiency in the process of European construction the fact that, for the British people, it does not have popular support? To win back that support, can my hon. Friend say whether the Government will press for restitution of the superiority of British law over European law at the forthcoming intergovernmental conference and, in particular, for the need to do something about the European Court's ability to impose retrospective judgments?

Mr. Davis: My hon. Friend is certainly right in respect of the need to rebuild popular support for the union. Prior to the intergovernmental conference, we presented to the reflections group of the European Union a paper that tackles that very issue—unpredictable and highly expensive judgments that have major retrospective consequences on Governments who try to carry out European law in good faith, as the British Government always do.

Mr. Skinner: Just to make sure that everyone understands what has happened since 1971, can we get it on the record that on 28 October of that year the Tory Government took us into the Common Market? In the next decade, Lady Thatcher passed the Single European Act. She forced it through on a guillotine and gagged Tory Members of Parliament who wanted to oppose it—every Labour Member opposed it. Then, in the 1990s, another Tory Government decided to sign the Maastricht treaty. Once again, we opposed it. Let us get it on the record that it is the Tory Government who have got this European issue round the necks of the British people.

Mr. Davis: The people who have most to worry about as a result of what the hon. Gentleman says are those on the Labour Front Bench. He just condemned them out of his own mouth. Let us get on the record the fact that enlargement of the European Union, the social opt-out, the single market, competitiveness and deregulation and our record on inward investment are all things of which we are proud in our policy on the European Union.

Mr. Gill: Is it not a fact that the Labour party not only wants to make us uncompetitive by adopting the social chapter, but wants to make us doubly uncompetitive by returning to fixed exchange rates?

Mr. Davis: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. One of the things which Labour tried to cover up at its party conference was the part of its conference document which said that it would not stand for any permanent opt-outs. That means that, whatever it said about European monetary union, it has decided now that at some point it will join.

Ms Quin: If, as the Minister claims, European social policies are economically damaging, how is it that several European countries, such as Denmark, Belgium, Luxembourg, Germany and Italy, which accept the social chapter, are not only higher up the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development world prosperity league than us but have improved their position since 1979, whereas we have dropped from 13th to 18th?

Mr. Davis: I am very surprised at the hon. Lady. I should have thought that the Labour party would

concern itself first and foremost with employment. When it comes to employment, we are top of the major country league in Europe—above Germany, above France, above Italy and above Spain.

Trade Development

15. **Dr. Spink:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the extent to which his Department has achieved its trade development responsibilities. [868]

Mr. Hanley: Commercial work is now the Foreign and Commonwealth Office's largest single area of activity overseas, involving 35 per cent. of the time of our front line staff. The volume of UK exports grew by 11 per cent. in 1994 against a 9 per cent. increase in the volume of total world trade. Foreign and Commonwealth Office posts overseas play an important role in helping UK exporters to achieve successes such as these and in helping inward investment.

Dr. Spink: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for that answer. Will he continue to ensure that Foreign and Commonwealth Office help is focused on smaller companies that want to break into export markets and that major companies are helped because they create so many new jobs for Britain?

Mr. Hanley: I thoroughly agree with my hon. Friend. The competitiveness White Paper stated that 100,000 UK companies export, and we set a target of 30,000 new companies joining world exporters by 2000. The majority of those 30,000 companies are bound to be small and medium-sized enterprises. The Foreign Office, through our commercial staff overseas, devotes much of its time to providing market information and contacts to small and medium-sized enterprises—SMEs—which they could not obtain nearly as cost-effectively anywhere else. Around 60 per cent. of companies that take part in outward trade missions that are supported by our posts overseas are smaller companies, so I am pleased that my hon. Friend takes such a great interest in this matter. Our SMEs are benefiting from the help that the Foreign and Commonwealth Office can give them.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Do not our trade development responsibilities include making representations to the American Government about the conduct of the Campbell Soups company from Campbell, New Jersey, which closed down a highly profitable manufacturing plant in my constituency? Will the Minister join me in asking the British people to boycott the products of that company throughout the country so that it learns the lesson that it cannot treat our people like rubbish, as it is at the moment?

Mr. Hanley: I not only watched the hon. Gentleman's Adjournment debate on the subject of Campbell Soups, but read it afterwards. I was interested by what he had to say, but it is not part of my responsibility to make representations to the United States on that matter.

Sir Roger Moate: Does my right hon. Friend agree that great opportunities exist for trade and development in the idea of the transatlantic free trade area, encompassing an enlarged European Community, the countries of the European economic area and the north American free trade area, which is so strongly supported already by my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary and the Government? Can my right hon. Friend say when practical negotiations might start and confirm that, even though the negotiations might be conducted by the European Community, Britain will have a significant role in such negotiations?

Mr. Hanley: I thank my hon. Friend for that question. The EU-US summit will deal with that matter. I agree with my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary who, as he has said so firmly in recent speeches, is totally committed—as are Her Majesty's Government—on this matter.

Israel

16. **Mrs. Roche:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he last met representatives of the Israeli Government; and if he will make a statement. [869]

Mr. Hanley: My right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary met Shimon Peres in Israel on 9 November. They discussed the middle east peace process, following the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin. Shimon Peres reiterated his commitment to continue to work for peace and he has, of course, our full support.

Mrs. Roche: I thank the Minister for that reply. Perhaps I may press him a little further about the peace accord with Syria. In response to an earlier question, the Foreign Secretary mentioned progress with the peace accord with Syria. Will the Minister give us some indication of how matters are progressing? Does he agree that a comprehensive peace accord, which covered Syria, in the middle east would be the greatest tribute that could be paid to the memory of Yitzhak Rabin?

Mr. Hanley: I agree with the hon. Lady. My right hon. and learned Friend spoke to the Syrian Foreign Minister yesterday in Barcelona and he spoke with President Assad in Damascus immediately after Mr. Rabin's funeral. The signs are better than they have been for some time that the Syrian track will be reconvened. More countries than ever before are expressing their good will and I hope that the events to which the hon. Lady referred will come to pass.

Mr. Hawkins: Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is a positive sign that, following the tragic assassination of President Rabin, leaders of Arab states who had never visited Jerusalem travelled there to attend his funeral? That should encourage the progress of the peace process, which is greatly welcomed.

Mr. Hanley: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. He has put his finger on one of the reasons why many people are now more hopeful about the peace process. The visits to Jerusalem by King Hussein of Jordan and representatives of the states of Oman and Morocco show that the Arab world wants as much as Israel and its immediate neighbours to see peace.

Mr. Gunnell: I am sure that, following his meeting on 9 November, the Foreign Secretary congratulated the Israeli Government on their early withdrawal of the troops to which he has referred already. Does the Minister agree that, if the elections to the Palestine National Assembly on 20 January are to be free and fair, it is very important

that they do not take place in the presence of occupying troops? Will the Government therefore do everything possible to encourage the Israeli Government to speed up the process of withdrawal so that the elections can take place in a constructive atmosphere?

Mr. Hanley: Yes. I can confirm that the British Government are committed to the success of the Palestinian elections. The withdrawal of the forces that the hon. Gentleman mentioned is extremely important. The elections are due to take place on 20 January, as agreed by the Palestine National Authority and the Israeli Government, and the European Union co-ordinating international observer group will be present. Four of the 30 staff in the co-ordinating unit are British and Britain is providing major input to the core of observers. Six long-term observers arrived on 9 November and are advising the Palestinians about policing the elections. I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's question and for the good will that it implies.

India

17. **Mr. Merchant:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to visit India to discuss the United Kingdom's relations with India. [870]

Mr. Hanley: My right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary had extensive discussions with the Indian Foreign Minister, Mr. Mukherjee, last week. He hopes to find an early opportunity to visit India, as I did last month.

Mr. Merchant: In view of the current unstable situation in Kashmir, will my right hon. Friend update the House on the situation with regard to the four hostages—two of whom are British—who are at present in the hands of political extremists?

Mr. Hanley: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his concern. I am sure that all right hon. and hon. Members want the four hostages to be released as soon as possible. We have no further news about them at the moment. We are grateful to the Indian Government and to their various authorities which are helping to try to secure the release of the hostages.

Representatives of the group of four nations—our high commissioner and the American, German and Norwegian ambassadors—are working very hard and very well together to try to secure the release of the hostages. This morning I saw a report on Teletext that one of the hostages is ill. If a hostage is unwell—we have no proof that that is the case—the best thing that the hostage-takers can do is release him. The four hostages should be released now. No purpose is served by their continued captivity and, in the name of humanity, they should be set free.

Mr. Pike: It is clear that everyone accepts that the release of the hostages is essential and that keeping them plays no part in helping to end the position in Kashmir. Will the Minister ensure that the Indian Government are aware that people in this country believe that the Indian Government should be the first ones to take steps to end that long-standing problem? That might be of tremendous benefit, not only to India but to Pakistan and the whole of that part of the world.

Mr. Hanley: We believe that the best way to make progress on Kashmir would be a combination of three main factors: first, simultaneous progress on dialogue between India and Pakistan, as provided for under the 1972 Simla agreement; secondly, an improvement in human rights in Kashmir and a genuine political process there; thirdly, a clear cessation of external support for violence in Kashmir.

While we are talking about the hostages, I pay tribute to their courage and the courage of their families, who have been remarkable under intense pressure.

Lady Olga Maitland: What response has my right hon. Friend had from the Indian Government to his efforts to persuade them to improve their relations with Pakistan? Is he aware that, because relations are poor, tensions are high and Pakistan is being pushed to spend a disproportionate amount of its resources on the armed services?

Mr. Hanley: I agree with my hon. Friend that nations tend to spend far more than they need to on building up their armed forces because of bad relations with their neighbours. This is a classic case in point.

We urge both India and Pakistan to resume a dialogue on bilateral matters, not least on Kashmir. Indeed, my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary, in discussion with the Indian Foreign Minister, did exactly that. I hope that the whole House—Members of good will—will urge their individual contacts with the Pakistan and Indian Governments to discuss between themselves if that is the only way to achieve peace.

Nigeria

19. **Mr. Pope:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he next plans to meet representatives of the Nigerian Government to discuss the situation in Nigeria. [872]

Mr. Hanley: We have no such plans.

Mr. Pope: Does the Minister accept that, if the British Government's arms and visa sanctions against the brutal Nigerian regime had been even remotely successful, there would have been no need to come back and announce further measures? Will he give the House an assurance that the visa controls currently in place regarding Nigeria will, at the very least, ensure that members of the brutal, vicious Nigerian Government are not allowed to enter or re-enter the United Kingdom?

Mr. Hanley: Under the present immigration rules, it has not been possible to cancel or revoke existing visas, but the Home Office has been notified of the EU decision and all members of the Nigerian provisional ruling and federal ruling council will now be refused entry to the United Kingdom even if they hold valid multiple entry visas issued before the new EU restrictions were agreed. I am sure that that comes as a comfort to the hon. Gentleman and other hon. Members.

Hong Kong

20. **Mr. Soley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the progress being made in negotiations with China on Hong Kong. [874]

Mr. Hanley: We have reached several important agreements with the Chinese in recent months which are

very much in Hong Kong's interest, but much work remains to be done to ensure a successful transition for Hong Kong, which I believe all of us, including the Chinese, want.

Mr. Soley: Is the Minister satisfied that the Chinese Government and the leaders of the business community on both sides of the border recognise that, if the elected legislature were removed in 1997 and replaced only with members who had the approval of Beijing, enormous damage would be done to political and economic confidence in Hong Kong?

Mr. Hanley: I agree with the hon. Gentleman that it is vital to maintain confidence in Hong Kong. Members of the business community have impressed on me the fact that confidence is vital for their continued interests.

We are doing everything that we can to ensure that the business community feels comfortable with what we are doing. Indeed, the business community welcomes the continuing agreements that we are making with the Chinese. The Chinese, for their part, recognise that Hong Kong is responsible for about 25 per cent. of their gross domestic product. Hong Kong and the business links between the two countries are important to China as well as to our continuing interest in the region.

I therefore agree with the hon. Gentleman.

Middle East Peace Process

22. **Mr. Hawkins:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assistance Her Majesty's Government are giving to the peace process in the middle east. [876]

Mr. Hanley: The £83 million of aid to the Palestinians has already been mentioned.

On his recent visit, my hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary encouraged the Palestinians and Israelis to maintain progress on the Palestinian track. He also urged Syria and the Israelis to press forward in their negotiations, and encouraged all the countries of the region to support the peace process—as did I during my recent visit to the Gulf.

Mr. Hawkins: I thank my right hon. Friend for that helpful answer. Does he agree that it is crucial to keep in touch with all the leaders of the most moderate Arab states to ensure that they are encouraged to continue their dialogue in all the tracks of the continuing peace process with the Israeli Government?

Mr. Hanley: I strongly agree with my hon. Friend. Indeed, I believe that the reaction of the Arab nations to the tragic assassination of Yitzhak Rabin is one of the developments that give us the most hope that the peace process will now accelerate. We hope that Mr. Rabin's tragic death will not have been in vain.

Northern Ireland

3.30 pm

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): With permission, Madam Speaker, I will make a statement about Northern Ireland.

Yesterday evening, the Irish Prime Minister and I met at Downing street to launch a new initiative in the Northern Ireland peace process. A copy of our joint communiqué has been placed in the Library of the House.

In the 15 months since the first of the two ceasefires, there has been a dramatic improvement in the daily life of people in Northern Ireland. They have enjoyed the freedom to go about their daily business without fear of terrorist attacks. Many new jobs have been created. Much new investment has arrived. New opportunities have opened for people of all ages.

We have responded positively—following advice from the Chief Constable and the GOC—to the much reduced threat to security. By the end of this year, half the Army's emergency or roulement battalions will have left Northern Ireland. Security infrastructure has been dismantled. Remission rates for scheduled offenders have been returned to their pre-1989 levels.

Although we have a ceasefire, however, we are still far from a comprehensive political settlement. To work towards that, we must establish a negotiating process that is open to all democratic parties, and embraces all democratic parties. That aim underlies the twin-track initiative that we have now launched with the Irish Government. The first of the two tracks in the joint communiqué will involve invitations to the parties to intensive preparatory talks.

These are not substantive negotiations on Northern Ireland's constitutional future; they are designed to prepare for such negotiations in the future.

There are many issues to be resolved if substantive negotiations are to take place successfully. The preparatory talks will consider the best structure and format for all-party negotiations, and how those negotiations can address all the relevant relationships in an interlocking three-stranded process. Several of the parties in Northern Ireland have suggested that an elected body could play an important part in all-party negotiations. Other parties disagree. As the communiqué makes clear, this is an idea that will be discussed in the preparatory talks.

As I have indicated, meeting the requirements of paragraph 10 of the Downing street declaration will be an essential condition for any party claiming a seat at the all-party negotiations. Not all the parties yet do so. That too will be a valid subject for discussion in the preparatory talks.

The format for those talks is intentionally flexible and permissive. We shall build on the exchanges and bilateral contacts that have already taken place. We shall treat each party equally. Exchanges can be bilateral or—where the parties so wish, and where it will further the objectives of the preparatory talks—they could be multilateral.

This new round of preparatory talks is an opportunity for each of the parties in Northern Ireland to express its view, in whatever format it chooses, on the best way of moving the political process forward. It is an opportunity for them to work together with one or other or both Governments, according to their wishes. It is an opportunity to generate fresh momentum. It threatens no one, no interest and no party. I hope that all the parties, each in their own way, will take advantage of this opportunity. The objective of moving towards a just and comprehensive settlement will be of benefit to all.

Let me turn now to the decommissioning of the weapons and explosives held in large number by paramilitary organisations linked to political parties in Northern Ireland. Before the Downing street declaration and the ceasefire, we recognised that the need to address this question was one of the practical consequences that had to follow the ending of violence. In a democratic society, political parties cannot be linked to private armies. In a society where parties are committed exclusively to peaceful methods, there can be no need and no justification for holding illegal weapons and illegal explosives. In a democracy, parties and Governments cannot be expected to negotiate under the duress of an implicit threat of a return to violence.

For that reason, we have throughout this year sought to engage the representatives of both Sinn Fein and the loyalist paramilitaries in an exploratory dialogue on how their weapons will be taken out of commission. In order to achieve more progress in that area, we have now agreed with the Irish Government to establish an international body to provide an independent assessment of the decommissioning issue and have given it specific tasks. It will consist of three members under the chairmanship of Senator George Mitchell from the United States. They will act in a personal capacity and on an advisory basis.

The body has been asked to identify and advise on a suitable and acceptable method for full and verifiable decommissioning and also to report whether there is a clear commitment on the part of those in possession of such arms to work constructively to achieve that. We expect it to invite relevant parties to submit their analysis of matters relevant to the decommissioning issue. The Governments are not setting limits to the scope of the submissions that may be made to it. It will be for the international body, in reaching conclusions within its remit, to consider such evidence on its merits.

We will not be asking the international body to question the Government's position on what has become known as the third Washington criterion. It has not been established to make recommendations on when decommissioning should start. That is a matter for governmental decision; and, as I have indicated, it is properly a matter for discussion in the preparatory talks. To avoid any doubt, let me stress that the Government stand by the three criteria on decommissioning, which my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland set out in Washington earlier this year. We cannot see a way of securing the necessary confidence to bring all parties to the negotiating table without a start being made to the decommissioning of illegal arms.

This is not a matter of dogma; it is a matter of practicality. It goes without saying that we, like the Irish Government, will consider constructively any practical suggestions that could help bring all parties into negotiations on the basis of the Downing street declaration.

It is no secret that yesterday's agreement between the two Governments required long and difficult negotiations. The British and Irish Governments agree on the need for

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disarmament by the paramilitary organisations, but we do have an acknowledged difference of opinion about its timing. We have decided not to allow that difference of opinion to stand in the way of forward movement along these twin tracks. That is a measure of our determination to continue working together in the future as we have done in the past.

We have asked the international body to report by the middle of January. We hope that progress on both tracks will then enable the two Governments to launch all-party negotiations by the end of February. That is our firm aim. I am confident that it is attainable, but it will require a serious commitment by all concerned. We are ready to make that commitment. But let me make a crucial point. The British and Irish Governments cannot themselves make peace in Northern Ireland. Our role in the process is to facilitate the making of that peace.

We have borne a great deal of the burden. We have been ready to take risks for peace. Now is the time for others to do the same. Now is the time for all parties and all groups to make a sincere and constructive contribution; for the paramilitaries on both sides to give not merely qualified verbal assurances, but a real and tangible commitment to peace. If they mean peace, they do not need guns and semtex. Now is the time for all the political parties to enter the preparatory talks, not with rigid and irreconcilable positions, but with the will to make them work. Ultimately a lasting and peaceful settlement is in their hands and not mine. I hope that they will all have the courage and the wisdom to grasp it.

Mr. Tony Blair (Sedgefield): For reasons that you, Madam Speaker, and the Prime Minister know, I have to leave straight after the Prime Minister has responded to me. I hope that the House will not treat that as a discourtesy.

I welcome the statement the Prime Minister has made. We know that progress has been tough over the past few months and both he and the Taoiseach and their array of advisers deserve credit for their perseverance and dedication.

Can I be sure that I have accurately understood the status of both the preparatory talks and the establishment of the international body on arms decommissioning? I understand that the preparatory talks will be bilateral or multilateral. They are designed to facilitate the all-party talks and will involve all parties, but will not in themselves be negotiations on the substantive constitutional issues. The international body similarly will advise on the issues connected with decommissioning, but will not deal with the question of whether arms are decommissioned prior to all-party talks. Therefore, both the preparatory talks and the international body are, in a sense, designed to create a mood and momentum by which the all-party talks can take place.

May I express our support for the view that, for those all-party talks to take place, there has to be full trust and confidence that each party in those talks will abide by and accept exclusively the democratic path? Trust is the key. There can be no threat, implicit or explicit, of any return to violence by any party if such talks are to be successful.

Will the Prime Minister acknowledge that this agreement, although of course it does not resolve the problem of decommissioning, produces a mechanism by which the question can be discussed? There is a heavy obligation on all those who say that they want peace to prove it by engaging in this process and providing solutions to the outstanding problems.

Will the Prime Minister tell the House how the preparatory dialogue will operate? In particular, how will the two Governments be involved and when does he expect the first meetings to take place?

The Prime Minister mentioned the idea of an elected body playing some part in this process. Can he tell us how he would envisage the possibility of such a body becoming part of the peace process? What would be the timing of establishing such a body and, in particular, what would be its role in relation to the all-party negotiations that the two Governments hope to establish?

We essentially agree with what the Prime Minister has done today, and we welcome the framework that has been set out. It is not a solution, but it may provide a bridge to a solution. In constructing that bridge, the Irish and United Kingdom Governments should know that they will have the whole-hearted support and good wishes of all decent people in the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland.

For 15 months, although unacceptable violence of a sectarian nature still continues, there has been without doubt a transformation in the lives of the people of Northern Ireland. Their liberation from the bomb and the bullet has brought new hope and the chance of renewed prosperity. Peace is now too precious to squander. The duty lies on all parties to make this process work. From the outset, the Labour party has regarded this issue as transcending party politics. We have supported the Government in their search for peace because we believe it to be right. We have worked with the Government and will continue to do so.

The Prime Minister: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for his comments and his consistent support. I am also grateful to him for explaining to me his impeccable reason for needing to leave the Chamber during the course of this statement. I fully understand that that is unavoidable.

I join the right hon. Gentleman in the tribute that he paid to the Taoiseach. The Taoiseach has shown great courage and persistence, and I much admire what he has done. We have not invariably agreed on every matter, and all our discussions have not been easy, but I have found him an honest and straightforward man with whom to do business and I believe that, between us, we have made progress.

The right hon. Gentleman's characterisation of the preparatory talks and the decommissioning body was correct and I shall not reiterate the points that he put. They were certainly right. He raised a number of specific questions about the preparatory talks: how the Governments will be involved; and when they will start. We have set ourselves ambitious targets. We shall need to make a start on both tracks within a matter of days and we shall seek to do so. I hope that each Government will issue invitations to preparatory talks very soon. The starting point will obviously be existing exchanges and bilateral contacts, but we shall encourage other formats for meetings where the parties believe that they might further the objective of securing agreement.

This will be an intensive process. The two Governments have set out a way forward, but, as the right hon. Gentleman intimated, it requires the co-operation of all the parties in the tracks if we are to achieve real progress towards the targets that we have set ourselves. The right hon. Gentleman also asked about the role of an elected body and whether that could play a part in the negotiating process. Certainly it will. That is one of the propositions for serious consideration in the preparatory talks.

Both the Unionist parties represented in the House have put forward interesting and constructive proposals. They are not the same but they are both worthy of careful consideration by all the parties with an open mind, and we shall endeavour to ensure that that is precisely what they receive. The key to this, as to so much else in this process, is what will give the parties the confidence to come together for substantive political negotiations. If an elected body can play a part in that—one can certainly see circumstances in which that could be the case—it should be looked at very hard and it most certainly will be in the preparatory talks in the weeks ahead.

Mr. Tom King (Bridgwater): Is my right hon. Friend aware that there are obvious fears about the significant risks that are being taken in the initiative that he has announced and agreed with the Taoiseach? Is he also aware that there were even more significant risks in allowing the logjam to continue and no progress to be made? In that respect, will he accept the strong support, as echoed by the Leader of the Opposition, for the view that there is no prospect of all-party talks of any value and meaning unless there is confidence between the parties? It is therefore essential that Sinn Fein-IRA and other paramilitaries recognise the challenge that they will face in a matter of weeks—I understand that the commission is to report by the middle of January—and that they give clear evidence and conviction to all those concerned that they are genuine about becoming non-violent democratic parties and are prepared to embark on the decommissioning of arms.

The Prime Minister: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend. I share his judgment about the relative balance of risk between proceeding as we propose and not having proceeded at all. I believe that we have made the right judgment. No progress in this affair is without risk and it could never have been without risk.

I share the view that my right hon. Friend set out. The key to progress is to establish proper confidence between the parties, and all those who propose to take part in the negotiations must be set upon a secure democratic future. This is not a new condition or proposition. It was set out clearly in paragraph 10 of the joint declaration when we embarked on this whole affair and it remains as relevant and important today as it was on the day when we first agreed it.

Mr. Paddy Ashdown (Yeovil): I am happy to welcome and support the Prime Minister's statement and the joint communiqué on which it was based which was issued last night. This is not a breakthrough. The bottom line problems remain to be resolved, but it returns momentum to the peace process and provides a time frame and a structure within which those problems can be resolved. That may not be very tidy, but it is sensible and good politics.

We are now less than three weeks away from the anniversary of the publication of the foundation document. The Prime Minister will no doubt agree that the only rock on which that document and the peace process can be founded is absolute unanimity of purpose and action on the part of the British and Irish Governments. Perhaps he will confirm that in the process that he sees ahead, we shall overcome the disagreements and divergences that have perhaps taken some momentum from the peace process over the past few weeks.

On the role of an elected assembly, we support the Government's position that talks cannot take place between all parties until the process of decommissioning has started because that is the clear indication that all parties have committed themselves exclusively to the democratic process. But does The Prime Minister agree that the establishment of an elected assembly may have a role in that as well, and that in this matter the Irish Government may have a role to play in encouraging those who have so far been reluctant to take part in that to do so?

Finally, the Prime Minister said that within the next two or three days invitations will be issued to the parties for the exploratory talks. May we take it that that means that he sees those talks starting in a week or so—at all events before Christmas?

The Prime Minister: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman. The answer to his last point is yes. I certainly see the talks starting as speedily as we can manage and invitations being issued within a few days. I hope that all those who receive those invitations will both join in those talks and join in them at senior decision-making level within their parties because that is important.

The right hon. Gentleman is right that there is a balance of advantage, a very clear balance of advantage, in working with the Irish Government. We do not agree on every aspect; both the Taoiseach and I would state that quite plainly. There is no doubt that there is a different perspective on some of the matters that we have been discussing, but the prospects for success are infinitely greater if the two Governments can continue to work together in this process rather than apart. There were efforts during the past few months by some of the parties involved to seek to provoke differences and breaks between the two Governments. We are well aware of the number of occasions on which they tried to do that and we have resisted.

I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for what he said about decommissioning. As I said a moment ago, that was set out in the Downing street declaration. It is not a matter of dogma but of practicalities. No one has yet found an alternative way of providing confidence. The hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) once said that if there were other ways, of course one could look at them. But no one has yet provided another way. We shall wait to see whether one is provided. As for an elected assembly, I do not need to reiterate what the right hon. Gentleman said: I agree with it.

Mr. Andrew Hunter (Basingstoke): In warmly welcoming yesterday's communiqué and my right hon. Friend's statement, may I ask him to confirm that the international body will be purely advisory, that it will have no executive role and that both Governments will be free to respond to its suggestions in the way that they wish?

The Prime Minister: Yes, I can confirm all my hon. Friend's points. It will have an advisory, not an executive

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role. Of course we shall listen carefully to what it has to say and both Governments will consider its recommendations, but, ultimately, it is for the British Government to take decisions on matters affecting Northern Ireland and for the British and Irish Governments to take decisions jointly on matters that are of joint interest to north and south and between the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland. I believe that the international body, although advisory, will have a very valuable role to play.

Mr. David Trimble (Upper Bann): I note that the communiqué that was issued last night is in its essentials identical to the one that would have been issued at the beginning of September if the Irish Government had not given way to IRA threats at that time. In his statement the Prime Minister referred to paragraph 10 of the Downing street declaration and said that meeting the requirements of paragraph 10 are an essential condition. He will know that one of those requirements is the need to establish a commitment through exclusively peaceful means. I welcome what he said in the statement with regard to the decommissioning requirement and I welcome that clear restatement of the Government's position, but does he agree that there is also stated in paragraph 10 of the Downing street declaration a need for parties moving into all-party talks to have a democratic mandate and to show a willingness to abide by the democratic process? Does he agree that that mandate can be obtained, and that willingness to abide by the democratic process can be shown, only by the parties submitting themselves to an election and showing a willingness to participate in an elected body, and that, therefore, the sooner we have such an election and such a body, out of which negotiations can subsequently be developed, the better?

The Prime Minister: There is a great similarity between the agreement that would have been reached in September and the communiqué that was issued last evening. One difference of course between the two, as the hon. Gentleman will know, is that the communiqué issued yesterday was far more detailed in its content than the relatively brief communiqué that was still-born in September. To that effect, the time that has been lost has not been wholly lost because we have made some progress in the detail of the matters.

The hon. Gentleman quotes paragraph 10 correctly and that is, of course, one of the ways in which parties may achieve a democratic mandate. We said clearly in paragraph 10 that

> "democratically mandated parties which establish a commitment to exclusively peaceful methods and which have shown that they abide by the democratic process, are free to participate fully in democratic politics".

That has been our guiding position from the outset and it remains so.

Mr. Peter Robinson (Belfast, East): Does the Prime Minister accept that my colleagues and I have always been willing to meet him and to express our views on how political progress can be made and that we shall continue to do that, but that we are not prepared to be included in a process in which Sinn Fein-IRA plays a part while it still holds on to its semtex and weapons?

Will the Prime Minister explain to us how it is fair and just in paragraph 4 of the communiqué that constitutional and legitimate political parties should be treated on an equal basis to a political group that is a support organisation for a terrorist organisation, which, in turn, still holds on to its weaponry? Will the Prime Minister explain in relation to paragraph 3 what the term "widespread agreement" in that context is intended to convey? Is it possible for a talks process to begin without the support of all the Northern Ireland political parties?

The Prime Minister: We certainly seek as broad as possible participation and I hope that we can have universal participation. That would certainly be the best guiding star to achieving a satisfactory outcome and I hope that the hon. Gentleman and his party, who represent a great deal of important opinion in Northern Ireland, will play a constructive role. They have an important role to play. The proposals that he and his hon. Friend the Member for North Antrim (Rev. Ian Paisley) brought to me recently were constructive. The hon. Member for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson) will see the echo of them in the reference to an elected assembly in the communiqué that was issued yesterday. I should like to continue that constructive approach and I hope that he and his party will contribute to these discussions at a senior decision-making level.

As the hon. Gentleman knows, we are seeking the prospect of a proper dialogue for peace, but there is a dilemma for the two Governments in that respect: we cannot ensure that dialogue ourselves. We can only encourage it. The hon. Gentleman and other hon. Gentlemen with political responsibility for parties in Northern Ireland can deliver it and I very much hope that they will do so. They can help to ensure peace or they can help to prevent peace. I very much hope that they will work to ensure it.

As we have seen in the sad history of Northern Ireland, it is very easy to prevent peace. All that is necessary is to play to the old script, stand on the sidelines and play on the old fears and there will be no lasting peace. We know that that is the case. The history of Ireland has sadly told us that, but there is an alternative: if the people of Northern Ireland, who have shown great courage, can find a similar courage in all their political leaders—courage and determination to banish the old enmities—then, in joining in these discussions, those leaders can provide a more secure future for Northern Ireland than it has ever known in the past. That is a very great prize. It is a prize that is worth examining very carefully. It is worth examining all the options, including the option of deciding to engage in these preparatory talks.

The hon. Gentleman set out correctly what is necessary before one can move to what one might call the mainstream constitutional talks. We are here talking about the preparatory talks, and I hope that he and his party will show the same constructive spirit as they showed when they called upon me recently in Downing street, and will join in the talks, for the sake of the contribution that they can bring to making them a success.

Mr. Clive Soley (Hammersmith): Will the Prime Minister accept that we should not take the present ceasefire for granted? That is why the talks last night were so welcome, because they prevented the ceasefire from beginning to fray at the edges, as some of us feared that it might, given that there are always a few people who would like to return to violence. More importantly, will the right hon. Gentleman confirm that the British and Irish people expect the parties to participate in the preparatory talks, and that failure to do so would cause enormous damage to the communities that they represent in Northern Ireland?

The Prime Minister: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for what he has said. Certainly it is not wise to take the ceasefire for granted. One illustration of the extent to which that is true is that although, mercifully, we have had 15 months free of bombings and murder, emphatically we have not had 15 months free of crime and thuggery. Day after day, on both sides, punishment beatings have occurred, and people utterly defying the normal rule of law have taken it upon themselves to enter homes and break them up with baseball bats, and to break the arms and legs of teenagers with baseball bats for not toeing what those people thought was the appropriate party line in their particular part of Northern Ireland. That is not peace as I understand it, and it provides an illustration of the dangers that lie there.

There is one other relevant point: if the parties that have not been bombing and killing over the past 15 months are genuine in what they have repeatedly said since we lifted the broadcasting ban and enabled them to speak directly to the world, the peace that they seek is permanent. If that is true, there can be no question of going back to guns and bombs. In the future we shall find out whether, when they talked of peace over the past months, they were speaking the truth, or whether they were not. I hope that it will turn out that they were. Time alone will tell.

Mr. James Couchman (Gillingham): May I join others in congratulating my right hon. Friend and the Taoiseach and all who have worked towards this welcome progress? The international body is to be given a substantial task, and a formidably short time in which to do it. My right hon. Friend has named the chairman of the international body; can he say when he expects to be able to tell us the names of the other people serving on it?

The Prime Minister: I hope that we shall be able to announce the other two names speedily—I hope that one will be Canadian and the other Nordic. We are going through the final processes now and, as soon as those names are confirmed, and agreed by their Governments, I shall make them public.

Mr. Dennis Canavan (Falkirk, West): Does the Prime Minister now agree that to make total or even partial arms decommissioning a precondition for all-party talks is rather impractical, because arms handed over today could be replaced tomorrow? And will he therefore pursue more vigorously the twin-track approach, with a firm starting date for all-party inclusive talks, which would help to find an agreed new constitutional settlement, as well as helping to bring about the total arms decommissioning that we all want to see?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman is right that the ultimate prize is complete decommissioning, not the partial decommissioning that we seek before we get to all-party talks. The problem is a practical one. Unless there is some partial decommissioning there is unlikely to be confidence among the other political parties that Sinn Fein is committed permanently to peace, and we cannot have all-party negotiations unless all parties are prepared to sit down and talk together. The reality of life is that, without something that will engender confidence—*[Interruption.]* The only thing that we have been able to identify is a decommissioning of some of the arms. If there is an alternative, it has not yet been produced. If it is produced, of course any sensible person would look at it. But it has not yet been produced and we have not been able to conceive what it might be. It is a practical problem, not a dogmatic problem. I hope that that point will be understood by those who have the arms and could decommission a portion of them to try to engender the confidence to ensure that those all-party talks can then take place.

Mr. David Wilshire (Spelthorne): May I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his perseverance and wish him well with his future endeavours in the matter? Does he accept that a considerable number of Conservative Members believe that it is absolutely crucial that we put beyond all doubt and misunderstanding the central issue of decommissioning? Will he therefore confirm that there is absolutely no question whatever of the Government agreeing to enter into all-party talks before a start has been made on decommissioning?

The Prime Minister: I have indicated to my hon. Friend several times this afternoon that that is the Government's position. More relevantly, it is not only the Government's position. We must make that clear. It is the position of the parties who would be party to the talks. That is the real point. The parties would have to sit down together.

A number of the parties take the view, and I myself would not question that view—it is absolutely understandable—that they would not have confidence to sit down with Sinn Fein until they have a greater indication that Sinn Fein is prepared to disarm. That is the substantive point. It was implicit in the Downing street declaration mentioned earlier. It has been implicit ever since. My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland set it out in the three Washington conditions, the third of which is the one to which my hon. Friend refers. That remains the Government's position.

Mr. Kevin McNamara (Kingston upon Hull, North): Is the Prime Minister aware that all people in these islands will be congratulating him and the Taoiseach on having overcome some considerable difficulties and differences of opinion in achieving the communiqué yesterday? It is greatly welcomed. Will he answer two points? First, in talking about the three interlocking agreements, can he confirm that the principle that nothing is agreed until everything is agreed still stands? In relation to confidence-building measures, will he confirm that the proposal of an elected assembly may in itself cause a lack of confidence in other participants, bearing in mind, as they do, the fact that the result is a foregone conclusion,

[Mr. Kevin McNamara]

that the constituency itself was drawn up to give that particular electoral conclusion and that they have unhappy memories of Stormont and of the conventions?

The Prime Minister: That is of course a proper matter for discussion. But there is one thing that I hope that we will be able to do. Time after time in the history of Northern Ireland an opportunity to progress in one form or another has been pushed aside because something similar was tried at some stage in the past and did not succeed. The hon. Gentleman is right in saying that the assembly route was tried in the past and did not succeed. But that was in a different time and in different circumstances. That is not to say that it would not succeed on this particular occasion.

I am saying to all the parties that I hope that they will stand back and consider whether it is possible to put some of those old shibboleths to one side and decide in the circumstances of 1995, on the back of the talks that have taken place, on the back of the changed situation that exists in the everyday life of people in Northern Ireland, in the understanding that this may be a chance that may not readily be repeated in the years ahead if it slips away from us, and when everyone should be prepared to go to the limit of what is tolerable for them and their view, to see if we can reach a communal settlement.

In that sense, I ask the hon. Gentleman not to rule out instinctively the question of going down the route of an elected body. One of the proposals is that there should be an elected body—not to govern Northern Ireland, but from which a negotiating team with a proper mandate to negotiate the future is drawn.

Negotiating those constitutional points will not be easy. I am open-minded about how those constitutional talks come about, but I can see the advantage that some of the political parties in this House see in having an elected assembly—not to govern Northern Ireland but to produce nominees from that assembly to negotiate constitutional matters for Northern Ireland. I hope that that matter will not be pushed aside by anyone in these preliminary conversations.

Mr. Richard Spring (Bury St. Edmunds): I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on so assiduously seeking a resolution of the problems in Northern Ireland. Does my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister agree that a democratically elected body in Northern Ireland could be entirely consistent with the often expressed commitment of the Government not to seek to impose solutions on the Province?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is quite right; it would be consistent. That is legitimately one of the matters for discussion in the preparatory talks and thereafter. The fact of the matter is that the possibility of imposing solutions is more apparent than real. One cannot impose a solution that is not acceptable to the people generally. We need to reach agreement on those issues, and that is why it is so important that the discussions between all parties take place.

Mr. Robert McCartney (North Down): Does the Prime Minister agree that, although the issue of decommissioning has been firmly put in place by his statement today, Sinn Fein will not be admitted to substantive negotiations until it has physically commenced decommissioning? There is of course a more significant point, and that is the whole issue of consent. It seems to me—I am sure that the Prime Minister will agree—that the whole basis of the Downing street declaration was that the principle of consent, which is consent by the greater number of people in Northern Ireland, should rule any agreement. Does the Prime Minister therefore confirm that Sinn Fein will not be admitted to any substantive negotiations until it has unequivocally accepted the principle of consent as a basis for discussion?

The Prime Minister: As the hon. and learned Gentleman knows, Sinn Fein cannot be admitted to talks with other parties until the other parties are prepared to talk to it. Therefore, the principle of consent, in that respect, lies in the hands of all the parties. There is a bigger issue on the subject of consent, and it is one that I sought to deal with some months ago. I have made it clear, and I happily reiterate it this afternoon, that if we are able to get through the preparatory talks and then move into all-party talks, and if those all-party talks reach an agreement, the agreement that emerges from the all-party talks will have to be put in a referendum to the people of Northern Ireland for their consent. Given the nature of what is under discussion, that is proper. I reiterate that that consent, in that respect, remains at the heart of the Government's plans.

Lady Olga Maitland (Sutton and Cheam): May I welcome my right hon. Friend's courageous determination to keep up the momentum? Will he confirm that the international body has a clear remit to consider only illegally held weapons, and that there is no question that the legally held weapons of the security forces in Northern Ireland will be dragged into the process?

Mr. Major: Yes, I can confirm that for my hon. Friend. That point is explicitly made in the communiqué agreed between the Taoiseach and myself.

Mr. Ken Maginnis (Fermanagh and South Tyrone): May I begin by thanking the Prime Minister for clinging so tenaciously, if somewhat precariously, to his Washington third criterion, which requires that a full decommissioning process be agreed and the first phase be implemented before any paramilitary organisation can enter into substantive talks? May I caution him that the Irish are very good wordsmiths who are able to craft their language in a way which means all things to all people? Does he recall that Albert Reynolds, who with him signed the Downing street declaration, was unable to understand the meaning of "commitment to exclusively peaceful means" to include decommissioning of illegal weapons? Does he also recall that, in 1985, the Government's commitment to allowing the status of Northern Ireland to be decided by the people of Northern Ireland was overruled by the Irish Supreme Court, which said that status was not defined—carefully not defined? In the communiqué, could it be that the Irish believe that decommissioning is not defined—carefully not defined?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman began by saying that there was great skill in the use of language in Ireland, and I would suggest that that skill extends to all

parts of the island of Ireland, both north and south. The hon. Gentleman has just illustrated that skill with great clarity, and I understand his point.

The hon. Gentleman was one of the early advocates of the possibility of an international body, and I congratulate him on his prescience in that respect. It is clearly a valid way forward, and we have decided to adopt it. We also were considering it at the time, and I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's support. I believe that the hon. Gentleman is misjudging the communiqué in his use of language. The communiqué is not a fudge, and what is set out in it is very clear.

The only point of difference that exists between the British and Irish Governments has been set out clearly by both the Taoiseach and me last night and separately this morning. That point of difference has been acknowledged, but the substance of the communiqué is very clear and includes the remit of the international body and the nature of the arms to be considered by that body.

Social Security

4.15 pm

The Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Peter Lilley): With permission, Madam Speaker, I should like to make a statement on social security following my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor's Budget statement.

For half a century since the creation of the welfare state, expenditure on social security has, on average, grown 5 per cent. a year faster than inflation. As a result, it has taken an ever-growing share of national income and it has been an engine for rising taxes. Social security now costs the average working person £15 every working day.

That is why, when I became Secretary of State for Social Security, I launched my programme of step-by-step reforms. Those reforms are having an effect. During the next three years, spending should grow by little more than 1 per cent. per annum, well below the growth in the economy, so it will be a declining share of national income. It will leave scope for sustainable reductions in taxes. That in turn is the best of all ways to stimulate activity in the economy, to create jobs and to reduce benefit dependency.

Next year, planned spending on social security will be £90 billion. That is the figure I announced last year, and it is below the plans of two years ago. The figure includes nearly £3 billion to finance increased benefit rates. That is £600 million more than anticipated last year because it is based on the September inflation rate which jumped to 3.9 per cent., and has since fallen back to 3.2 per cent.

The measures that I am announcing today will save nearly £500 million in 1996-97 and more than £1 billion in 1998-99. Together, my reforms to date will save £3.5 billion next year. By the turn of the century, they will save £5 billion a year.

To be able to help those in need, we have to stop fraud. Despite tough control on overall running costs, I am channelling extra resources to the battle against fraud. Last year the Benefits Agency detected and stopped a record £700 million of fraud, and local authorities doubled their savings to £170 million, but prevention is better than detection and I am therefore pursuing an anti-fraud strategy based on prevention and deterrence.

In total my anti-fraud measures across all benefits will save £2.5 billion by 1998-99. The Benefits Agency has just started deploying one of the most powerful data matching systems in the world to identify suspicious claims. The agency will investigate claims and carry out more than 1 million home visits and other checks. It will tackle employers who collude with people who claim unemployment benefits while working. Next year, we will start computerising post offices and launch the benefit payment card.

Local authorities have responsibility for administering housing benefit. A recent study suggests that housing benefit fraud costs almost £1 billion a year, so I shall strengthen the financial incentives for local authorities to tackle fraud. I shall invite local authorities to compete for challenge funding for innovative anti-fraud measures. Next year, I shall introduce a national computer record of housing benefit claimants. That will stop people claiming from more than one local authority.

[Mr. Peter Lilley]

From October 1996, further changes in housing benefit will reduce abuse and waste. Some tenants abscond without making initial payments to landlords, so I shall enable local authorities to make the first giro payable to the landlord.

Most other benefits are already paid in arrears. I shall align housing benefit with them. That will stop the wrongful payments that can arise when housing benefit is paid in advance.

In October, I announced proposals to limit asylum seekers' access to benefits. Seventy per cent. of people who claim asylum do not arrive as refugees, but make a claim some while after entering the United Kingdom illegally, or as tourists, students or visitors.

From next year, I intend to allow benefit only for people who claim asylum as they enter the UK. When a claimant is found not to be a refugee, benefit will cease. My proposals will save £160 million next year. My right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary is speeding up asylum decisions, which will further reduce the benefit cost. We will offer refugees a sanctuary, but we will not be a soft touch for social security.

During the past two decades, there has been a huge increase both in the number of lone parents and in their cost to the taxpayer, which is expected to reach £9.4 billion this year—equivalent to more than £1,500 a year extra tax on each working family with children of their own to support.

The right approach is neither to penalise nor to promote lone parenthood. The benefit system, however, gives special assistance to lone parents, which couples do not have. In particular, two components of benefit for lone parents have no equivalent for couples—one-parent benefit and lone-parent premium. They cost about £600 million a year.

To start bringing treatment of one-parent and two-parent families more into line, I propose no increase in either benefit next April. My intention over time is to continue to narrow the gap between the benefits that go to lone parents and those that go to couples. At the same time, I intend to build on our existing measures to help lone parents back to work.

Family credit has been of particular benefit to lone parents and I have greatly improved it. I extended family credit to people working part time, gave an extra £10 a week to people working full time and introduced a £40 a week allowance for the cost of child care. I now propose to increase that allowance to £60 a week. That will be of particular benefit to those who want to return to full-time work and those with more than one child. The provision of nursery vouchers will be an additional help to parents of pre-school children.

Maintenance is also an important stepping stone to work. Even absent parents on benefit should contribute to their child's support, so I propose to double the minimum payment of child maintenance to £4.80 a week from April next year. In addition, from April 1997, I shall pilot a major new scheme, which will provide individual help for up to 25,000 lone parents to find jobs or training opportunities.

Finally, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment will extend the very successful scheme that has already created places to care for 50,000 children out of school hours, creating a further 18,000 places over the next three years.

As a result of the reforms already implemented, the proportion of lone parents in work has increased. The four measures that I have announced today will help more lone parents to become self-supporting.

Most young people starting out in work either stay with their parents, share a flat or find a bedsit, but those who are without a job can claim housing benefit and choose to occupy a better property than they could afford if in work, so for single people under 25 who are renting privately I propose to limit housing benefit to the average cost of shared accommodation in each locality. That will reduce disincentives to work, discourage young people from leaving home before they can afford to and reduce the attraction of moving to seaside resorts. The changes will apply from next October.

Couples, people with children and those exempted from the January housing benefit changes will not be affected. Local authorities will be given funds to prevent hardship in exceptional cases.

The new scheme should save more than £100 million over three years. Last year, I announced a scheme to continue maximum help with housing benefit during the first four weeks of work. I am now extending it to people who have been on a Government training course. In a separate measure, I intend to increase non-dependant deductions for housing costs.

The state system of social security provides decent help for those in need. However, the voluntary and charitable sectors provide extra help to cope with unusual circumstances. Voluntary bodies and charities can already pay £10 a week without the recipient losing benefit. I propose to double that limit to £20 a week. I believe that the change will be widely welcomed.

I propose some smaller measures to remove anomalies. I shall amend the industrial injuries benefit scheme so that those who receive reduced earnings allowance to compensate for loss of earnings should normally transfer to retirement allowance when they reach pension age. Separately, I shall align the mobility component of disability living allowance more closely with similar benefits that are withdrawn during hospital stays. I shall improve the information gathering used to make assessments for disability living allowance.

Britain already has one of the lowest non-wage labour costs in Europe. I intend to reduce it further. From April 1996, employers will qualify for one year's remission from their national insurance contributions for each person they take on who has been out of work for two years or more.

I am cutting the national insurance class 4 contributions for self-employed people by 1.3 per cent. from April 1996. This outweighs the loss of tax relief on these contributions announced by my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor. Finally, I intend to cut the main rate of employers' national insurance contributions by £500 million, some 0.2 per cent., from April 1997.

One of the main financial concerns facing elderly people is the prospect of needing long-term care. Providing for their needs in old age is, of course, one of

the reasons why people save, but Age Concern and others have argued that the capital limits applying to people in residential and nursing care are tougher than the rules for people who stay in their own homes. They have urged us to raise the capital limits for residential and nursing care to those that apply to housing benefit.

We are going further than that. We are not just doubling the upper limit to £16,000 but more than tripling the lower limit. Under our proposals, people with up to £16,000 of assets will qualify for state help and people with capital of less than £10,000 will not be required to make any contribution from their capital towards the cost of basic residential care.

The new limits will apply from April 1996 at the latest to all people in long-term residential care or nursing homes. About 50,000 people should benefit in the first year. However, we also want to ensure that, in future, more people can afford care.

One of this country's major successes has been encouraging more private pension provision than any other European country. The challenge facing us now is to be equally successful in enabling people to make decent provision for long-term care. We are announcing three important proposals to stimulate the development of attractive savings and insurance schemes.

First, benefits from long-term care insurance will be tax free. Secondly, my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor is consulting on how occupational pension schemes can enable pensioners to defer some income early in retirement so that they have more income to help with the cost of long-term care. Thirdly, we will consult on partnership schemes that would enable people to retain even more of their assets in return for providing for a corresponding amount of their long-term care costs. That would encourage more people to make provision for themselves and it should help the insurance market to develop new products, as the risks would be limited.

Today's measures continue my step-by-step reforms of social security. I have protected the most vulnerable and I am creating a fairer and more modern benefit system, but our aim is to help more people off benefit altogether, and we are succeeding. We have fewer people out of work than any other major European country and more people in jobs.

My reforms will make a double contribution to that aim. They strengthen work incentives and encourage more people off welfare and into work. By controlling spending, they are easing the burden of taxes and helping to create a vibrant, free enterprise economy. That gives people the chance to find a job and provide for themselves, which is the best help that we can give them. It means that we can afford fair provision for those who are unable to work. My reforms give them a greater chance. I commend them to the House.

Mr. Chris Smith (Islington, South and Finsbury): I remind the Secretary of State at the outset of the background against which his statement is delivered. It is a background of rising inequality in society. Earlier this year, the Joseph Rowntree trust inquiry into income and wealth showed that inequality in income had risen rapidly between 1977 and 1990 to reach a higher level than has been recorded at any time since the second world war. In Britain, the poor are getting poorer and the rich are getting richer.

The recent report of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development shows that that growth is greater in the United Kingdom than in any other advanced industrial country. The number of people who are dependent on benefit has doubled since 1979, from one in 12 people to one in six. One in five non-pensioner households has no one in work. That is the background against which the statement comes; it is the background of a divided Britain. This statement and the Budget will make those divisions worse rather than better.

The proposal to pay housing benefit in arrears rather than in advance will not only harm landlords, but make it extremely difficult for people who need to claim housing benefit in order to move into new accommodation to do so. The present situation is bad enough—deposits are sought for which no funding is available—but this change will make it even worse.

The limitation of housing benefit amounts for young people under the age of 25 will have a series of malign consequences. It will force young people out of bedsits and one-bedroom flats into inadequate, unregulated and potentially dangerous multi-occupation dwellings. It will also be particularly damaging for young people coming out of care. They are often vulnerable and already face huge difficulties—we do not need to be reminded of recent tragedies to appreciate the dangers faced by lonely and vulnerable young people.

The proposal will also create a new unemployment trap. People on existing housing benefit who take up a job that might not last very long will be faced with a lower benefit and the potential loss of a home if they lose their job. The proposal will surely act as a disincentive to people in that position taking up work. Young people face a double whammy because for the second year running, there is an increase in the non-dependant deduction on housing benefit that is well above the inflation rate. It will provide an incentive for families to remove adult children from the family home—and that is the proposal of a party that is supposed to favour keeping families together.

On the subject of families, perhaps I might discuss the measures for single parents. Is there not a fundamental fallacy at the heart of what the Government are doing? Are not they telling us that the costs of bringing up a child or children are exactly the same for a single-parent household as for a two-parent household? It is patently obvious that that is not the case in a host of different ways, especially because the costs of child care fall to be met by one income alone. One can never rely on the unpaid help of the other member of the household if one is a single parent.

The Conservative Government used to recognise that obvious truth. The 1985 Green Paper on the reform of social security argued that one-parent benefit should be continued

"as a contribution to the additional costs"—

additional costs—

"faced by lone parents in bringing up children alone".

It approved the introduction of a lone-parent premium in order to recognise

"the extra pressures faced by lone parents."

In 1985, the Government recognised that extra pressures and extra costs were faced by lone parents; now it would appear that they do not. What has changed in the meantime?

[Mr. Chris Smith]

In the White Paper that followed that Green Paper, the Government went even further. They emphasised that

"The principle of continued recognition of the need for specific further help for lone parents on top of that provided by the family premium has been welcomed."

It is that specific further help that they are now in the business of removing.

When will Conservative Members wake up to the fact that single parents are real people with real needs, and are not to be scapegoated at every turn?

Freezing lone-parent premium and one-parent benefit is bad enough. How will the phasing out happen? Will lone-parent premium be reduced year by year as family premium is uprated? Will single parents be confronted with a complete standstill in premium income as a result?

It is especially malign to attack one-parent benefit. It is an in-work benefit; it provides a through train from benefit into work. It is one of the few bits of the present welfare system that acts as a genuine bridge into work. We need to be removing disincentives that affect the move from benefit to work, not removing one of the precious few incentives that there are in the system.

I should like also to ask about the increase in minimum maintenance payments, from £2.35 to £4.80, under the Child Support Act 1991. Is not that a payment from absent parents that will frequently go straight into the pockets of the Treasury rather than the hands of the child or the caring parent? Will not many children experience no benefit from that change? Will it not also represent an effective reduction in income support for a single person, who will lose £2.45 under that measure but gain only £1.40 in the uprating? How can the Secretary of State justify his saying that a person in that position should live below what even the Government accept is the basic poverty line?

The increase in child care disregard on family credit—I must correct the Secretary of State, it is not an allowance, it is a disregard and there is an important distinction between the two—is welcome, but I note in passing that many people in real need already receiving maximum family credit will not be able to benefit from the increase in the disregard. I also note the failure to uprate any of the other disregards on housing benefit, family credit and income support.

Of course we welcome the raising of the long-term care thresholds, but is that not a very small step that leaves the great majority unassisted? The homes of many who live alone will be counted as assets, and a £16,000 threshold will surely go nowhere towards meeting their needs. Will not many thousands still live in fear of losing their homes? The Secretary of State has told us that 50,000 people will benefit from the change. Does that figure include those who may still be forced to sell their homes as a result of the current system? I must point out that the existing threshold has been frozen since 1988. Does the Secretary of State intend to uprate it regularly hereafter?

Does the introduction of a measure relating to industrial injuries in fact mean that those who have suffered an injury at work through no fault of their own will be forced out of reduced earnings allowance and lose three quarters of that benefit as a result? Will the Secretary of State also confirm that, of the cases that currently go to adjudication, only 3 per cent. have resulted in the refusal or reduction of disability living allowance? Given that small degree of error, will the right hon. Gentleman's information-gathering exercise—of which we have been given no details—be cost-effective in any way?

We consider the Secretary of State's proposals relating to asylum seekers to be inhumane and unjust. We do not believe that they will produce any real savings, especially in view of their impact on children and local authority care costs. We will oppose the proposals. We believe that the real way in which to tackle the problem is to speed up the assessment of applications. That is obviously not happening now, given that there is a backlog of 65,000—and it is growing.

I was pleased to note that the Government are to introduce tax exemption for compensation for mis-sold personal pensions for those who were wrongly advised to leave occupational pension schemes. That is a sensible measure: it represents the equivalent of a tax-free lump sum, and thus makes fiscal sense. What bearing has that proposal, however, on the position of those who may receive payments in respect of their having opted out of the state earnings-related pension scheme, rather than an occupational scheme, and what principles underlie the Secretary of State's approach in each case?

Today we have seen yet another relaunch of the fight against fraud. That fight is, of course, desperately important: every pound of which the system is defrauded is a pound less for someone in genuine need. Indeed, the Select Committee on Social Security recently told us that the figures were grossly underestimated, but why should we believe the targets that the Secretary of State has set today any more than the unachieved targets that he has announced in previous years? Last year, savings from the fight against fraud amounted to £717 million. The Red Book tells us that savings for 1998 will be £2.5 billion. Is the Red Book figure correct? How, precisely, will the Secretary of State achieve a 250 per cent. improvement in the tackling of fraud in the course of three years?

The Secretary of State has told us that there will be extra home visits each year. Even if the number reaches the 1 million home visits that the right hon. Gentleman anticipates, that figure will bring us barely above the 800,000 figure of 1989, and nowhere near the 6.6 million that took place in 1979. It is all very well to ring-fence special officers for fraud investigation, but should not every single member of DSS staff be part of the battle against fraud? If the administrative cost of the rest of the Secretary of State's Department is being squeezed, will that not damage the overall effort?

What about the level of errors? We know from the Comptroller and Auditor General's report that, in the last recorded year, £540 million was lost through departmental error in income support payments alone. Will not that be made worse, not better, by what is proposed in the statement? Will the Secretary of State now commit himself to implementing in full the Select Committee's recommendations on fraud?

Is not the statement just another example of the Government's approach to social security: not an overall coherent approach, just a piecemeal look, benefit by benefit, target group by target group—what can we take off mortgage payers or the unemployed one year and off young people and single parents the next? Surely the real way to set about reforming the welfare system and

reducing the overall budget is not to harm the people concerned with benefit cut after benefit cut but to look at the system as a whole and put in place real measures to help them come off welfare and into work.

The statement showed precious little of the Chancellor's boasted social conscience. It has not protected the vulnerable. It does not come anywhere near a coherent benefit-to-work strategy. It deepens the divisions in a divided Britain. It is time for the Government who have created those divisions to go.

Mr. Lilley: How things have changed since the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) was replaced by the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith). The former was always careful to leave us entirely confused as to whether he was supporting or opposing what we had suggested. There is no doubt today that Labour has opposed every measure that we have introduced. The hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury has just chalked up a bill of £1 billion of savings forgone. How the Labour party can honour, "Vote in favour of our tax cuts" while opposing our savings remains to be seen. It is old Labour with a vengeance.

The hon. Gentleman began by referring to the Joseph Rowntree trust report. He clearly has not read the subsequent Institute for Fiscal Studies report which showed that, far from the poor getting poor and the rich getting richer, the poor have also got richer in the sense that the bottom 10 per cent. spend substantially more now than they did in 1979, and a high proportion of them move each year to higher deciles in income distribution.

The hon. Gentleman criticised our measures to restrict housing benefit for the under-25s to the sort of accommodation that most people who are paying for their housing when in work choose to occupy. I cannot see the logic of his position there.

The hon. Gentleman was worried about the danger of properties in multiple occupation. The answer to that is proper regulation and enforcement, not to try to manipulate the benefit system, which already leaves many people in such properties.

The hon. Gentleman referred to the difficulties that young people might have getting back to work. He clearly does not understand the run-on scheme, which I announced last year and which is being introduced from April. It will allow people to keep, for four weeks after returning to work, the maximum housing benefit even though they are in work and may no longer be entitled to it. That will be a major help for young people and others returning to work. There will, of course, be special provision for the more vulnerable groups, as there is in the changes that begin in January.

The hon. Gentleman does not seem to recognise that

> "For decades politicians would not talk about the issue. Tax and benefit policy was squeezed to help single parents and childless couples. Single parents gained more help than did two parents. That policy has got to be reversed."

Those are the words of the Chairman of the Social Security Select Committee in September this year, and I agree with him.

The hon. Gentleman does not seem to realise that one-parent benefit, when it was originally introduced by Barbara Castle—as both the Chairman of the Select Committee and Barbara Castle herself made clear—was never part of any strategy. It was merely an attempt at a quick fix. Barbara Castle said that it was an interim benefit for the one-parent family "for a year" and that it would cease when the child benefit scheme came into effect.

The hon. Gentleman argued that one-parent benefit is necessary as a work incentive. Since we are treating lone-parent premium—which is the counterpart to the out-of-work benefits—in parallel with one-parent benefit, there is no problem with any change in work incentives. We believe that the right approach is to encourage people back into work. We are doing that by increasing the child care disregard and by the range of other measures that I have announced today. Indeed, I calculate that the expansion of nursery care vouchers will almost cost more than the savings that we are achieving initially from our lone-parent measures. Once again, the Opposition would not be able to finance desirable schemes because they refuse to make the savings necessary for them.

The hon. Gentleman was completely silent on what Labour proposes to do about long-term care. He hinted that the Labour party was proposing to spend billions of pounds more of public subsidy. We believe that it is right to try to achieve as much success in enabling people to finance long-term care as we have had enabling them to finance decent pension provision. That is the burden of the various measures that the Chancellor and I are introducing.

The reduced earnings allowance, as its name suggests, is a compensation for people who have suffered injuries that have reduced their earning capacity. The allowance is intended to apply to people during their working lives. Because of some anomalies, it does not stop for all people when they reach retirement age. We are trying to ensure that, in the majority of cases, the allowance will stop and be replaced by the retirement allowance, which is appropriate in retirement.

Mr. Smith: When they have less income.

Mr. Lilley: Of course most people have less income when they retire than when they are at work, but they none the less get some compensation through the retirement allowance to acknowledge the fact that they have been able to make less provision during their working life because of the industrial injury.

A fair structure of benefits has been agreed by Parliament and we are now trying to implement that properly through regulations.

The hon. Gentleman says that all we should do for asylum seekers is to speed up the process. The Home Secretary is doing a great deal to that end. I understand that the Opposition are opposing the measures that would enable my right hon. and learned Friend to speed up the process. As long as we are a honeypot attracting people for benefit reasons, we will find it impossible to give proper consideration to the genuine refugees who reach our shores—whom we all want to help.

I am not surprised that the hon. Gentleman chooses to try to ridicule the changes that have been made to assist detection of fraud. He said that our previous targets have not been achieved. He is wrong. Our target for the current year was about £648 million of fraud detected and stopped by the Benefits Agency. The actual figure was £717 million, just by the Benefits Agency. Fraud savings have also been made by local authorities and by the

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Employment Service's fraud department, which has now merged with my Department. That is why there is an apparent disparity in the figures that the hon. Gentleman quoted.

There will be a substantial increase in the fraud savings because of the extra resources that I have devoted to it and the strategy that I am pursuing, which the Labour party appears to oppose. I remind the hon. Gentleman that the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) has said that Labour has too long been associated with the freeloaders.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Order. That initial exchange has taken 37 minutes. I must now insist that hon. Members put brisk questions. I equally insist on brisk answers because we have other business to conduct in the House today.

Sir Andrew Bowden (Brighton, Kemptown): I welcome the announcement on long-term care. Will my right hon. Friend enlarge a little on partnership schemes? Does he foresee those schemes including the ability to purchase a room in a residential home or some sort of equity in a residential home so that a person who moves into a home can retain some capital for his or her family in the future?

Mr. Lilley: My right hon. Friends and I will issue a paper to consult on the possibility of proceeding with partnership schemes. It would be wrong to speculate now on the full extent of them, but I note the point that my hon. Friend has made. I know of his great interest in this matter and I am sure that we shall receive helpful and extremely well-informed contributions from him once the proposal is in the public domain.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): My question, too, is about how the Secretary of State's announcement affects older people. Why has not he altered the insulting additional 25p payment for over-80 pensioners, which has remained in place for so long? Why, after 23 years, has he still not adjusted the Christmas bonus, which remains at £10? Was not the Chancellor's residential care announcement yesterday a giveaway, as it increased capital allowances? Will not we have a takeaway from the Secretary of State for the Environment tomorrow when he announces that local authority funds will be cut? Is not this an attempt at a getaway by the Secretary of State for Social Security because he is not increasing the special transitional grant for community care?

Mr. Lilley: I can answer that question briskly. Unlike the Opposition, we are in serious government and cannot afford to hand out money like confetti.

Mr. Tim Smith (Beaconsfield): May I congratulate my right hon. Friend on the meticulous and patient way in which he has carried out his comprehensive review of social security spending since 1992? What would total spending have been if none of the changes had been made, and what would have been the cost to the taxpayer?

Mr. Lilley: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. If none of the changes had been made, expenditure next year would have been about £3.5 billion higher than it will be; by the end of the century it would have been £5 billion higher; and in the next century it would have been three times that figure—nearer £15 billion higher.

Mr. Frank Field (Birkenhead): As every statement by the Secretary of State is incomplete until he has announced new anti-fraud measures, when does he expect to have an adequate anti-fraud programme in place? When will it be safe for taxpayers to trust him with their £90 billion contribution?

Mr. Lilley: We can make greater progress than any previous Government because of our benefit reviews, which enable us to identify, measure and investigate the different kinds of fraud. Those reviews are taking place benefit by benefit. Provisional results from the review of housing benefit show a substantial amount of fraud there. That information enables us to carry forward anti-fraud measures against housing benefit with local authorities. I imagine that the other benefits are likely to show a lower level of fraud. The answer to the hon. Gentleman's final question is that there is greater security with this Government, and me in charge of the anti-fraud campaign, than there would be with anyone else, with the possible exception of the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. John Townend (Bridlington): Will my right hon. Friend accept my congratulations on all the savings that he has made? I am slightly mystified, however, in view of the great number of savings that he has outlined to the House, that page 126 of the Red Book shows that social security spending has gone up, compared with plans for 1996-97, by £1,040 million and that, for 1997-98, it is proposed that the increase from previous plans be a further £550 million.

Mr. Lilley: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I think that I can help him with the figures. They refer to the control total, which forms only part of the actual total and excludes all cyclical benefits in my Department. Offsetting savings have been made in some areas of cyclical benefits, which are not included in the control total. We excluded cyclical benefits because we thought that it was right to let the cyclical effect of increased spending occur during the recession and be fully financed by extra taxation. As I said this morning, only two things drive up taxes—recession and a Labour Government. We are coming out of recession; let us ensure that we do not have a Labour Government. We can then be certain of sustained lower taxes.

Mr. Terry Rooney (Bradford, North): The Secretary of State will be aware that one of the greatest areas of fraud is among corrupt employers who work in the black economy. Why has he cut Contributions Agency field inspectors by 60 per cent.?

Mr. Lilley: I said in my statement, quite contrary to what the hon. Gentleman says, that with the integration of the Employment Service fraud officers and my Benefits Agency staff, there will be a special effort to crack down on collusion between employers and employees. I am glad to have the hon. Gentleman's support for that.

Mr. Peter Luff (Worcester): In my constituency and around the country the elderly and those approaching retirement will welcome the measures that my right hon. Friend has announced for long-term care and those that my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor

announced yesterday about tax on savings. Will my right hon. Friend continue with research to find ways to reward rather than penalise those who have been prudent enough to prepare for their old age?

Mr. Lilley: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his welcome. He is right to say that, going beyond the measures that I have announced and including those announced by my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor, this is a Budget for everybody but specifically for the prudent and the elderly. We think that those who are prudent enough to save for retirement should be encouraged to do that, hence the lower tax on savings, measures to promote investment for long-term care and the recognition of the comparative harshness of the previous capital rules.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Does the Secretary of State recall that in the past few weeks, the nation has been aghast at the stories, emanating from around Gloucester and elsewhere, of young women in particular roaming the streets and being picked up by Rose and Fred West? By proposing to take away some of the housing benefit from under-25s, he will create a situation in which thousands of young people will be roaming the streets. Any decent Government would withdraw that proposal. If he wants to do something about high rents, he should tackle the landlords—his friends.

Mr. Lilley: Even by the hon. Member's standards, that is a distasteful attempt to exploit a ghastly tragedy for party political ends. We propose to continue housing benefit for the under-25s but to restrict it to the level that is payable for shared accommodation. That is only right and proper. A number of the measures that we have announced will prevent abuse by both landlords and tenants.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (Colchester, North): Is it not disturbing that total spending on social security is still rising despite all my right hon. Friend's efforts to curb it? Does not that demonstrate that, unless we continue to reform social security and tackle fraud, the burden will continue to rise and threaten the country's prosperity?

Mr. Lilley: I agree that further work needs to be done. I spelt out that there would be a step-by-step, sector-by-sector review of social security. That is the way in which we have approached it. None the less, it is worth noting that the average growth in real terms of social security spending over its first 50 years was 5 per cent. a year, while over the next three years it is expected to be a little over 1 per cent. That is a major change, and this must be one of the very few countries in the developed world that can expect social security to take a declining proportion of national income in the years to come, thereby reducing taxes and the burdens on creating jobs.

Ms Angela Eagle (Wallasey): Given that the Government have admitted that lone parents face extra costs, can the Secretary of State explain why the children of lone parents should be made to suffer because of the marital status of their parents, which after all is not their fault?

Mr. Lilley: Lone parents receive extra money relative to couples in a number of ways and not just through lone-parent premium and lone-parent benefit. The lone parent receives £10 a week more in her or his personal allowance than when she or he was part of a couple. That reflects the greater cost of living alone. There are a number of other changes, the most important of which is the introduction of family credit. It is heavily weighted to the benefit of lone parents and has significantly increased the chances of lone parents returning to work. We must build on that.

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Blackpool, South): The measures announced by my right hon. Friend will certainly be welcome in many seaside resort constituencies, not least because of the help that he has announced for those who are in long-term care, his raising of capital limits and his continuing support for the most vulnerable pensioners. Is he surprised to know that, contrary to what the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) said, Labour councillors in many seaside resorts own and run houses in multiple occupation and benefit as unscrupulous landlords? That is the record of Labour in power.

Mr. Lilley: My hon. Friend speaks with great knowledge of this matter and I am sure that his remarks will bite home among Opposition Members. I am grateful to him for his welcome, and I know that the measures that I have announced will be well received not just in Blackpool but in many other seaside and inland resorts.

Mr. Alan Howarth (Stratford-on-Avon): What assessment has the Secretary of State made of the cost to public expenditure of his decision to cut the value of lone-parent benefit, thus making it harder for lone parents to be in work? What assessment has he made of the effect of reducing the lone-parent premium which, through impoverishing households, means that more children are likely to be taken into care? On what evidence does he justify his decision to erode lone-parent premium which was introduced by his predecessor in 1988 in recognition of the additional costs and pressures faced by lone parents? Why does the Conservative party insist on stigmatising lone parents?

Mr. Lilley: That is nonsense, as my hon. Friend—well, he is a friend, though not in the technical sense that he was before—used to know. The hon. Gentleman is talking absolute nonsense. We are moving lone-parent premium and one-parent benefit in parallel and there is thus no change in work incentives. We are simultaneously improving rewards for work through changes to family credit, making it available to part-time workers, increasing its value for full-time workers and covering more generously the cost of child care. He should recognise and welcome those changes. When he has considered them, perhaps he will review which side of the House he should sit on.

Dr. Robert Spink (Castle Point): In welcoming my right hon. Friend's reduction, albeit marginal, in non-wage labour costs, may I ask him to resist Opposition policies that would increase not just non-wage labour costs through the adoption of the social chapter but direct labour costs because of the minimum wage? That would happen at all salary levels because the policies advocated by those on the Opposition Benches would put people out of work.

Mr. Lilley: Far more important than anything that we can do directly to improve the benefits system are measures that increase the number and availability of jobs for those who would otherwise depend on the benefits

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system. We have been more successful than our counterparts in Europe in getting unemployment down and getting people into work. We have about 68 per cent. of people of working age in work. On the continent the average is 60 per cent. If we had the same average as that on the continent, which the policies of the Opposition might well achieve, there would be 3 million fewer people in work in this country. That is a measure of how important it is to stay out of the social chapter and continue to reduce taxes and the costs of creating jobs.

Ms Roseanna Cunningham (Perth and Kinross): Does the Minister recall the warnings prior to the removal of benefit for 16 and 17-year-olds that its abolition would simply result in an increase in homelessness? Does he not understand that because of that there is widespread support for the restoration of that benefit, particularly in Scotland? I am happy to say that my party is in favour of that. Does he not understand that there will be further widespread revulsion at the cuts in housing benefit because they are likely to lead to yet another increase in homelessness? People will be afraid that instead of seeing a "Big Issue" vendor on every street corner they will see one in every doorway as a direct result of the Government's policy.

Mr. Lilley: I understand that the Opposition think that the working of the rules that we introduced to remove automatic entitlement to benefit from 16 and 17-year-olds and instead give guaranteed training places should be extended to everybody under the age of 25. Therefore they have found evidence opposite to that of the hon. Lady, or at least the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) finds the opposite sort of evidence because he thinks that young people under 25 should have benefit removed if they do not fulfil his edicts. However, I gather that that view is not universally shared by his Front-Bench colleagues.

Mr. Anthony Coombs (Wyre Forest): Does my right hon. Friend agree that, in my constituency, few things annoy thrifty pensioners more than seeing young people touring the country on virtually unlimited housing benefit? Does he therefore agree that those pensioners will welcome the idea that there should be a limit to the costs of housing benefit on the basis of locally shared accommodation for under-25s? How will that be calculated?

Mr. Lilley: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his welcome. The proposal is that the structure set in place by the January changes, under which rent officers will assess the average reference rent for each type of property in each region, will apply to shared accommodation. Rent officers will set a reference—effectively, the average level of such properties in each locality. That will be the maximum to which people under 25 will be entitled to claim housing benefit.

Mr. Jeff Rooker (Birmingham, Perry Barr): Why is it possible, even after this statement, for a landlord owning and renting property and receiving an income to receive housing benefit personally? Why do not the same capital disregard rules apply to that landlord as apply to elderly people who may, even after the statement, have to dispose of their property to go into care? Why do we featherbed landlords so that they may obtain housing benefit? The Secretary of State looks so surprised: he does not even know about it.

Mr. Lilley: The hon. Gentleman might be right. He might have found something that I did not know about, in which case I shall be only too happy learn, but I am not sure that there is any such rule as he suggests, unless he is merely saying that landlords receive rent paid from housing benefit, which of course they do. If they did not, they would not rent out their properties to people on housing benefit. We could discuss that matter afterwards. I would be only too happy to become better informed on that matter.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): What is the estimated cost to the Treasury, to the nearest £5 million please, of making benefits from long-term care insurance tax free? There must be a notional sum in the brief somewhere.

Mr. Lilley: There must be but, that being a tax matter, it is not a figure that I carry in my head and no Treasury Minister is within earshot, so I shall have to write to tell the hon. Gentleman what the number is. [HON. MEMBERS: "It is in the Red Book."] It may well be in the Red Book, but I am sorry—I cannot give the figure to the hon. Gentleman off the cuff.

Mr. Harry Barnes (North-East Derbyshire): One of the Government's objectives is to get rid of inheritance tax. One of the few elements that many pensioners hold that could be an inheritance in future is their homes, which they are proud of, but which are small and would not bring much on the market. They could bring more, however, than the £16,000 that the Minister has mentioned within the changes, if they take place. Will he not consider protecting the inheritance that elderly people have, so that it is not ripped off by people in private nursing homes?

Mr. Lilley: As I mentioned, and as the Chancellor mentioned yesterday, we are considering schemes whereby people would be able to protect an additional element of their capital by making prior provision for a certain amount of long-term care costs. If they have to activate that and spend that money, or the insurance company on their behalf has to spend that money, there will be a corresponding increase in the capital limit applying to them—that is the rough structure of the proposal. We are open to discussion about how it should work in detail, but it is precisely the sort of thing that the hon. Gentleman suggests his constituents would like, and I am sure that, as a result, they will be voting Tory.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): Will the Secretary of State instruct his anti-fraud staff to read his statement today to discover whether it is fraudulent to deny any increases on 30 benefits, including the widow's payment, which is £1,000, but would be £1,881 if it had been increased along with earnings? Will he include in the *Official Report* a full statement on all benefits that have not been increased today? Some of them have never been increased. They replace benefits that were increased by inflation. Will he explain his reasons for freezing them?

Mr. Lilley: If all benefits had been uprated in the way in which the hon. Gentleman suggests, the cost would run into billions. Like the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes), he belongs to the confetti

tendency of public expenditure. Any responsible party or Government simply cannot do all the things that he would like to do.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Will the Secretary of State consider that his naked appeal to the xenophobia of the Tory party has brought us the habitual residence test and all the misery that goes with it? He now proposes to take benefits away from asylum seekers from next year. Bearing it in mind that Britain has fewer asylum seekers than any other European country and the lowest number of acceptances, he is appealing to the racism of his party. His proposals will lead to destitution among people who are fleeing oppression.

Mr. Lilley: With respect, this is not a racial issue, but a benefits issue. The people who play the racial card are those who want to divide for their own reasons. That is monstrous and irresponsible. We believe that it is not right that people who enter the country as tourists, business men or other types of visitor on the understanding that they will not be a burden on public funds, who have been here for some while and who decide, typically when their visa runs out, to lodge a claim for asylum, should become entitled to benefits. As for the treatment of asylum seekers who have had their claim rejected by the Home Office, we treat their right to benefits during the period of appeal on the same basis as we treat the right of British citizens who appeal against refusal of benefit. Far from being racist, therefore, we are putting people on an equal footing.

Madam Speaker: We now come to the statement by the Secretary of State for Scotland.

Mr. Dalyell: On a point of order on this statement, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: I cannot take a point of order at this stage. Other hon. Members are waiting to hear the statement and it is usual for points of order to be taken at the end of statements.

Scotland (Government)

5.15 pm

The Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Michael Forsyth): With permission, Madam Speaker, I should like to make a statement about the government of Scotland.

Scotland has prospered under this Conservative Government. The economy has been transformed, unemployment is at its lowest for 15 years, and inward investment is booming.

The foundation of Scotland's economic success is the constitutional stability guaranteed by the Union—Opposition Members are meant to cheer at that point. The Union is not a dry legality; it is much greater than the sum of its parts. It is a constantly growing and living relationship, in which we must all continue to invest. It is strengthened by devolution for people, not for politicians. That means devolving power downwards from central Government, through local authorities, to community councils, school boards, housing associations and all other representative local groups, and ultimately to families and individuals.

The Government utterly reject a tax-raising Parliament that would damage Scotland's jobs and prosperity. We have long recognised that Westminster and Whitehall can seem remote from the people of Scotland. After all, it was a Conservative Government which established the office of Secretary for Scotland and the modern Scottish Office. As we made clear in the White Paper "Scotland in the Union", we believe that the correct approach is to work within the existing, successful framework of the Union to make Government and Parliament at all levels more visible and relevant to the people.

The expanded role recently created for the Scottish Grand Committee has been helpful both to Scottish Ministers and hon. Members, and to the business of the House in general. It has been extremely well received in Scotland, where the Committee's sittings north of the border, most recently in Aberdeen, brought Parliament to the people, making for better government.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said in 1993 in his foreword to "Scotland in the Union" that the White Paper was not the end of the story, but part of an on-going process. He said:

> "Our search for new ways to strengthen the Union will go on. We stand ready to take account of changing circumstances. And our drive to strengthen Scotland's place in the Union—and thus the United Kingdom itself—will continue."

It is in accordance with that commitment that I have been working with my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and my other right hon. Friends. I want to tell the House today of important changes that we propose to the way in which legislation is handled and Ministers called to account.

We believe that it is right to debate the Second Reading of Scottish Bills in a Scottish forum, and so to increase the involvement of the Scottish people in the process. We intend that, from now on, Scottish Bills coming to the House should have their Second Reading in the Scottish Grand Committee sitting in Scotland, whenever it makes sense that that should happen.

The other key stage of consideration of principle is the Third Reading. We believe, in such cases, that that too should be debated in the Scottish Grand Committee, so that people can see what is being done at the stage of

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commitment to the approval of the Bill after the processes of detailed consideration and amendment. The technical processes will be essentially similar to those already in place for Second Reading.

Making greater use of the Scottish Grand Committee in that way will mean that we can expand the Scottish legislative programme. As an example of the potential that that provides, it has been possible this year to add the Licensing (Amendment) (Scotland) Bill—*[Laughter.]* I am glad that hon. Members find a Bill to tackle the problem of drug misuse at raves amusing; I happen to think that it is central to our legislative programme.

Secondly, we want to use to the full the procedure under which, before Scottish Bills embark on their Committee stage, evidence can be taken by a Special Standing Committee meeting in Scotland. That was done with the Children (Scotland) Bill last Session, and was very successful. It is suited to uncontroversial Bills, and is especially relevant to Scottish circumstances.

There is in Scotland a range of professional bodies and other well-informed interest groups that have less access to the Westminster process than do their counterparts in England. The use of a Special Standing Committee gives such people an opportunity to make a key impact at a formative stage of the process.

I am pleased to be able to say in addition that my right hon. and noble Friend the Lord Privy Seal is actively pursuing the possibility of establishing a new procedure in another place, to allow evidence to be taken in Scotland for Scottish Bills that are introduced in the House of Lords. It is our hope that that approach may be followed in the first instance for the Deer (Amendment) (Scotland) Bill, which was published last week.

I turn now to the way in which Ministers are called to account. *[Laughter.]* Another advantage in the new procedure will be the fact that people in Scotland will be able to see how the Opposition behave. The Scottish Grand Committee already has the opportunity to call to account the Secretary of State for Scotland and other Ministers at the Scottish Office. But the business of government in Scotland is not the responsibility of the Secretary of State alone.

Many of my right hon. Friends have responsibilities and take decisions on a daily basis that impact directly on the people of Scotland; so it is only right that they too should have to explain to the Scottish Grand Committee in Scotland why particular policies are being followed, and the benefits that they will bring. I therefore recommend to the House that we should change Standing Orders to achieve that.

The importance of the innovation should not be underestimated. It offers the opportunity of adding a completely new dimension of accountability for Government business in Scotland, with the Prime Minister, the Deputy Prime Minister, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the Secretary of State for Social Security or the Secretary of State for Defence, for example, taking part in debates in Scotland and being able to present policies and react to criticisms of them; and it will all be done in a forum accessible to the people of Scotland.

Additionally, the provisions that already allow Scottish Office Ministers in another place to make statements to the Scottish Grand Committee will be extended to include all Ministers in another place.

We shall bring the new Standing Orders forward for approval shortly. To ensure that the process can be planned properly, we shall need a timetable for sittings throughout the year. I am today tabling motions for eight meetings of the Scottish Grand Committee to consider Government business, and two meetings to consider Liberal Democrat party and Scottish National party business, all of which will be held in Scotland.

As soon as the Labour party has made up its mind where it wishes the meetings to consider its business to be held, and on what dates, we shall agree through the usual channels the full programme for the Committee, and a motion will be put before the House for approval. It will provide for the Scottish Grand Committee to meet much more frequently in Scotland, and I intend that that should involve more places in Scotland. I am delighted to tell the House that, provided that the relevant changes to Standing Orders are approved, the Prime Minister and the Chancellor will take part in the Grand Committee debates in Scotland in the new year.

To sum up—*[Laughter.]* To sum up—

Mr. George Robertson (Hamilton): Is that it?

Madam Speaker: Order. The House must come to order. *[Interruption.]* If hon. Members seek to ask questions later, they had better come to order now.

Mr. Forsyth: The hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) knew precisely what I intended to say, because I gave him a copy of my statement in advance. He knew exactly what was being proposed, which is why his laughter was not quite co-ordinated with the statement.

To sum up, the changes that I propose will greatly strengthen the role of the Scottish Grand Committee in considering legislation affecting Scotland, and will provide for an expanded Scottish legislative programme that will be examined in Scotland in ways that should produce better legislation, and involve the people of Scotland.

The proposals will provide a new focus for the role of the Scottish Grand Committee in scrutinising and calling to account not just Scottish Office Ministers but every Minister. The Scottish Grand Committee will thus assume an increasingly pivotal role in the parliamentary government of Scotland, in bringing Government closer to the people, and in underpinning the Union.

What the people of Scotland want is Government close to them, Government listening to them, and above all, Government accountable to them. This historic Parliament embodies our great Union. It is the only Parliament that can effectively and powerfully secure Scotland's interests and future.

The changes represent a significant step forward. They must be seen in the context of our plans to devolve power to local government, to create a new forum based on the Scottish Economic Council, and to give the people of Scotland more control over their own lives. The Government stand four-square behind the Union, and thereby behind Scotland and her people. I commend the proposals to the House.

Mr. George Robertson: The statement was a stark admission that the Government's policies towards Scotland have utterly failed. The whole speech was a confession that, for the past 16 years, the Conservative

party has got the government of Scotland wrong. The "do nothing" policy of the Government has now been replaced by the "do as little as possible" policy. First we had "Taking Stock"; now we have taking the michael.

Did that statement really represent the full breadth of the Secretary of State's vision for his country? New Forsyth, new status quo? Is that the Secretary of State's really big idea—weekend breaks and awayday trips for the Cabinet, from the grouse moor to the Grand Committee? Will the Secretary of State confirm that that was really his best shot, and that after all the hype, the build-up and the publicity, it is the best that he could come up with?

The Secretary of State told the press the other day that, when he drew up the changes, he had started with a blank sheet of paper. Obviously he did not get much further than that, because today's long-awaited package is even more of a let-down than the new Beatles single.

Will the right hon. Gentleman admit that his revamped Scottish Grand Committee will be little more than a rubber stamp for non-controversial legislation? In that case, what has really changed? The Scottish Grand Committee can already deal with non-controversial legislation, as it did last Session with the Children (Scotland) Act 1995. We facilitated that Act's passage on to the statute book. Indeed, the Secretary of State can always expect co-operation from Opposition Members where consensus exists.

I ask the right hon. Gentleman again: what has really changed, other than the fact that there will be an extra stage for Scottish Bills and a few more meetings, debates and opportunities to hear Ministers and their reinforcements desperately recruited from the Cabinet dodge even more difficult questions?

My hon. Friends and I welcome the opportunity of more debates with the Secretary of State and his colleagues. I look forward to exposing the Government's betrayal of Scotland, wherever the debates take place. Does the Secretary of State not realise that this travelling circus is no substitute at all for a Scottish Parliament, elected by, and responsible to, the Scottish people?

Is it not true that the proposals will mean that not a single extra decision will be taken by Scotland's Members of Parliament, and that the so-called new Scottish Grand Committee will continue to be no more than a toothless talking shop, with no real powers to change Scotland for the better?

To get down to the specifics of the statement, what about the Third Readings in the Scottish Grand Committee? Will the Secretary of State confirm that decisions on Second and Third Readings taken in the Grand Committee will not stand, but that they will simply be on procedural motions that can be overturned by a Tory majority on the Floor of the House?

Since that is the case, will that not be yet another worthless trick, offering nothing beyond the present position, in which no real decisions can be taken in this tarted-up Scottish Grand Committee?

I should like to put the real acid test to the Secretary of State. Will the Scottish Grand Committee decide on the issue of nursery vouchers for Scotland, as was promised in the Scottish Office press notice which described his education Bill in the Queen's Speech? Or is he simply going to sneak through this unpopular, unwanted intrusion into Scotland's education system by some statutory instrument or by adding it to the English Bill?

I tell the Secretary of State this: if Scotland's representatives will not be able to make decisions on such legislation, his reforms will be simply worthless. The people of Scotland are not going to be bought off with a few more powers for local government, a few more debates in the Grand Committee, or some beefed-up old quango. That is not real devolution: it is simply a con trick—nothing more and nothing less.

The unity of this country, which we value as much as any Conservative, will never be guaranteed by cosmetic, panic-driven gimmicks that arrogantly insult the intelligence of the Scottish people. The people of Scotland want a Scottish Parliament, and nothing less will do. Only a Labour Government will deliver that to them.

Mr. Forsyth: I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman cleared his lines with the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair). Is he advancing a proposition that a Scottish Grand Committee should be able to pass legislation without the approval of this House, which is what it sounded like he was saying? Is that his position? The hon. Gentleman was implying that that was his position.

Can we take it, then, that it is the Labour party's position that, under a Labour Government, an English Grand Committee, for which there are provisions in our Standing Orders, would be able to pass legislation without the consent of this House? The hon. Member for Hamilton is nodding his head in agreement. I had no idea that he had jumped so far into the nationalist camp. He is supposed to be a Unionist politician. He speaks the language and the policies of nationalists.

We Unionists believe in the sovereignty of this House. The proposals that we have put forward are to strengthen the Union, to hold Ministers who are accountable to the House accountable within Scotland.

The hon. Member for Hamilton asked how accountability will be strengthened. If he thinks that senior Ministers having to go to Scotland to debate issues will not result in their Departments having to wake up rather more to the Scottish dimension, he has even less experience and understanding of government than I imagined.

I ask the hon. Member for Hamilton to solve this puzzle: why is he so opposed to the proposals? Imagine for a moment—it is a big thought; an impossible thought—a Labour Government and their having a majority in the Grand Committee with its proposed powers. They could take legislation through the Grand Committee, through all its stages. They could win votes, because they would have a majority. Indeed, they could do everything in the Grand Committee that they could in a Scottish Parliament, and more. The only thing that they would not be able to do is raise taxes in Scotland, and make the Scots pay a tartan tax. In addition, they could hold the Prime Minister to account.

Writing in the *Evening Times*, the Leader of the Opposition was quoted as saying:

> "I look forward to the day when, as Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, I will be able to visit a Scottish Parliament working to improve life for the people of Scotland".

[Mr. Forsyth]

Our proposals mean that the Prime Minister will not visit a Scottish Parliament—he will go to Parliament in Scotland and will be held to account by this House.

Mr. Allan Stewart (Eastwood): May I congratulate my right hon. Friend first on his practical and innovative Unionist package, and secondly on smoking out the hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) as the crypto-nationalist we always thought he was?

Will my right hon. Friend develop the point that he has just made? What on earth could a Labour Scottish Parliament actually do which, under his proposals, a Labour Government, sitting here, could not in any event do, except impose additional taxes on the people of Scotland over and above the taxes imposed on the people of the United Kingdom? Surely the hon. Gentleman has failed to answer that question.

Could we have the first meeting with the Prime Minister in that well-known Unionist citadel of Eastwood?

Mr. Forsyth: I shall bear in mind my hon. Friend's bid. I hope that towns and cities with suitable premises with which the House authorities are satisfied will bid for the Grand Committee to come into their communities. I am sure that that would be a desirable step forward. My hon. Friend is absolutely right. All that the Scottish Parliament will be able to do is raise income tax by 3p in the pound and make the people of Scotland pay more tax than that paid in England—and in Wales, because Labour's proposals for a Welsh Assembly do not include tax-raising powers. We have to have a tartan tax, but no Taffy tax, which seems to be deeply unjust.

Of course a Scottish Parliament will not be able to decide the level of the Scottish Office budget. That will be decided here in Westminster. Indeed, hon. Members on the Liberal Bench have already conceded that we would have fewer Scottish Members of Parliament and no Secretary of State. So who will speak for Scotland when the money is decided?

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): People in Scotland, and, indeed, the Secretary of State's fellow Cabinet members, will notice that, a few moments ago, the right hon. Gentleman conceded that many UK Departments were not fully awake to the needs of Scotland when dealing with legislation.

Will the Secretary of State confirm that, when the Prime Minister was on his soapbox before the election defending the Union, he had in mind that to do so would require an awayday ticket to attend meetings of the Scottish Grand Committee in Scotland? Will he answer the question that he has already been asked: whether education vouchers policy will be subject not only to the Scottish Grand Committee's deliberations but to a vote?

The Secretary of State has said that Ministers will be able to go to Scotland to present policies and react to criticisms of them. Will he confirm that there is nothing in his proposals that says that Ministers will change those policies in the light of Scottish opinion?

Mr. Forsyth: Of course we will take account of Scottish opinion. I am quite prepared to discuss through the usual channels which Bills have their Second Reading in the Scottish Grand Committee. In fact, the provisions which require legislation concerning nursery vouchers are, for example, to secure inspection, which the hon. Member for Monklands, East (Mrs. Liddell) has been going around Scotland saying is essential for nursery vouchers. So I am surprised that hon. Members are contemplating the prospect of voting such things down.

Mrs. Helen Liddell (Monklands, East): Is it to be a statutory instrument?

Mr. Forsyth: The hon. Lady asks from a sedentary position whether it is a statutory instrument. The answer is no. In fact, we do not require legislative powers at the present time in order to pay grants directly to parents. But we will make provision in the legislation, and when it is published, Members will be able to discuss it. We can discuss whether that can be dealt with through the Scottish Grand Committee.

I would certainly welcome the opportunity of scrutiny in Scotland, so that every parent with pre-school children would know that dogma dictates that Labour Members do not want them to get £1,100 in vouchers to choose the nurseries of their choice; that they, the socialists on the Opposition Benches, would much rather decide for parents what is good for their children.

Sir Hector Monro (Dumfries): I have attended Scottish Grand Committees for many years under many Governments. Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is good news that we will have real purpose in the future, and that our opportunity to consider legislation and to cross-examine will be extended? Does he agree that attendance by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and other Cabinet Ministers in Scotland for cross-examination will enhance the reputation of the Scottish Grand Committee? Does he agree that that is in stark contrast to the proposals of the Labour and Liberal parties for an assembly in which there will be no Secretary of State for Scotland and no one to look after our interests in the Cabinet?

Mr. Forsyth: I agree with my right hon. Friend: he is right. The Scottish Grand Committee is not a Scottish Parliament. It cannot impose tax on the Scots over and above what people pay in England. It is not a Parliament that would mean that people were taxed more because they worked in Scotland than people in any other part of the United Kingdom. It has none of those powers. I make no apology for that. As my right hon. Friend points out, our proposals strengthen the Union, strengthen the accountability of Ministers for what they do in Scotland, and take Parliament to the Scottish people. They are a step forward.

Although I appreciate that our proposals do not do the damage that they want to do to Scotland's interests, I should have thought that Opposition Members would at least welcome them as a step forward. It shows how lacking in confidence they are that they do not welcome the opportunity to call the Government to account in Scotland.

Mr. John Maxton (Glasgow, Cathcart): Madam Speaker, have you noticed how touchy and tetchy the Secretary of State has been in presenting his statement today? Is it not clear—it is certainly clear to all of us on the Opposition Benches and I am sure it is clear to the people of Scotland—that the Secretary of State decided

that somehow he had to upstage the celebrations tomorrow of the launch of the constitutional arrangements recommended by the Scottish Constitutional Convention, but then realised that he had nothing to say?

All that the right hon. Gentleman could come up with was a ragbag of nothing. Was he not equally aware that the people of Scotland wanted a Government nearer to them and more accountable to them, but, above all, on matters relating to Scotland and within the framework of the Union, a Government elected by them? Until we deliver that, the Scottish people will not be satisfied.

Mr. Forsyth: A Scottish Parliament with a Government elected by the Scottish people is what the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) wants. If the hon. Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Maxton) agrees with that, he should join the Scottish National party. If he is a Unionist, he believes in the Union and the sovereignty of this Parliament. The fact is that he is so damn scared of the nationalists that he is prepared to say almost anything and put at risk our ability to get a good deal for Scotland and ensure that it has a strong voice which is heard in Government. That is what our proposals will achieve.

Mr. David Harris (St. Ives): Government spending in Scotland is 21 per cent. higher than in England. There is massive over-representation of Scotland in this House. Does my right hon. Friend accept that most people in England, particularly in the south-west of England, believe, with justification, that Scotland gets an incredibly good deal from the Government and from the Union? Given those facts, can he understand the pathetic response of Opposition Members to his statement, which clearly strengthens the position of Scotland in the House and in the Union?

Mr. Forsyth: I do not want to alarm my hon. Friend, but the hon. Member for Hamilton has gone round Scotland telling people that the tartan tax might be used to cut taxation. The proposition that he has put to the people of Scotland—we do not hear Labour Members saying it here—is that my hon. Friend will continue to vote 21 per cent. more per head than he votes for his own constituency to a Scottish Parliament and will sit back and watch the Scottish Parliament hand out tax rebates.

If that was not so serious, it would be laughable. The hon. Member for Hamilton is trying to have his cake and eat it. I am afraid that the people of Scotland will lose out if Labour's proposals are ever shown the light of day. It is simply not sustainable to have a Scottish Parliament sitting in Edinburgh the budget of which is determined down here and which is able, even if it raises taxes of 3p in the pound, to raise only 3 per cent. of its revenue. That would be an unstable Parliament, and one doomed to disaster. The most vulnerable people in Scotland would suffer as a result.

Mr. Sam Galbraith (Strathkelvin and Bearsden): Does not the Secretary of State realise that, while much of what he said about the Children (Scotland) Bill was true, the crux came in Committee when there were controversial issues? The Committee always split along party lines, and the Scottish vote always lost. Does he not realise, therefore, that the real test of his proposal will be whether the Scottish vote in Committee counts, and that the only way to make it count is to hold the Committee stage of consideration of Bills in the Grand Committee? If that is not a part of the Secretary of State's proposal, the sittings of the Scottish Grand Committee will be no more than just another travelling talking shop.

Mr. Forsyth: That is a point of view, but it is not a point of view with which I agree. If the hon. Gentleman's position is that the Scottish vote should prevail in determining what happens in Scotland, what would he say to those of my hon. Friends who would say that, in that case, the English vote should prevail in England? [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] We have the federalists and the separatists shouting out. That is certainly not a Unionist position. The hon. Member for Strathkelvin and Bearsden (Mr. Galbraith) is an intelligent and thinking Member of Parliament. He should think about how far he is running away from the Unionism upon which the future of our country depends.

Mr. Neil Hamilton (Tatton): On the basis of the infantile response of Opposition Members this afternoon, if that behaviour is typical, is my right hon. Friend aware that many English Members of Parliament will welcome the opportunity for the Scottish Grand Committee to sit in Scotland as often as possible?

For those of us who represent constituencies which strongly support the Union with Scotland, I should like to reiterate the point that was made by my hon. Friend the Member for St. Ives (Mr. Harris). We are prepared to continue to put up with the over-representation of Scotland in this House, and with the favourable financial treatment that Scotland receives from the British taxpayer, on the basis of proposals which strengthen the Union, but we would not be willing to put up with that if constitutional proposals such as those proposed by the hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson), which weakened the Union and moved it towards separation, were brought before the House.

Mr. Forsyth: I am not sure that I agree with my hon. Friend's use of the phrase "put up". This is a Union. We are a United Kingdom, and we are a Conservative Unionist party. Scotland gets a good deal out of the Union, and England gets a good deal out of the Union. The Union is greater than the sum of its parts, and it works.

Opposition Members are prepared—for their own narrow party political ends, because they want to have an entrenched socialist majority in Scotland—to gerrymander our constitution, to put Scotland's vital services at risk, and to play straight into the hands of the nationalists. When the electorate discover that, the Opposition will find that their lead in the polls will tumble.

Mr. Dennis Canavan (Falkirk, West): If the Secretary of State really believes in people power, does he recognise the sovereign right of the people of Scotland to decide what system of government is best for them, instead of being constantly told what is best for them by a puppet of a discredited Tory regime?

Mr. Forsyth: Apart from the last part of the hon. Gentleman's question, I agree with what he says. If Scotland wanted to become independent, it could become independent. What is not possible is to vote for the ragbag of ill-thought-out proposals that is the Scottish Constitutional Convention, which would result in independence, because divisions would be created between Scotland and England and because damage

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would be done to Scotland's interests. Even on the back page of a supplement that the *Evening Times* produced on a Scottish Parliament—16 pages of it—we are told, on the sports page:

"Major Scottish disappointments on the international sporting stage could be a thing of the past under a devolved Parliament".

It seems that there is no end to the benefits. If that is true, it may well be that the Scottish people will be tempted.

Mr. Peter Luff (Worcester): Before anyone comes forward with more radical constitutional proposals—a sensible package has been announced today—does my right hon. Friend agree that they would do well to reflect on the fact that public expenditure in Scotland is some 20 per cent. higher than it is in England? Does he understand that, as an English Member of Parliament, I am very happy to justify that to my constituents as an investment in the Union, but that I could no longer do so in any conscience if there was a Scottish Parliament with Scottish tax-raising powers of its own?

Mr. Forsyth: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. People must realise that the future of the Union is a matter for everyone in the Union. It is not just a matter for Scotland. What is so devastatingly damaging about the proposals of the hon. Member for Hamilton is that they take no account whatsoever of the interests of those from south of the Border. The hon. Gentleman is proposing that Scottish Members of Parliament will come down here with no say in health, education, agriculture or any of the other matters which concern our constituents for the simple purpose of keeping in office a Labour Government by voting on those matters which are in England.

That is an intolerable position, on which the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell), when he was the Member for West Lothian, asked his question. After six years of deliberation, the Scottish Constitutional Convention and the hon. Member for Hamilton still cannot answer the West Lothian question. Labour Members want to have their cake and eat it—they cannot have it.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): May I return the Secretary of State to his statement? I suppose that any concession—however weak and belated—must be welcomed. But I must say to the Secretary of State that, if this is it after all the build-up, it is not opposition that he is risking today, but ridicule.

Will the right hon. Gentleman confirm that, under his proposals, the absolute Westminster veto over Scottish business remains? If what the Secretary of State is proposing had been in operation during the poll tax debate, would the proposals have gone to the Scottish Grand Committee? If the Scottish Grand Committee had come up with an inconvenient vote on the poll tax, would it have been overruled in this Chamber? Would the Secretary of State have defended his pet project through these processes?

The Secretary of State has sidestepped the question of nursery vouchers so far, but he told us in his statement that Scottish Members could decide on the future of deer. Can he explain to the people of Scotland in a simple phrase why Scottish Members should be trusted with the future of red deer but not with the future of Scottish children?

Mr. Forsyth: I said no such thing. Legislation is a matter for this House and this Parliament. The proposals which I put forward allow for scrutiny and debate on matters affecting Scotland in Scotland and involving Ministers. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) has a perfectly honest and responsible position—he wishes Scotland to leave the United Kingdom and become independent. In those circumstances, he would find that he was £8.6 billion short of the money he needed to run Scotland, and the Scottish people would be greatly damaged as a result.

But in those circumstances, a Scottish Parliament would be able to decide on legislation in Scotland. That it is the nationalist position. It is not my position. The position of Unionists is that this is the sovereign House. The hon. Member for Hamilton has got himself into a dreadful tangle, because he has been so worried about the way in which the Scottish National party has been rising in the polls.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): What about the poll tax?

Mr. Forsyth: The hon. Lady is getting excited about the poll tax. Does the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan remember that the great objection of Labour Members to the poll tax was that we were introducing a tax in Scotland a year ahead of England? But Labour plans to have a tartan tax for Scotland, which, year after year, the Scots will have to pay and the English will not. For sheer brass neck, that takes the biscuit.

Mr. John Home Robertson (East Lothian): After the poll tax and everything else that has been imposed on Scotland in the past 16 years, surely the Secretary of State cannot expect to smother the Scottish constitutional issue in a welter of amendments to Standing Orders in Committees. Does he accept that a Committee is, by definition, a subordinate body? Does he also accept that, under his proposals, it would be open to him and his successors to continue to impose legislation and decisions on the Scottish budget as has always been the case? If he is really serious about addressing the Scottish constitutional issue, why does he not take his seat in the Scottish Constitutional Convention tomorrow, as a representative of a small and dwindling, but nevertheless significant, Scottish minority?

Mr. Forsyth: The hon. Gentleman asks me to take a seat in the Scottish Constitutional Convention. I am told that tomorrow the members of the convention will say that they have reached an agreement.

The hon. Member for Hamilton says that we might have the office of Secretary of State, and that we would keep 72 Scottish Members of Parliament. The hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace), who speaks for the Liberal Democrats on the matter, says that we would have to reduce the number of Members of Parliament, and that the office of Secretary of State would disappear. If they cannot even agree on fundamentals such as those, the convention sounds like no place to be. It has wasted six and a half years, and has still not come up with an answer to the question which the hon. Member for Linlithgow asked.

The hon. Member for East Lothian (Mr. Home Robertson) may not like being a part of the United Kingdom, and he may not like having this House as a sovereign body. If he feels like that, he should join the Scottish National party, and stop pretending to be a Unionist.

Mr. Calum Macdonald (Western Isles): Does the Secretary of State recognise that nobody objects to him and his colleagues having ideas or plans about education vouchers, local government or the poll tax? What is objected to—following our experience in the past 16 years—is that the right hon. Gentleman is able to impose these policies upon the people of Scotland against the wishes of the majority of the people of Scotland and against the wishes of the majority of Scottish Members of Parliament. Does he not acknowledge that that raises a democratic question about the way in which the House works, which his proposals do nothing whatsoever to address?

Mr. Forsyth: The hon. Gentleman is an honest man, and he is acknowledging the root of Labour's proposals. The Labour party does not like the fact that it is unable to govern in Scotland, where it gets the majority of the vote. But I ask the hon. Gentleman to contemplate what he is saying. If it is the Labour party's policy that we should have a Government who represent the majority in the constituent parts of the United Kingdom, how will his right hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield be able to govern England as leader of a Labour Government—something that I think is unlikely—who do not have a majority of seats in England? That way lies the break-up of the United Kingdom, and the hon. Gentleman should have nothing to do with it.

Mr. Denis MacShane (Rotherham): As a Member representing an English constituency in Yorkshire, may I invite the Secretary of State to get off at Doncaster when he brings the Prime Minister by the nose to Scotland, to defend the Government's policies to the people of Yorkshire? I am not sure if the Secretary of State realises quite the constitutional innovation he is proposing. He proposes to turn Parliament—or rather, those on the Government Front Bench—into a kind of travelling circus which moves to other parts of the UK to discuss parliamentary and political problems.

We heard this morning an excellent address from the President of the United States, who represents the union of America. America has 52 state legislatures or parliaments with tax-raising powers. If it is good enough for the United States and most other modern democracies, why cannot the people of Scotland have their own legislature?

Mr. Forsyth: Scotland is a country, not a county. That is the difference between Scotland and Yorkshire. I am glad that the hon. Gentleman brought that matter up, because, for a while, the hon. Member for Hamilton—in an attempt to answer the West Lothian question—was telling us that Labour would introduce parliaments in Yorkshire and other counties. But that idea was swiftly abandoned in favour of quangos in the counties of England, and the answer to the West Lothian question was lost. We look forward to hearing tomorrow from the hon. Member for Hamilton what the answer to the West Lothian question now is.

Mr. Charles Kennedy (Ross, Cromarty and Skye): Let us return to the acid test. If the Secretary of State's revised proposals had been in place at the time, would they have enabled Scottish Members to prevent the imposition of the poll tax—yes or no?

Mr. Forsyth: No, as the hon. Gentleman knows. He is fair-minded, and I would ask him to reflect upon the point I made. If we had a Labour Government with a majority in the Scottish Grand Committee, they would be able to do everything that they could do in a Scottish Parliament and more. They could call senior Ministers to account, and could have a Budget for Scotland.

The proposals which the hon. Gentleman supports for a Scottish Parliament would give the Scottish Parliament no say in the most important thing that a Parliament does. This House was established to be able to control and raise revenue. Revenue would still be determined in Westminster under the proposals from the constitutional convention. Scotland's voice in Westminster would be diminished, and therefore our ability to defend Scotland's interests and to hold Ministers to account would be undermined.

Mrs. Maria Fyfe (Glasgow, Maryhill): For the sake of absolute clarity, will the Secretary of State describe exactly how he intends to implement the voucher scheme? In what way is that more democratic than allowing a Scottish Parliament with elected members sent by the people of Scotland to decide how nursery provision should be paid for?

Mr. Forsyth: The hon. Lady has not got the message. Our idea of devolution is taking power from the Government and devolving it downwards to local government and to individuals. Nursery vouchers are about empowering people, while the Labour party wants politicians to decide what is good for people. Nursery vouchers are about giving people the money to allow them to choose for themselves, rather than having them do what they are told by their local authority. That is the sort of devolution that matters—devolution to people, not to politicians.

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): Is the Secretary of State aware that there is a part of the United Kingdom in which Unionism is manifestly even stronger than it is in Eastwood, and that is Northern Ireland? Will he forget about his fixation with our proposal for a moment and explain exactly why the Government are proposing an assembly for Northern Ireland, which will have control over legislation and administration, with no reduction in the number of Members representing Northern Ireland here, or no reduction in their powers, while all he is suggesting for Scotland is a beefed-up Grand Committee?

Mr. Forsyth: The hon. Gentleman is making a comparison with Stormont, but he will know that such a proposal would mean reducing the number of Members of Parliament representing Scotland from 72 to 40—

Mr. Foulkes: The right hon. Gentleman has it wrong.

Madam Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman has had his say. He is very articulate. He must let the Minister answer.

Mr. Forsyth: I am not sure that the Leader of the Opposition would find the argument of the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes)

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helpful. The hon. Gentleman has been going around Scotland saying that he is in favour of changing the clocks. It would appear that it is not merely on that matter that he is in favour of keeping Scotland in the dark.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): On a point of order, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: I must call the hon. Member for Motherwell, North (Dr. Reid)—the only hon. Member who has been rising to ask a question, but who has not yet asked one.

Dr. John Reid (Motherwell, North): Does the Secretary of State really understand the length and depth of commitment behind the case for the devolution of power? It is not just a matter of the past 17 years: it was included in Keir Hardie's first manifesto, as well as the first manifesto of the Labour party in Scotland and, incidentally—*[Interruption.]*—this will be of interest to Unionists—at precisely the time that Gladstone was suggesting that he might give the Irish devolved powers. Had that happened, they might still be in the Union.

In that context, the right hon. Gentleman failed to deal with two problems. He dealt with scrutiny and accountability, and I welcome any step forward on those—I also welcome what he said today—but he failed to deal with the real question of power and of whether the Government are prepared to devolve the power of decision making on purely Scottish affairs to Scotland within the general sovereignty of Westminster. Is he prepared to countenance any devolution of power, rather than accountability? If he is not, and has not today, he might as well not bother putting forward any more proposals.

Mr. Forsyth: I am not a federalist and I am not a Unionist—[HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] I am a Unionist. *[Interruption.]* I think that the House knew what I meant to say. I am not a federalist, and I am not a nationalist. I am a Unionist, so I am not in a position to help the hon. Gentleman.

I ask the hon. Gentleman to reflect on one thing on behalf of his constituents, and it is a serious matter. The other day, more than 3,000 jobs came to his constituency, which desperately needed them after the closure of Ravenscraig. They came as a result of a major inward investment project. Scotland was competing with the Welsh, and Wales was a possible site because of the proximity of various glass-making factories.

Does the hon. Gentleman think that, if the Welsh Office had been able to say, "If you come to Wales, you won't have to pay the tartan tax that you'll pay in Scotland," the investment would have gone to Scotland? The Labour party's proposals to hobble Scotland with a tartan tax would destroy jobs and the inward investment on which his constituency depends.

Points of Order

6.5 pm

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I want to raise a point of principle about ministerial statements. It may be within your recollection that, an hour ago, the Secretary of State for Social Security was asked a specific question about tax and long-term care benefits. In reply, he said he could not give the figure for which he was asked, because that was a matter for the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

My point of order is this, and it results directly from the Secretary of State's statement. In the eighth part of that statement, he said that benefits from long-term care insurance would be tax free. Should not Ministers who make undertakings in their opening remarks be responsible for the explanation and putting on the financial tag, rather than leaving it to another Minister and saying that they will write about it at some time in the future? That is a matter of principle.

Madam Speaker: It is not for me to comment on ministerial statements—*[Interruption.]* I am being prompted by Ministers to give the figure. It is not for me, as Speaker, to give the figures. Ministers are responsible for the comments they make at the Dispatch Box. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman may well pursue the matter with the Minister and get the correct reply recorded in *Hansard*.

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Blackpool, South): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. You will be aware of the serious events that took place in the Committee Corridor late yesterday afternoon. The hon. Member for Nottingham, South (Mr. Simpson), who is a cricketing friend of mine and has apologised to me, was one of the sponsors of a meeting in Committee Room 14. At the conclusion of that meeting, when those attending were not accompanied by any hon. Member, they refused to leave, thus preventing another meeting taking place, which I and some of my hon. Friends were planning to attend.

The Serjeant at Arms had to be informed, and a large number of police officers summoned. Hon. Members on both sides of the House were prevented from passing and re-passing the Committee Room on their way to and from other meetings in that Corridor. Worst of all, those attending the meeting, who were socialist militants, insisted on continuing, and not only to obstruct the business of this House, but to chant socialist slogans in a most offensive way. That exploded for ever the myth of new Labour.

I know that the hon. Member for Nottingham, South has written to you to apologise, and to indicate his stance on the matter. What steps will you take to ensure that hon. Members are aware that they never allow those they have invited into this place to remain in Committee Rooms unaccompanied by any hon. Member?

Mr. Alan Simpson (Nottingham, South): Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. I am grateful to the hon. Member for Blackpool, South (Mr. Hawkins) for raising this matter, and giving me the opportunity to repeat the apology that I made to you in writing last night, to hon. Members who booked the subsequent meetings, which were disrupted, and to the many hon. Members with whom I spoke in the corridors during what seemed to be a large part of yesterday evening.

I owe the House an apology and an explanation. The meeting was booked—

Madam Speaker: Order. No explanation is necessary. It is perfectly legitimate for hon. Members to book rooms in this House for a meeting. What disturbs the House and me is that the hon. Member responsible for those lobbyists did not see them off the premises. That is the point, and I think that the hon. Gentleman is giving some explanation and making an apology.

Mr. Simpson: Although I had made assiduous efforts to ensure that everyone came in properly, my error in failing to make the exit equally uneventful was seriously misjudged. I was the last to speak at the meeting, and left it only to inform the police and staff on the Corridor that I had been told that those attending were about to depart. My mistake was that I went down to the Lobby to pick up a full copy of the Budget briefing papers.

Only when I was then informed by the Serjeant at Arms that the meeting had not disbanded did I realise that I had not discharged my responsibilities fully and properly, and for that I apologise to the House in the way that I apologised to you last night.

Madam Speaker: That matter was brought to my attention at the time. The hon. Member for Nottingham, South (Mr. Simpson) and I have exchanged correspondence. He is left in no doubt as to what I feel about that neglect of duty yesterday. The matter is now closed.

Mr. Peter Luff (Worcester) *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Sit down. The hon. Member for Nottingham, South has apologised to the House and to me. I am sure that there are lessons to be drawn from that incident, and that it will not happen again.

Mr. Mike O'Brien (North Warwickshire): May I draw to your attention an incident in my constituency, on which I wish to raise a point of order, Madam Speaker? Coleshill high school in my constituency received an Office of Standards in Education report from the schools inspector. An attempt was made to withdraw the report a couple of days later, apparently because of some of the contents.

A second report was filed which had had some of the contents of the first report deleted. What was deleted was criticism of the Government.

Madam Speaker: Order. What is my responsibility in the matter?

Mr. O'Brien: I am just coming to exactly that point. The situation raises serious questions about the way in which such reports are prepared and about the whole process. Is it not exactly the sort of—

Madam Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman must come to my responsibility in the matter of this report.

Mr. O'Brien: Is it not exactly the sort of incident on which you should insist that the Secretary of State for Education and Employment should make an urgent statement, because it raises such profound issues?

Madam Speaker: I have no authority or influence over Ministers making statements. The hon. Gentleman has not raised a point of order; he has wasted the House's time. If a statement is to be made by a Minister, it is always on

[Madam Speaker]

the annunciator—as today's three statements were—by 1 o'clock on the day that it is being made. Can we proceed with our business, or are there other bogus points of order?

Mr. Luff: On a point of order, Madam Speaker. This is not a bogus point of order. I am sure that the whole House will appreciate the apology offered by the hon. Member for Nottingham, South (Mr. Simpson)—

Hon. Members: Bogus!

Madam Speaker: Order. Allow me to deal with this. The hon. Gentleman will resume his seat for a moment.

Mr. Luff *rose—*

Madam Speaker: He will resume his seat. If he has a different point of order, I will of course hear it, but the other matter is now closed.

Mr. Luff: My understanding is that the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) had also booked that Room, and I hope that you will draw his attention to what you have said about the other matter, and clarify to all hon. Members the fact that, when they make bookings, as the right hon. Member for Chesterfield also did, they have a responsibility—

Madam Speaker: Order.

BILL PRESENTED

Asylum and Immigration

Mr. Secretary Howard, supported by The Prime Minister, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr. Secretary Lilley, Mrs. Secretary Shephard, Mr. Secretary Hague and Miss Ann Widdecombe, presented a Bill to amend and supplement the Immigration Act 1971 and the Asylum and Immigration Appeals Act 1993; to make further provision with respect to immigrants and the employment of immigrants; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time tomorrow, and to be printed. [Bill 8.]

Orders of the Day

WAYS AND MEANS

Order read for resuming debate on Question [28 November].

AMENDMENT OF THE LAW

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That it is expedient to amend the law with respect to the National Debt and the public revenue and to make further provision in connection with finance; but this Resolution does not extend to the making of any amendment with respect to value added tax so as to provide—

(a) for zero-rating or exempting any supply, acquisition or importation otherwise than by—

(i) zero-rating or exempting supplies of goods which are, or are to be, subjected to a fiscal or other warehousing regime; or

(ii) zero-rating or exempting supplies of services on or in relation to such goods;

(b) for refunding any amount of tax otherwise than to persons constructing or converting buildings in cases where the construction or conversion is not in the course of furtherance of a business;

(c) for varying any rate at which that tax is at any time chargeable; or

(d) for relief other than relief applying to goods of whatever description or services of whatever description.—[*Mr. Kenneth Clarke.*]

Question again proposed.

Budget Resolutions and Economic Situation

Madam Speaker: I must put a 10-minute limit on Back-Bench speeches.

6.11 pm

Mr. Gordon Brown (Dunfermline, East): The House may recall that in Easter this year the Chancellor of the Exchequer said that the feel-good factor would probably not return for two years—until after the election. We now know what he meant, because the central challenge for the Budget—to acknowledge and tackle the real weaknesses of the British economy—was to encourage new and sustained investment, to close the investment gap with our competitors and to move people out of welfare into work and so reduce the huge bills for social security.

In yesterday's Budget, however, not only was there no significant encouragement for new investment, and no new plan to tackle unemployment, but the Chancellor had to report that, after 16 years of Conservative government—and after all the boasts of economic transformation—investment, three years into a recovery, is virtually stagnant, rising by only 1 per cent. this year. Public borrowing is now £7 billion above his estimates of the summer. It will be £10 billion higher next year and £10 billion higher the year after. Public finances are in such a poor state that even after a shocking 17 per cent. cut in public investment over the next three years and a 27 per cent. cut in the hospital building programme, he has had to admit that his best chance of balancing the Budget is probably not in this century but at the beginning of the next.

The Chancellor cannot, because he is imprisoned by his own economic failure, deliver the one measure that Conservative Members were demanding, and looking to for their job security: undoing the damage of the 7p tax rises since 1992.

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): In view of his concerns over public finance, how would the hon. Gentleman finance the £8 billion cost of his 10 per cent. starting rate for income tax?

Mr. Brown: There is no £8 billion cost of a 10p starting rate for income tax. I will tell the hon. Gentleman what the choices will be at the next general election. [HON. MEMBERS: "Answer the question."] I am answering the question. The hon. Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold) has a few questions to answer to his constituents about the promises that he made about tax cuts that have never been delivered.

I will tell the hon. Gentleman what the choice at the next election will be: it will be between what the Chancellor said yesterday—the Conservative plan to abolish capital gains tax and inheritance tax, at a cost of more than £4 billion to benefit only a few—and our proposals to use the same resources to get the starting rate of income tax down to 15 per cent., or preferably 10 per cent. I know what choice, on fairness grounds and on employment grounds, the electorate will make.

This is not just the 7p up and 1p down Budget. It is not just the Budget that gives—as I will show in a minute—with one hand but takes with another. The Government cannot present the Budget as inspiring, as a turning point or as the 17th relaunch—for it would have been the 17th failed relaunch—so they now to try to salvage it and present it as cautious, sensible and prudent.

Prudence would have meant that the Chancellor tackled our deep-seated economic weaknesses, that he had a long-term strategy while being cautious in the here and now, but there is no sign at all from his Budget that he has any sense of direction or strategy for the British economy. He cannot be considered prudent if he neither acknowledges nor addresses the fundamental investment and skills gap with our competitors and has no clear direction for this country. He is not a prudent Chancellor with real scope and options that he can consider and reject, for what he calls his prudence is forced on him. He is a man without real choices, a prisoner of his Government's failure, paralysed into inaction as a result of everything that has happened to the economy under Conservative management for the past 16 years.

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Blackpool, South): The hon. Gentleman has talked about the need for investment. How will his party's policies to sign up to the social chapter and have a statutory minimum wage help investment? They will ruin investment, especially in manufacturing, and destroy jobs.

Mr. Brown: It is interesting that the same question that was asked of me last week has been asked this week by a different hon. Member who was not here last week. I will repeat what I said. Britain has slipped from 13th to 18th in the world prosperity league. Of the 17 countries ahead of us, 16 have a minimum wage. The hon. Gentleman must face up to the fact that there is a minimum level of social justice that contributes to economic efficiency in modern economies. The idea that we should return to a 19th century situation, where there is no protection at all for people in the workplace, is unacceptable to this country.

The result of everything that has happened is that after 21 tax rises—the biggest tax rises in history—with, even this year, as was admitted in a recent report, living standards for the majority still falling, with consumer confidence still weak because of widespread job insecurity and despite all the promises of the Conservatives being the low-tax party, all the Chancellor can offer to undo the damage of a 7p in the pound tax rise from 1992 is to make it a 6p tax rise from 1996.

People will ask, "What has all the suffering been for?" It has been for one solitary tax cut that cannot mitigate a record of 21 tax rises. Big tax rises followed by a small tax cut still equal a big tax rise since 1992. A tax cut one year in five cannot undo the damage of tax rises in the other years. Three billion pounds given away cannot compensate for more than £16 billion that has been taken away.

Mr. Tim Smith (Beaconsfield): The hon. Gentleman says that the 1 per cent. reduction in the standard rate is the only progress that is being made on tax reductions, but that it is not true. There are two other respects in which we shall be moving towards a 20p rate. The tax on savings is to be reduced to 20p, at a cost of £800 million. Will he support that?

Mr. Brown: The hon. Gentleman raises what the Deputy Prime Minister said immediately after the Budget. The Deputy Prime Minister was sent into the television

[Mr. Brown]

studios to tell people that they were £9 a week better off as a result of the Budget, but when the Treasury press release was examined immediately afterwards, it turned out that £6.50 of the £9 was an assumption that people were getting a 4 per cent. pay rise and that the tax changes added up to a fraction of the £9 that was mentioned. Taken overall, all the tax changes made by the Chancellor are worth little more than £2 a week to the ordinary family. Many people's savings have been destroyed by the Government; the hon. Gentleman should face up to that fact.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Anthony Coombs (Wyre Forest) *rose—*

Mr. Brown: No, I will not give way to the hon. Member for Gravesham again. I will give way to the hon. Member for Wyre Forest (Mr. Coombs), and then I shall continue my speech.

Mr. Coombs: The hon. Gentleman talked about savings, but what destroys savings are the inflation rates—about 26 per cent.—that we had under the last Labour Government. Will he tell the House what his target inflation rate would be?

Mr. Brown: I thought that the hon. Gentleman would ask about the 40 per cent. increase in unemployment in his constituency in the past five years. I will tell him about inflation. We have said very clearly that we will set an inflation target. We shall consult the Governor of the Bank of England and set that rate in government.

The Chancellor must now explain his inflation target. Is it 2.5 per cent.? If it is, he has gone beyond it and he has failed to meet it this year. There is no guarantee that he will meet it in future years. I thought that the Chancellor might tell us that his inflation target is 1 to 4 per cent., but now he is telling us that it is 2.5 per cent. That is very similar to the memo that he sent to Back Benchers, in which he said that he might meet the 1 to 4 per cent. target on some, but not all, occasions.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Kenneth Clarke): I did not intend to intervene, but I shall answer the question. The target is 2.5 per cent. by the end of the Parliament and we are on course to achieve it. As I said yesterday, the target will be 2.5 per cent. for the rest of the Parliament. The Chancellor, and not the Governor of the Bank of England, is supposed to set that target. Why cannot the hon. Gentleman answer any of the perfectly legitimate questions that my hon. Friends have put to him? What will he do in the vote on the tax on savings, what inflation target will he set and what is the cost of his proposal for a 10p basic rate?

Mr. Brown: I have answered all those questions. I thought that, after last night, hon. Members would be more anxious to question the Chancellor about what he has done and what he has failed to do.

I have made it absolutely clear that we shall consult the Governor of the Bank of England on the inflation target when in government. That is the sensible thing to do. The Chancellor must explain why inflation this year is at 3 per cent. when his inflation target is 2.5 per cent. The Governor of the Bank of England says that he has no confidence that the Chancellor will meet the target by the end of the Parliament.

I will remind hon. Members about taxation. Despite all the promises of tax cuts, year on year, the tax cuts in the Budget leave value added tax at 17.5 per cent. and VAT on fuel at 8 per cent. Employees' national insurance contributions have risen since the last election and they have not been reduced. Mortgage assistance has been halved and it remains unchanged. The airport tax and home contents insurance tax have not been reduced. Anything that the Chancellor has given this year must be set against what he has taken away. After VAT rises, national insurance rises, cuts in mortgage help, cuts in the married man's allowance and new airport and car taxes, people are almost £700 worse off under the Conservative Government. Having taken the pounds, they are returning only the pennies. People have suffered enough as a result of the Government's actions.

Mr. John MacGregor (South Norfolk) *rose—*

Mr. Brown: I will give way to the right hon. Gentleman. He is a distinguished former Treasury Minister and I doubt whether he agrees with many of the things that have happened since he left the Treasury.

Mr. MacGregor: I shall make my speech in my own way, thank you very much. We know that the hon. Gentleman has already committed himself to substantial public expenditure increases. Would he reverse the tax measures that he has just mentioned? Would they become tax reductions if he were in power?

Mr. Brown: I have committed the Labour party to one measure: the employment and training programme. We would fund that measure—just as the Chancellor should have—with a windfall tax charge on the profits of the privatised utilities. When the Chancellor speaks at the end of the debate, he will have to explain why the Conservative party is always a soft touch for the privatised utilities.

Let us be clear that what the Chancellor gave yesterday he also took away. The tax cut will be paid for by a council tax rise of 11 per cent.—if our calculations are correct—in some parts of the country. Water charges and rents have increased and there are hidden taxes. Rail fares are up, as are prescription and dental charges. The Chancellor and the Deputy Prime Minister have claimed that we are £9 a week better off. Some people will be better off by £9 a week, but the Chancellor will have to scour the country looking for a whisky-drinking, vintage-car-owning pensioner who is looking for community care and who has assets of between £8,000 and £16,000. Very few people are better off in real terms as a result of the Budget.

On the fairness of the Chancellor's proposals, it has been reported today that—after all the benefits that they have received—the richest 10 per cent. will gain £7.30 per week and the poorest 40 per cent. will gain only £1.04 per week after the Budget changes.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce (Gordon) *rose—*

Mr. Brown: I shall give way to the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) because he is a Liberal Democrat.

Mr. Bruce: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way. He says that he is concerned about the rise in

council tax, which has occurred because of the Chancellor's sleight of hand in putting pressure on local authorities to finance the education budget. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the education money would be better provided from the 1p income tax cut? Will he join the Liberal Democrats in voting against that 1p reduction, which we believe should go to education?

Mr. Brown: When the hon. Gentleman makes his contribution to the debate this afternoon, I should be grateful if he would confirm whether he agrees that the assisted places scheme should be scrapped and the money used to reduce class sizes. That is an important change. I should also be grateful if he would tell us whether the Liberal party will go to the next election promising a rise in the basic rate of income tax, as he hinted in his speech yesterday.

Mr. Bruce: We will tell the hon. Gentleman at the general election. I asked him a simple question. He and his colleagues have said that they want to put money into education and that they do not wish to increase council taxes. We have pledged to vote against the 1p reduction in income tax this year—has he?

Mr. Brown: Never has an intervention been more telling. The Liberal party spokesman is not prepared to say whether he will go to the next election promising a tax rise. That would be the honest position of a party that has pledged to vote on Monday against the tax changes.

Let us examine what the changes mean for ordinary people throughout the country. Hon. Members will recall that the Chancellor told us that the tax rises since 1992 should not be exaggerated. He said that, for most people, they amounted to little more than the price of three pints of beer a week. Staying with the pub economy—which the Chancellor finds so congenial and of which he is an acknowledged master—and using the same equivalents, we find that the weekly sums from the tax cuts that he announced yesterday will amount to fewer than two or three packets of peanuts. That is the equivalent of what the Chancellor has done.

Let us recall what the Chancellor told the Conservative party conference only a few weeks ago. Do hon. Members remember what he said to earn the traditional crouching ovation that he gets at such events? He said:

"It is a Budget I'm looking forward to a lot more than the last two.

Many of you feel, I know, that the time has come for some reward in the Budget.

So far this Parliament we have given you the hors d'oeuvres and not the main course, the trailer not the film, the warm-up not the main performance".

I can tell the Chancellor that, as a result of yesterday's Budget statement, we have gone straight from the hors d'oeuvres to paying the bill without receiving the main course. We have gone from the trailer to the end credits. People are walking out and there is still no main feature. We have gone from the warm-up to the final curtain, and nothing that the Chancellor has done is worth a single round of applause.

Mr. Barry Legg (Milton Keynes, South-West): The hon. Gentleman said that nothing that the Chancellor did yesterday was worthy of support, but I remind him that his leader pledged his support for the 1p reduction in income tax. Will the hon. Gentleman tell us whether he believes that that 1p reduction should be financed by less public spending or higher borrowing?

Mr. Brown: I will tell the hon. Gentleman what we shall do. We shall not vote against the 1p cut in income tax; and I will tell him why. People have suffered enough; they have been punished enough by the Conservative Government.

I find it interesting that Conservatives—not only Conservative Members of Parliament, but Conservatives in the country—now spend all their time writing to the Labour party. One of my colleagues received his Budget representations, not from his local Labour club, but from Middlesbrough Conservative Club Ltd., founded in 1883. The letter started:

"The Management Committee of this club are becoming increasingly concerned about the falling trade which has been apparent for some months now. We know that we are not alone in the immediate vicinity. Trade is down by some 8 per cent. throughout the licensing trade in the region. My Committee will be obliged if you will bring this matter to the attention of anyone you think can influence the situation."

So little faith do they now have in Conservative Members that even Conservative clubs find it necessary to write to the Labour party with their Budget representations.

What of the fundamental problems that should have been tackled in the Budget, the original causes of the tax increases—the neglect of investment and the failure to get people back to work? After 16 years of promises of economic miracles, what has been done about the central challenges to arrest the decline from 13th to 18th place in the world prosperity league? Where is the investment-rich economy that the Government promised? There has been only a 1 per cent. increase in investment this year, in spite of a promise of a 6 per cent. increase in the summer.

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Brown: I will not give way again. I have given way a dozen times to Conservative Members and none of them—*[Interruption.]* In spite of their barracking, none of them has acknowledged that they should be returning to their constituents to apologise for what has happened as a result of the Budget.

We have the slowest increase in investment out of recession since the 1930s, yet there was not one measure, apart from those previously announced, that the Chancellor could genuinely say directly gives attention to spurring investment forward.

If the Government had been serious, they would have introduced the investment allowances that we proposed in our pre-Budget submission. If they had been serious about infrastructure investment and helping the housing market, they would have considered the phased release of capital receipts to allow local authorities to build. Instead of improving the prospects for investment, however, they have cut public investment.

Mr. Robathan *rose—*

Mr. Brown: I will not give way again.

[Mr. Brown]

What do the Government offer in its place? The private—

Mr. Legg: Will the hon. Gentleman try to answer one question?

Mr. Brown: I have given way many more times than most Ministers are prepared to, and Conservative Members are intent on not allowing me to make my remarks; they are simply trying to disrupt them.

What do the Government offer in place of the cuts in public investment? They offer the 10th relaunch of the private finance initiative, and not a plan or a programme but a wish list.

The Chancellor should listen to this. He failed, during three years of the private finance initiative, to deliver projects worth the original sum of £15 billion and delivered only £1 billion—a fraction of what was promised. Having failed to deliver his promise, the right hon. and learned Gentleman simply makes more promises and announces the possibility of 1,000 projects, at a cost of £25 billion. Is it not typical of the Government to seize on the manifest failure of their private finance programme, declare it a resounding success and move it right to the centre of their plans for the future without any sign of how they will repair the failures of the past three years?

The small print reveals that this is not a programme but an open-ended list of unlikelihood, offering not a plan but what the Budget press statement calls

"an illustrative list of projects"—

merely a list of potential partnerships that have been identified. What started as an initiative, followed by the formation of a panel and then a panel executive, has now become simply the announcement of an action plan that will come later.

Where has that taken us? A car park in Eastbourne; the unpopular Skye bridge. The jewel in the crown appears to be a hospital incinerator built in Hillingdon, which is now the subject of complaints about toxic emissions and is being used by Blue Circle Industries plc more than by local hospitals. Beyond that, we are given castles in the air, when people want projects on the ground.

Private companies in the construction industry and elsewhere are now longing for the task force, the statement of priorities and the clear commitment to action that the Labour party offers.

If the Chancellor wants an example of what has happened to the private finance initiative, he need look no further than the channel tunnel rail link. It was launched as a project in 1986, legislation was promised in 1987 and finance promised from the Government in 1993. The bids have yet to be assessed and the builders have yet to be agreed. In September, the Government finally took a decision; they appointed a negotiator to consult and then discuss with prospective bidders. There is no signature and no start, almost 10 years on. Now, as the French travel on their high-speed link, completed before the tunnel was opened, the British link may not be completed until next century—the year 2002.

Mr. Hawkins: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Brown: I will not give way any more.

What of crossrail? It was first promised in January 1989, the Government gave the go-ahead in 1990 and this year, 1995, it is at risk because of the costs of rail privatisation.

Public money for the railways should be used not to fund expensive consultancies and the subsidies that will accompany privatisation but to invest in rail transport.

Why not use money from the venture capital trust and the European investment scheme budget, which has not been taken up, to invest and help small businesses move ahead? Why not bring new technology into schools under competition proposals that my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition has made?

What is happening to employment under the Government? The best way to save money in the long run is to tackle the £20 billion bill that is the cost of unemployment. The biggest barrier to sorting out our public finances is the billions being poured down the black hole to pay the costs of unemployment.

Perhaps the Chief Secretary to the Treasury will draw the House's attention to what he said in his pamphlet, "Changing Gear: What the Government should do next" before he landed up at the Treasury. As we are discussing public investment, let me read what he said:

"In the public sector, a wide range of public investment should be undertaken. Amongst the investment undertaken should be house-building, renovation, insulation aimed at inner-city areas in part at least, road building, other infrastructure work, telecommunications and school equipment."

The right hon. Gentleman said that it would be sensible to think that £4 billion to £5 billion would be spent on capital projects in the next two years. He continued:

"If such a policy combined with other less expensive initiatives we suggest elsewhere on training and social policy were to be vigorously pursued, the atmosphere as well as the real economy might well be different at the time of the election, and if we lost, we would at least not have landed ourselves with the permanent stigma of apparent callousness and inaction"—

exactly the stigma that now threatens to attach itself to the Conservative party as a result of the huge cuts in capital investment for which the Chief Secretary and Chancellor are now responsible. I will tell them how they might begin to tackle the problem. They might do so by adopting our plans to reduce unemployment, especially youth unemployment and long-term unemployment.

What do the Government do instead? They scrap the community action programme, which was launched two years ago by the then Chancellor in the Budget and which was helping 100,000 people a year. They cut the training budget by 4 per cent.—I am not surprised that the Secretary of State for Education and Employment is now not to speak in this week's Budget debate—and, of course, by freezing it, they scrap the one-parent benefit, which provides an incentive for single parents to return to work. They are making it increasingly difficult for single mothers to take up employment again.

What should the Government have done? They should have introduced our employment programme, and they should have paid for it with the windfall tax on the utilities. If anyone has any doubt about the case for such a tax, they should look at the profit made by Yorkshire Water. It has increased its profit by 50 per cent.—not by supplying the people of Yorkshire with water, but by not supplying them. *[Interruption.]* Conservative Members are well aware that the plans to take away the supply of

many people in Yorkshire are still on the table, and could be introduced. But how can they defend circumstances in which the profits of Yorkshire Water have doubled, while the service that it is providing is the subject of massive criticism—even from constituents who normally support the Conservative party?

This Budget is a survival package for the Government, and it has failed. It does not begin to tackle the underlying weaknesses. It does not tackle the investment gap with our competitors; it does not tackle the skills gap, because there is no new measure to deal with post-school training for young people other than the measure to deal with single parents, as the one-parent benefit has been cut.

In my view and, I believe, in the country's view, the Government have run out of steam and given up on the future. They are not prudent; they are paralysed and powerless—frozen in the headlights of the oncoming election. This is the Budget of a Government who are now a prisoner of failure. The public are not short-sighted, greedy, gullible, easily fooled or forgetful of what has happened. The public do not want to praise this Government: they want to bury them.

This is a Budget that marks not the beginning of the Conservative party's fight back, but the irrevocable public exposure of its terminal decline. It will be seen not as the brave new launch, the turning point for victory, but as the last-gasp effort of a decaying regime.

After this Budget, the public know as they have never known before that the long night of Conservative rule is drawing to a close. It is the Budget of a Government with nowhere to go and a Chancellor with nothing left to offer. This Government are in terminal decline: they should go, and go soon.

6.42 pm

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. William Waldegrave): I always enjoy the speeches of the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown). That was not one of his vintage contributions, but I was very flattered when he referred to my elderly pamphlet, produced in 1980. I recommend its approach to my hon. Friends on the Back Benches; it was moderately troublesome to the Government of the day, and shortly afterwards I was given a job. I consider that quite a good way of proceeding.

I think that the pamphlet makes me look rather good. It sounded rather moderate to me. Given the investment figures in those programmes of the 1980s, the Government have a very good record. And, if we are to go back into the past, we cannot fail to remind the hon. Gentleman that he came to the House on a CND manifesto. Opposition Members always get cross when we remind them of that, but it strikes me as a more fundamental shift in political stance than any that I have made.

The Budget has three main themes. It keeps spending down, keeping borrowing on its downward path and protecting high-priority programmes; it sets Britain on a course of cutting taxes in a sustainable way; and—through the £700 gain in real income that the average family has experienced since the last election; some £450 will probably be added next year—it continues, in a plausible way, our campaign to reform the way in which government works, so that the state does less but new partnerships are built with the private sector.

First, let me deal with spending and borrowing. The Budget keeps borrowing on a clear downward path by keeping tight control on public spending. Lower borrowing will keep pressure off interest rates. That is good news for business, investment, home owners and, above all, jobs. I am sure that the House will be pleased to learn that three building societies have cut their mortgage rates this afternoon; that shows that they support the climate of confidence produced by my right hon. and learned Friend's Budget.

We have made tough decisions to return public finances to a sound footing. Borrowing always goes up in a recession, but once the recession is over the test of a Government is the Government's ability to ensure that it goes down again. That is what we are doing. We have done it before. We inherited an unsustainable level of public borrowing in 1979. There was a tough Budget in 1981. My noble Friend Lord Howe—ignoring 364 economists, the Labour party and everyone else—tackled the public sector borrowing requirement head on. The consequence was one of the longest periods of growth that we had experienced since the war.

We are now doing the same. We are already in the fourth year of a period of sustained growth—the steadiest for a generation. Exports are doing extremely well: last year we increased our share of world trade, which is very unusual. Businesses are investing: contrary to what was said by the hon. Gentleman, manufacturing investment was up 12 per cent. this year. As for business investment, an increase of 9 per cent. is forecast for next year. Living standards are improving, and unemployment is falling—and all that is happening without an increase in inflation.

Mr. Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): What is the reason for the continued decline in sterling?

Mr. Waldegrave: The hon. Gentleman should ask the markets. We do not have targets for sterling. I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman would like to set some targets; would he like sterling to be higher, or lower?

Mr. Anderson *rose—*

Mr. Waldegrave: The hon. Gentleman will find that there are benefits as well as costs. What matters is the inflation target, and the inflation target will be met. I do not think that serious commentators are in much doubt about that.

We intend to lower the public sector borrowing requirement further. Our goal is clear: we intend to bring the budget back towards balance over the medium term. We have done that before, and we will do it again. Balance should be achieved at the end of the decade; the current balance will be in surplus a year or so earlier.

Sound public finances cannot just mean ever higher taxes to balance ever higher spending. That is the fundamental difference between Conservative and Opposition Members. We believe that, when the businesses and workers of the country create wealth, it belongs to them. It is their right to keep what they make; Government must take only the minimum that is needed to provide decent services and the essential functions of government.

The Labour party used—honourably and openly—to believe the opposite: that far more should be done and financed collectively, and less left to the individual. As the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) put it

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in an eloquent speech in the debate on the Gracious Speech, it should be done less by profit and more by collective will. That is, after all, what the political argument has been about for 200 years or so. Now, however, things are alleged to be different. As The Independent recently put it, elegantly,

"The British Left have at last returned, snout-first, to the politics of the pork barrel".

That was the view of Niall Ferguson. New Labour claims to want even lower taxes than we do, but with no theory and philosophy to explain it. *[Interruption.]* If the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Darling) can prove to me that Niall Ferguson was writing in *The Daily Telegraph*, I shall withdraw what I said at once.

Mr. Alistair Darling (Edinburgh, Central): The article to which the right hon. Gentleman refers was written by Niall Ferguson, but it was not the view of The Independent. Niall Ferguson is a commentator, and he is entitled to his view. The right hon. Gentleman should not suggest that the newspaper, editorially, took that view.

Mr. Waldegrave: That strikes me as the feeblest intervention of the afternoon. I thought that the hon. Gentleman was going to point out a serious mistake. Muddling up *The Daily Telegraph* and The Independent would have been a serious mistake. I do not think that Opposition Members like what Niall Ferguson wrote.

Labour has now joined in the competition for low taxes, but it has no ideology, no theory and no idea of what that is for. We had about £1 billion of extra spending from the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith), who opposed all the savings that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security had made. I think that that is the way in which Labour is proceeding. Its practice is to oppose and sneer at all the savings, and to tell the lobby groups that it is against them, but then to back off and, when its members have lunch with people in the City, say that that was not spending.

For us, the Budget process starts with the tight control of public spending. We have always fought to keep state spending down. We have always believed that one can provide the services that people want without putting an intolerable strain on the taxpayer. We have always linked that to our fundamental political belief: that in the end big government is not only inefficient but threatens freedom. We do not—as the Opposition do—collect shopping lists of expensive commitments from the lobbyists and pressure groups and then ask the taxpayer to foot the bill. We start with the taxpayer.

In July, the Cabinet asked the special committee on public spending—EDX—to re-examine public spending. We did so. We found savings. They were not easy. There is very little Government spending that does not have some defender or nothing to be said in its favour, or the House would not have voted it in the first place. But we succeeded.

Mr. Harry Barnes (North-East Derbyshire): The Red Book tells us that public expenditure is to go down by £3.25 billion. Elsewhere, reserves have gone down by £3.2 million. Are we not left with dangerously low reserves? What if the money that is supposed to be saved on social security fraud does not materialise?

Mr. Waldegrave: That is a perfectly fair point to probe, but I do not think that the hon. Gentleman is right. We have not broken the reserve in any recent years. This year the underspend looks like being about £750 million or £800 million. We thought carefully about a reasonable figure for the reserve, and I can assure the hon. Gentleman that we have one.

We succeeded in finding public spending savings. My two predecessors did not make my task easier; they had helped the Chancellor to cut projected public spending in his previous two Budgets by £43 billion. None the less, in this year's public spending round, we have gone further and the total has gone up to £53 billion.

For 1997-98 alone, we cut the public spending control total by £3.2 billion from the ceilings that the Cabinet endorsed at the start of the spending round. That is about 1 per cent. in real terms. It is also £12 billion lower than when we first set plans for that year, two Budgets ago. This year, we predict an underspend of about £$\frac{1}{4}$ billion. Spending this year will be only about $\frac{1}{4}$ of a per cent. higher in real terms than in 1994-95. Over the whole period of the public expenditure survey, our plans represent tighter spending control than at any time since just after the war, when the Attlee Government were demobilising.

Doing it this way—by real spending control—means that tax cuts are sustainable. In fact, spending controls bring a double benefit: they let people keep more of what they earn; but they also mean government that is smaller, more efficient and less of a burden on people and industry.

As a result of the drive to greater efficiency, we have been able to cut the cash cost of running Government in each of the next three years. Compared with £15.1 billion this year, next year we will spend £300 million less on Government running costs, the year after £530 million less and the year after that £860 million less—a cash cut of more than 5 per cent. In real terms, the figures are even more impressive. By 1998-99, the annual cost of the civil service will be nearly £2 billion—more than 12 per cent.—lower in real terms than today.

Mr. Denis MacShane (Rotherham): If public expenditure and the cost of the civil service are going down so dramatically, why, in a written answer that I received today, has the cost of chauffeurs for Ministers gone up by 50 per cent. since 1991? Will the Chief Secretary set an example and occasionally catch the bus?

Mr. Waldegrave: That sounds like a good subject for a Chief Secretary to look at, and I thank the hon. Gentleman for his helpful indication of where I might look for further savings in next year's expenditure round.

The savings that we have made will not reduce standards of public services. The citizens charter and the competing for quality review have shown that standards can rise with lower costs. We have already carried out 1,000 competing for quality reviews across Government, covering 70,000 staff. More than £1 billion-worth of business has been won by the private sector, with significant reductions in the costs to the taxpayer. The programme of fundamental expenditure reviews and

senior management reviews have led to 20 per cent. cuts in senior staff in major Departments and contributed to the drive for greater efficiency across Whitehall. Other reductions come from better procurement, rationalising functions and reducing the span of Government through privatisation.

Those reductions build on the Government's considerable success in the fight against excessive bureaucracy: holding down running costs and the number of civil servants. There are now 506,000 civil servants—fewer than at any time since the war, 65,000 lower than at the previous election and more than 30 per cent. lower than in 1979. Numbers will continue to fall as a result of those reductions and should be well below 500,000 next year.

I heard the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central mutter about quangos—quite rightly. They are the next target. Central Departments are just one part of the Government machine that we are committed to modernise. Circling each Department are large numbers of satellite bodies, which are commonly described as quangos. They come in all shapes and sizes. Some spend money and run programmes on behalf of Ministers. Some provide services themselves. Some are regulatory and raise income from fees. The great majority consume taxpayers' money.

The Government have already had considerable success in reducing the number of quangos and improving the efficiency of those that remain, but we intend to make further efforts. We shall review the way in which the administration costs of quangos are controlled. We need to ensure that they are exposed to the same discipline as Departments. We shall consider the scope for further reducing the number of quangos. All are at present subject to periodic review. That process will continue. But we shall look at them in groups to see whether there can be overlaps that can involve removal of whole organisations. We shall help Departments with the effective management of quangos. The efficiency unit in the Cabinet Office will undertake a scrutiny aimed at generating practical guidance on how to improve that efficiency.

The hon. Member for Dunfermline, East spoke about the private finance initiative, and my hon. Friend the Financial Secretary, who leads on that subject, has been talking about the PFI today. In 1979, the public sector was the owner of many loss-making industries, nationalised by Labour after the war, and which Government should never have owned. Our privatisation programme transformed many of them into efficient world-beating companies, like the present British Steel. Today, we face the challenge of achieving similar improvements in services that the Government have a duty to provide, services for which we must keep responsibility: roads, hospitals, prisons, and a whole range of other things. That is where the PFI can be extremely powerful.

That policy is now central to the next stage of the reform of government in Britain. Government are often not the best manager and provider of services, whether they are people-intensive or capital-intensive. A huge prize of more efficient provision, giving better value for money, is available if we can harness business management expertise at every stage, to design, build, finance and operate public services. This gives an opportunity to free the public sector to do the things that it is best at, for example, an NHS that is focused on core clinical services rather than the maintenance of boilers and the management of car parks.

The PFI is gathering momentum and projects are demonstrating good results. We will have about £5 billion-worth of deals signed by the end of this financial year. The scepticism—as exhibited by Opposition Front-Bench Members—that accompanied its growth has been just like that in the early 1980s on privatisation. Opposition Front-Bench Members will find that the programme will work and, in due course, they will probably come to support it. *[Interruption.]* As they say, some of them support it already. Some of them advocate it, and one even claims to have invented it—the deputy leader of the Labour party.

We are on course to deliver projects that are worth about £5 billion by the end of March, and there is much more to come. It is not just about capital spending; it is about making the Government more and more a purchaser of public services rather than a provider of capital assets. But even as it is, the policy will maintain publicly sponsored capital at about £22½ billion a year through the survey period—a level, which, in real terms, is higher than almost at any time in the 1980s.

The other reform relates to the extension of challenge funding, which builds partnerships with local authorities, private business and the voluntary sector. Challenge funding has already been a formidable success in tackling urban regeneration, adding £1 of private money to every £1 of public money invested. We want to see that continue and have announced third and fourth rounds of bidding for the single regeneration budget. Challenge funding has also been successful in the Home Office, in its town centre video camera campaign. That is why we are announcing plans to extend it into the regeneration of deprived housing estates; local employment enterprise and training initiatives by the training and enterprise councils; a new challenge fund for the renewal, repair, improvement or replacement of school buildings; and establishing a network of centres to raise standards of literacy and numeracy.

Happily, my job is not all about cuts, though cuts are an important part of good government. Good government is also about priorities and ensuring that money goes where it is needed. For example, the Budget demonstrates our commitment to schools. In total, we will increase provision for schools by almost £880 million. Our plans will extend quality and choice in education by funding, among other things, a major new initiative on nursery vouchers, a doubling of the intake of the assisted places scheme, and enabling banks to offer subsidised loans to students.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: Will the Chief Secretary confirm that the bulk of the expenditure is to be provided through local authority funding rather than direct Government funding, and that the Government's proposed allocation to local authorities represents no increase in real terms compared with last year? Is not the net effect that education funding will have to come from cuts in local services and an increase in council tax?

Mr. Waldegrave: There are two separate issues. There is a large increase in central Government grant—the aggregate external finance grant—of almost £1 billion and there is an increase in standard spending assessments. The

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hon. Gentleman should wait for the Secretary of State for the Environment's statement tomorrow. It will be possible for all education authorities to spend the increase on schools, whatever their budget.

We are launching two new challenge funds to lever in private money to improve school buildings. As I have said, we have £880 million more for schools. The two principal English Opposition parties—to my knowledge the same thing is happening in Scotland—have been—

Mr. Gordon Brown: Not in Scotland.

Mr. Waldegrave: No doubt, different things have been going on in Scotland. The two Opposition parties have been co-ordinating campaigns in the English counties, and probably in Scottish counties, on education spending. I am sure that most of my hon. Friends will have noticed such campaigning.

We have provided £880 million more and it is fair to ask whether the Opposition want to provide more or less. Perhaps the Labour party wants to provide less because it is now a tax-cutting party. It is now outbidding us on tax cuts, so it might want to spend less. Does it want to spend more? That is a fair question. The Member for Dunfermline, East walked straight past all the questions asked by my hon. Friends and I expect that he will walk straight past this one. Does he want to spend more than £880 million on schools this year? That is not a difficult question, but I do not think that we will get an answer.

The same is happening on crime. Since we came to office, spending on law and order has more than doubled in real terms. Over the past two years, recorded crime has fallen significantly for the first time in modern years. That is no accident. Police manpower has increased by over 20 per cent. since 1979. Our plans provide for a further 5,000 policemen on the beat over the next three years and almost 4,000 extra prison places. We have consistently backed the police since 1979 and the Budget does so again.

Can anyone believe that Labour would spend more? Would it spend less? Will we get an answer? I think that the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East nodded. That may be a spending pledge on the police. We should note it. He is now shaking his head, so I think that pledge has been withdrawn.

Our other consistent priority has been health. Next year, current spending on the NHS will go up by about £1.3 billion—over 1.6 per cent. in real terms. The private finance initiative will bring in at least an additional £165 million in private sector investment. I expect it will bring in even more. As always, the NHS will keep what it can save. The hospitals' target in efficiency gains next year is 3 per cent. or £650 million. That means about £2 billion in a tight spending year in extra resources for patients in the national health service. That is the mark of our commitment.

Every Labour spokesman competes with us on health spending. However, when the Labour party was in government, it cut nurses' pay. It is the only party in the history of the NHS to cut spending in real terms. The only year that that has happened since the foundation of the health service was 1977-78. However, our record on health spending is better—we beat the Labour party on health spending. We can do that only because we are tougher on spending on lower priorities. The hon. Member for Bristol, South (Ms Primarolo) said as recently as last year that she wanted to spend—rather like the Liberals on education—the product of a penny on income tax on the NHS.

Ms Dawn Primarolo (Bristol, South): We did not say that.

Mr. Waldegrave: I did not mean "we"; the hon. Member for Bristol, South herself said that she would like to spend the product of 1p on income tax, or about £1.6 billion, on the health service. Since she is now in the Treasury team, she has forgotten about that. She has blotted it out of her memory. The remarkable transformation in the political position of the hon. Member for Bristol, South has been observed with astonishment by those of us in other parts of Bristol in the past few years.

Ms Primarolo: Read out the quotation then.

Mr. Waldegrave: I will send the quotation to the hon. Lady. The Government have a clear strategy. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Lady is presumably saying that she does not want more spending on health.

Ms Primarolo: That is not the point.

Mr. Waldegrave: It is the point. Does the Labour Front-Bench team want more spending on health or not? I may be mistaken that a couple of years ago the hon. Lady wanted more spending on health. I thought I was complimenting her because as she was—and still is in reality—a good tough left-wing politician, she would have wanted more spending on health. I am now told that I have misquoted her. I apologise and I withdraw that. The hon. Lady did not want any more spending on health. I entirely withdraw those allegations. We are none the wiser as to whether the Labour Front-Bench team wants more spending on health. We will not learn that.

The Budget, like its predecessors, is a Budget for jobs and growth. We are keeping public spending down as a share of GDP and keeping taxes down. We believe that that is the way to get more jobs, a more secure economy and better prospects of sustained growth. We point to the success of the economies that follow that line. Keeping public spending down is fiscally responsible; it continues the process of lifting the total burden of government from industry; it helps to make employing people cheaper; it helps incentives for work by taking many of the lower-paid out of tax; it cuts the burden on small business; and it makes Britain Europe's enterprise centre.

There is a counter-argument. Some honest and intelligent people take a different view; they include the right hon. Member for Chesterfield and the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley), as I read in the *Evening Standard*. People such as Professor Layard and Professor Wynn Godley take a different position. They argue that higher spending, even with higher tax, will achieve what is needed better. That is a perfectly logical and coherent position, but one with which the Government disagree. That is the ever-present argument between left and right.

We have not heard those counter-arguments today from the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East. We have heard no alternative political position whatever. All that we have had is the Labour party advocating more spending when

it talks to the lobbies; less spending when it talks to the City and it wants to look respectable; and income tax at 10 per cent. when it talks to the media. That fools no one.

There are two explanations for what Labour is up to. The first is that it has not really changed its policy at all, but knows that it cannot be elected if it shows its true high-spending colours. That is what the hon. Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) hopes when she says that she wants

"Labour to win and Gordon can say anything he likes if he thinks that it is going to win the election; but when Labour is in power they will be looking for other priorities apart from tax cuts."

That is what the hon. Lady hopes and believes, but that ascribes such low motives to the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East and to the Labour party that I cannot subscribe to it.

The second interpretation is less Machiavellian and more charitable and therefore the one that I believe. It is that Labour simply has no idea of the implications of what it is doing or saying. All that matters is to look good, like Robert Redford in the film "The Candidate". The hon. Member for Dunfermline, East would be splendid in the role. He might lose a little weight, but he would look very good. The Labour party just strings out the soundbites and who cares if they are contradictory. Like the great Tom Lehrer's song on Wernher von Braun: "Once the soundbites are up who cares where they come down. That's not my department says Gordon von Brown."

Let us compare a few soundbites. The hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) said on the private finance initiative:

"It is a privatisation initiative. Its not privatisation by the back door, its privatisation by the front door."

That is for the scares on health privatisation. On the other hand, the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) said:

"The PFI is right in principle. We have supported it, and in many ways we have been advocating it.—[*Official Report*, 28 November 1995; Vol. 267, c. 1077.]

The right hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) said, "We initiated it." Those are the soundbites for the City and commentators. The hon. Member for Dunfermline, East has said

"We also see limited application in provision"—

he is being very statesmanlike here—

"for private finance for publicly-led projects in education and health."

That is not what the hon. Member for Peckham says.

The soundbite for those who want tax cuts is "7p up for 1p down". That is a neat slogan. But when it comes to spending, they want more on every major programme, as we heard again today. Do they want to cut borrowing faster or slower? They do not know.

We have just heard the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East promise to do away with a list of taxes which my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor had to introduce to bring public borrowing down. He liked none of them, and we had lots of nods and winks that they would all go. Where would the money come from? Having given itself such a contradictory set of slogans, no wonder that the best that new Labour can do is to abstain on the principal issue of this Budget: our judgment that the time has come to return to lower taxes. That is the result of new Labour. It is firmly based on new principles, but when it comes to the big issue, it manages to come to the decisive conclusion to abstain. That is wonderful.

I shall be interested to see whether Labour Members abstain on the cutting of whisky and beer duties. I expect that they will. We had no answers because they have not decided what to do, which is rather surprising. Nor have Labour Members decided what they will do about the 20p savings rate of tax. They walked straight past that question, too. We had no answer on that or anything else.

To use the words of Dr. John Wells, an honest adviser to an honest man, the late John Smith:

"the Shadow Chancellor has been engaged in the truly astonishing feat of trying to present Labour as the Party of low taxation and public borrowing . . . it is breathtaking. For if a party of the centre-left has any simple guiding economic principle, it must surely be that it stands for a more active state than right wing—and for a bigger share of Government spending in national income".

That is surely right, which is why my right hon. Friends and I are in the Conservative party. We believe in a smaller state and in less Government spending. What anybody thinks that they would support that by backing the Labour party now is as much a mystery to Dr. Wells and me as it must be to the right hon. Members for Chesterfield and for Sparkbrook—an unlikely but formidable alliance.

One thing that I can say for sure is that, if this country were to find itself with a Labour Government elected on such a basis—having promised lower taxes and higher spending, with no theory or ideology of any kind to guide them, and no consistency or plan—it would find itself in a world where the soundbite would avail it of nothing. It is called the real world. Labour would be a broken-backed Government within six months, as they always have been before. Today's speech by the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East was not in the real world. By contrast, my right hon. and learned Friend's Budget, like him, is honest, straightforward, robust, and well founded in a commonsense application of sensible principles. That is why Conservative Members wholeheartedly support it.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order. I remind hon. Members that Madam Speaker has ruled that, from now on, Back-Bench speeches are restricted to 10 minutes.

7.12 pm

Mr. Jim Cunningham (Coventry, South-East): I was interested to listen to the debate yesterday and today.

As some of my hon. Friends pointed out, council tax payers will bear the brunt of the so-called "1p reduction" in income tax. I am sure that many people will be alarmed at that proposal because they will fear for the services provided by local authorities. It has been suggested that extra money will be provided for education, although it has not been made clear whether that will be ring-fenced, so people in local authorities will be extremely worried about the Budget's impact on their jobs. It will threaten jobs, from teachers to cleaners. Even before the Budget, local authorities in some parts of the country, especially Coventry, had already started looking at jobs, pay and conditions. That did not bode well for lower-paid

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employees, or the education service and other services. So I imagine that many people in Coventry will be alarmed about this Budget.

The Budget did not do much for the unemployed, and I saw no reference to investment in young people. Rather, it contained punitive measures against young people as benefits will again be cut. Once again, young people are the whipping boy. One-parent families and old-age pensioners will also carry the brunt of this Budget.

Over a period of years, the Government encouraged many people, particularly young people, to take out mortgages. Unemployment now threatens their ability to pay those mortgages. Worse, the Government, who say that they support a property-owning democracy, have cut mortgage relief over the past two or three years. If one goes further down that road one notices a little thing called negative equity. The Government have hung a millstone round the necks of many young people who want to own their own homes, yet they call themselves the Government of hope.

Much has been made of the new initiative, which is actually an old initiative—it has certainly been around for a number of years—called "city challenge". I had always thought that the scheme was designed for the inner cities. The problem is that it is a lottery, so it will not tackle some of the major problems of the inner cities as the Government claim. On the contrary, leaders of city councils may have to wait 10 years before they see results using that method of pouring money back into our inner cities.

The Government have also made great play of the fact that, over the next two or three years, they will employ 5,000 extra policemen. When that figure is broken down, one sees that cities like Coventry will be lucky to have between 10 and 15 extra policemen. We need more than that to tackle some of the crimes committed in parts of the inner city that I could mention. Ministers have come to Coventry and insulted parts of that city and its population.

The Government propose to cut some £2 billion from the social security budget. Given that £3.5 billion has been cut over the past two or three years—the past two or three Budgets must be taken together—it means that £5 billion or £6 billion will have been taken from the social security budget.

The Conservatives claim to want to help the poor and say that they are the compassionate party, but over the past two or three years they have cut housing benefit, which does not help one-parent families, the poor or the homeless. One has only to talk to people who work for charities in any major city to find that, rather than assist organisations like Shelter, or the Cyrenians in Coventry, the Government have cut resources for staff which those organisations badly need. Those organisations not only house the homeless but deal with people with drugs problems. The Home Secretary said that he intends to set up a special task force to deal with drug abuse. If we leave out MI5, that task force must be funded, but there is no reference to it in the Budget.

The Budget does nothing for industry or to expand our industrial base. Conservative Members often talk about wealth creation, but when it comes to putting their money where their mouths are, they do nothing to help industry, which is crying out for help. It is no good simply tinkering with small measures like corporation tax. The Government must come to grips with the needs of industry, which include money for research and development, and for training. Where will future generations go to learn their skills? The Government have no proposals on that.

Except for a few hundred houses built while the Government have been in office, when was the last time that council house construction took place or cheaper housing was built for the less well-off? Instead, the Government have introduced a punitive Budget. That is the only way that it can be seen. It is not designed to help the needy, the unemployed, new home owners or local government. Rather, this Budget—I presume that next year's Budget will do the same—is all about tax cutting. That will benefit no one because the Government still owe the public £650 a year, or another 6p, which they robbed them of. They should not forget that yesterday's Budget did the public no big favours. They owed the public that cut in income tax because they ran the country into a £50 billion debt. The Government have the effrontery to tell the British people that they are doing them a favour with these tax cuts. They are not a favour, and the sooner the Government decide to go, the better for everybody.

7.19 pm

Mr. John MacGregor (South Norfolk): For the record, I have declared in the Register my outside interests, although I do not think that anything I shall say will have a direct impact on them. I congratulate my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor on his wise, shrewd and balanced Budget. He is right not to take any risks with inflation or interest rates. The tax reductions have been shrewdly chosen and have many good targets, and I support the priorities of education, health and the police.

There is much that I should like to say, but in view of the time limit I shall confine myself to a few comments. I particularly draw attention to the measures for retirement incomes and the provision for long-term care. We all know the issues—demographic patterns and the fact that people living longer creates health problems in later life—and we all know about the high cost of community care. That may become one of the most potent political issues over the next 20 years.

The Chancellor has started to tackle the short-term problem of the feelings of many people who have saved throughout their lives only to see their savings eroded to meet the cost of community care in residential homes. The cost of that may also include the family home. Therefore, I warmly welcome the increase in the capital thresholds from £8,000 to £16,000 and from £3,000 to £10,000. That will bring relief to many people with modest savings. Many such people spoke to me while I was making speeches on that issue in various parts of the country.

The perception that the family home may have to be sold worries people. That does not always happen, but frequently it does and in due course I should like to see the family home exempted from the needs calculation for meeting the cost of retirement care. At least the Budget has introduced a good measure.

In the context of short-term issues, I welcome the reduction on savings incomes to 20 per cent. for basic rate taxpayers. It will affect mainly retired people because they are the people with building society deposits and a small amount of equities. The significance of that measure is

shown by the actual cost in tax relief, which is £800 million. It is a significant measure that will help many retired people, but the long-term problem is much more formidable. It is essential to start to tackle the issue by encouraging many more families who can afford it to start saving through personal pensions and long-term insurance schemes—not just through TESSAs and PEPs—to meet the cost of retirement care.

At the moment, only 10,000 to 15,000 insurance schemes are being taken up but I have no doubt that in the next 20 years there will be a much greater need for such schemes. That means introducing tax relief measures to encourage people to save more. I am delighted that consultation documents are to be produced and that a couple of measures have already been suggested. A range of options is possible and I hope that over the year ahead we shall introduce them. An important actuarial point is that the earlier people start to save, the less they need to pay and the more benefits they will receive at the end of the day. Every year lost in encouraging people to take out policies for retirement care is a year lost for many families. Through tax measures and constant education, it is necessary to change the culture among the younger generation towards this issue, because it will have an impact on them. I am glad that the Budget took a step in that direction.

The second issue also relates to savings and I shall couple it with the Chancellor's remarks about the need for tax simplification. That does not just mean explaining tax measures to make them simpler for professional advisers and the public at large. We need to simplify the underlying structure of the system. In that respect, I should like to highlight capital gains tax. I welcome what has been done about inheritance tax and I hope that capital gains tax can be tackled next.

The right step on capital gains tax is not to abolish it altogether because there is a real issue in terms of the early years. The right approach is to taper capital gains so that the assets and the capital gains move quite swiftly, say within seven years, out of the tax system altogether. That is a much simpler way to deal with the issue than the current one and I hope that the problem can be tackled.

The third issue relates to the expenditure plans and it is the source of some disappointment. As a former Chief Secretary, I am fully aware of the difficulties that face any Government every year. I have been in several spending Departments and on the other side of the table, and I understand all the issues. I congratulate the Chief Secretary on his reductions in the overall expenditure plans this year, although part of the contribution is from the contingency reserve. I am sure that he will be very tough on that reserve in the year ahead.

I support the plans for education, health and the police and it would be churlish of me to single out the area in which I am critical of what has been done. Nevertheless I shall do so to highlight it for the years ahead; it relates to the roads programme. I strongly support the private finance initiative on roads and the concept of design, build, finance and operate. I started them and thought that they would be important in the years ahead. I hope that in due course motorway tolling can be linked to them to produce resources that will enable us to ensure a significant future roads programme. However, I do not think that the PFI and DBFO will be enough over the next three or four years.

A substantial number of road projects have been cut as a result of reductions in the programme. That worries me, partly because all over the country there is a need for more bypasses for environmental and other reasons, to relieve towns and villages that are hard pressed by traffic, but also because if we do not maintain a decent roads programme, congestion costs on businesses and the economy will start to grow again. Of course, a cut in the programme also has an impact on the construction industry.

Over the past 15 years a considerable number of bypasses have been built in my constituency and they have been of major benefit to all my constituents. There have been big improvements to the trunk roads in Norfolk, which were much needed for our economy. We have benefited substantially, but more bypasses are necessary and further improvements, by which I mean mainly widening of the main motorway and trunk road network throughout Britain are required. I hope that in future the Chancellor will look again at the impact of his measures on the profile of the roads programme to see whether more can be done.

My final comment flows from what the Chief Secretary said in the final part of his speech. In 1987 I was the first Chief Secretary to cost the Labour party programme and I remember the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) looking absolutely astonished at the scale of the programme to which his Front-Bench colleagues had committed him. Over the past few years we have been able to demonstrate clearly that Labour is the high-tax, high-spending, high-borrowing party. It has not changed and I was astonished by the effrontery of the Leader of the Opposition and the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown). They have put together a number of tax increases and have clearly implied to the public at large that they will reduce them although, of course, we know that they will not. They attack quite a large number of increases in fares or charges—the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East did that in the debate—and imply that they would not have occurred under a Labour Government. All over the shop Labour is still committing itself to spending. The hon. Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith) shakes his head, but I understand that within the past month 40 per cent. of all Opposition speeches have urged higher spending and that clearly shows what they will do.

Mr. Darling: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. MacGregor: No. I am almost finished.

Labour is trying to con the electorate into thinking that it would be a low-tax party as well because Labour Members know that that is politically attractive. However, when one examines the totality of their proposals, it is clear that that could not happen under a Labour Government. They would be back to high tax, high borrowing and high spending. On 10 November, the game was given away on "Clive Anderson Talks Back" by the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn), who said that at present the Labour party did not want to cause trouble internally because it wanted to return to government, but that when

"we come to power then you'll find the Labour Party is the same Party it's always been."

That is true. Therefore, the charge of the Labour party being a high-spending party—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Mr. Malcolm Bruce.

7.29 pm

Mr. Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): Following the right hon. Member for South Norfolk (Mr. MacGregor), I support the principle of cutting the roads budget, although we think that the money should have been switched to public transport. I agree with him, however, that that cut should not be at the expense of long-overdue bypasses. It would have been extremely damaging if, as was suggested a little while ago, the Government had frozen all road projects that had not been started. I live in a part of the world where the population has grown by 50,000 in the past 10 years. A number of planned bypasses are just at the point where they should be started and I hope that they will not be further delayed.

I apologise to the Minister who will reply to the debate because, due to a previous engagement, I will not be here for his speech. No discourtesy is intended. No doubt he will take a free kick at the open goal.

This is a cautious Budget because it had to be. The Chancellor of the Exchequer knows that the economy is so sluggish that the most important thing that it needs is a drop in interest rates. The Chief Secretary to the Treasury alluded to that and I understand that today the Confederation of British Industry called for a cut in interest rates. I hope that enough room has been created for that to happen. In my alternative Budget, I made it clear that getting interest rates down was the single most important economic priority.

The other problem and the reason why the Budget had to be cautious is that, although not quite in the terms that the Chief Secretary set out, to some degree, borrowing is out of control. If the Chancellor was not to cause alarm bells in the markets, he had to demonstrate that any changes that he was going to introduce were properly balanced and properly funded.

Having said that, there is a degree of dishonesty in the way in which the Budget has been constructed and presented. The most specific point is that the borrowing position does not justify the standard rate of income tax cut that has been driven by a political imperative that does not square with the Government's analysis last year. The Chief Secretary's predecessor, speaking in the Budget debate just one year ago—bearing it in mind that he was talking about a forecast public sector borrowing requirement deficit of £21 billion for the current year, which is £1 billion less than his successor is forecasting for next year—said:

"at those levels of borrowing, no prudent domestic or international observer of the British economy should have expected to see tax cuts . . . it is far more important . . . to be right than to be popular."—[*Official Report*, 30 November 1994; Vol. 250, c. 1237.]

That is obviously true until one gets to within 18 months of a general election, when clearly it is far more important to be popular than to be right. In the circumstances, inevitably the Chancellor of the Exchequer has been pulled in that direction.

The Chancellor's own wise men have given him some sort of shot across the bows. In the *Financial Times* today, Mr. Gavyn Davies of Goldman Sachs says:

"The target for the public sector borrowing requirement next year . . . is too high, and should not really have permitted sizeable tax cuts. Also, we have probably reached the point where spending plans have been cut so much they become implausible."

That is where the Chief Secretary's mettle will be tested. It is much easier to cut off the forecast figures than to deliver them at the end of the day. I am not saying that he will not achieve that, but the specifics of how it will be done have not been set out. In a pre-election year, when unpopularity faces the Ministers who preside over cuts, I predict that he will have difficulty delivering them. Consequently, his borrowing forecasts may yet turn out, as they did last year, to be more optimistic than he hopes.

Apart from that, the dishonesty involves the fact that on analysis the education commitment is nothing like as generous as the Chancellor sought to make it. The Chief Secretary stated that this was the commitment—from central Government sources, it appears that all that the Government are offering is funding for their pet schemes: the assisted places scheme and the nursery voucher scheme. All the rest of the funding must come out of the local government settlement.

The Chancellor wished to portray himself as a one-nation Tory keen to protect public services when in reality the best that he has done is hold the health budget just about to real health inflation. Although he has put some additional money into increasing the number of police officers, it is a phased introduction and £20 million is not a huge sum in the context of the Budget and it is against the background of cuts elsewhere in the Home Office budget.

Nevertheless, we welcome and will support some modest measures in the Budget. In particular—here I take up the comments of the right hon. Member for South Norfolk—the threshold adjustment and the help for the elderly who need long-term care are needed. Some imaginative new proposals, which again were alluded to, go in the right direction for encouraging people to make provision for themselves and for giving them an incentive to do so.

Not surprisingly, I welcome the 27p reduction in duty on spirits. The Chancellor of the Exchequer did not acknowledge that that was a reversal of the 26 per cent. increase that he introduced last year in a fit of pique after he was defeated on the VAT on fuel issue. Over time, whisky has consistently been our biggest export and home sales have suffered. I am not sure that the Chancellor was being that magnanimous because the indications I have are that his revenue fell as a result of the impact of the tax last year. I hope that he will stop there, listen to the Scotch Whisky Association and reduce duty on spirits so that it is more in line with the alcohol content and the gap is narrowed between beer and wine.

Overall, the Budget is something of a damp squib. For the reasons I have stated, the cut in the standard rate is not justified. We have consistently stated that we believe that education could be funded. We have said that, if necessary, we would increase taxation for it and we will vote against the 1p reduction in income tax and challenge others to support us in so doing.

The Budget's most alarming feature was the uprating of the Government's borrowing forecast. That took even independent commentators by surprise. We knew that it was bad, but not as bad as that. The Chancellor is forecasting that next year's borrowing deficit will be greater than his forecast for the outturn this year. This year's outturn is forecast to overshoot by £7.5 billion. The 1997-98 figure shows borrowing at £15 billion, which is three times the level forecast in last year's Budget. In the past 10 years, the average error in PSBR forecasts has been £11 billion per annum, so it is a big variation and not a firm foundation for definite decisions.

Frankly, the figures are awful and for the reasons that I have stated they could turn out worse. In addition, the wise men do not agree with the Chancellor's forecast that he can achieve 3 per cent. growth. They forecast 2.7 per cent. I hope that the Chancellor is right because clearly we want the economy to sustain higher levels of growth.

After 16 years in government, the Tories have not found the holy grail of sustained economic success. Some things are being done. Reform of the trade unions has been very much for the better and my party supported most of those proposals.

Mr. MacShane: It would, wouldn't it?

Mr. Bruce: Indeed it would because we believe in democracy, in industrial democracy in particular, and that the country has been dramatically improved as a result of those industrial relations reforms. I understand that the leader of the Labour party and Labour Front-Bench Members also support them, although they fought them all the way at the time.

The Government have also perhaps helped to deepen the understanding of certain fundamental economic realities such as that enterprises must ultimately make a return on capital if they are to survive. Having said that, the Red Book confirms that the post-war average growth rate of 2.5 per cent. is all that has been delivered under 16 years of Conservative rule. Although there are some important improvements in the underlying economic indicators, we have not yet got to the point where we can say that there is real confidence that permanently low inflation has been achieved.

When the Prime Minister says that inflation is in the box, he is being a little complacent, given the sluggish state of the economy, which is a major fact or in keeping it under control. As a result of that, the Government have not got to the point where we can say that we have stable and competitive interest rates. One of the reasons is that the Government insist on keeping interest rates under political control. All the indications are that that keeps them at a higher base rate than they would be if they were taken out of the immediate political arena, as we Liberal Democrats would wish.

Those may be some of the reasons why investment is low—and it is low, historically, across the board. Last year the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee was sceptical about Government claims that business investment would be 10.75 per cent. Sure enough, that figure was revised to 3.25 per cent—and the investment forecast for the whole economy was revised from 5.75 per cent. to 1 per cent. Although manufacturing investment is on the increase now, that is after a deep recession. As a percentage of GDP, it is still at an all-time low.

The Government are cutting their own capital spending as a means of helping to get their borrowing under control and trying to justify tax cuts. The private finance initiative has been launched many times, and was originally hailed as a way of boosting public capital spending. The hope was that it would unlock additional resources.

However, the Red Book shows that the forecast increase in the PFI is exactly offset by the forecast cut in the Government's contribution to capital expenditure, so the PFI is now directly substituting for what the Government would have done, and there is no net benefit in terms of the capital expenditure that might have been delivered.

The Chancellor and the Government talk about getting expenditure below 40 per cent. of GDP, but unless they are prepared to explain it, that is a meaningless figure plucked out of the air. If it is to be achieved by economic success, that means reducing unemployment and increasing earnings so that there is less call on the welfare budget, which is obviously the biggest single factor outside the Government's control.

If that is the plan, we need to know what policies the Government have, which they have not shown us over the past 16 years, to achieve that transformation. But to date they have totally failed to deliver. If there is no such magic new policy—there is certainly no evidence of one—the Government can mean only that they favour transferring more of the cost of health, welfare and public service provision to the consumers of those services. Presumably the provision to some of the most vulnerable people in our society will be reduced too—witness today's earlier benefits statement.

If that is what the Government are about, their argument may be perfectly honourable and justifiable, but it is not honest simply to call for public expenditure to be cut to 40 per cent. of GDP or below, without explaining how to achieve that. The Budget was a blatant attempt to sell a false prospectus.

First, the Government claim that there is room for justifiable and sustainable tax cuts, when patently there is not yet. They also claim that spending on health, education, and law and order has been increased. Health has been protected, but spending on law and order has been frozen and, unless the Chief Secretary to the Treasury can clarify the position for me, I shall continue to believe that real investment in education has, if anything, been barely maintained, and may still end up cut.

The Government claim to be providing a big funding boost for education, but they are doing nothing of the kind. That confidence trick involving education makes Liberal Democrats especially angry, because in our alternative Budget we made a commitment to a £2 billion boost as a minimum requirement for education—to deliver the nursery education that all parties claim to want, but for which only the Liberal Democrats are prepared to identify the funding, to reduce class sizes, and to provide more funding for books and materials, and better-quality further and higher education.

The Government claim that education will be boosted by £878 million. But the direct Government contribution will be enough only to finance their pet schemes, nursery vouchers and assisted places. All the rest is to come from the local authorities. The trouble is that this year's allocation to local authorities does no more than reverse last year's cuts. The Government are simply putting us back where we were a year ago.

Even working on the proposals for this year alone, the figures do not stand up. The Government say that there will be a 3.1 per cent. increase from last year's reduced total Government grant support to local authorities. Out of that, plus their council tax income, local authorities are expected to find an extra 4.5 per cent. for education. As education accounts for about half local authority spending, that means that 2.25 per cent. of the 3.1 per cent. increase should be earmarked for education.

It does not take a mathematical genius to work out that that leaves only 0.85 per cent. for all the other services—a real cut of almost 10 per cent. That means drastic cuts

[Mr. Bruce]

in local services such as community care, home helps and other essential local services. It also means that council tax will have to rise, and I gather that there is to be an announcement about that.

So the Government's proud boast of taking a penny off the standard rate of income tax has been made at the cost of a dramatic increase in council tax.

Mr. Waldegrave *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Bruce: The Chief Secretary to the Treasury is shaking his head. Perhaps he would care to tell me why in the Red Book the Government forecast an increase of £900 million in council tax income. That is clearly a sign that they intend to lift the caps, and that they expect local authorities to increase council tax to close the gap.

The Government hope that somehow or other they will gain the credit for cutting taxes, and still be able to claim that they have increased funding on education, while the local authorities will have to deliver the money and put local taxes up. That is dishonest; it is a sleight of hand—although it is probably typical of what one might expect.

Government spokesmen have acknowledged the fact that we Liberal Democrats have set out our priorities for the current year in our alternative Budget, which is more than can be said for the official Opposition. We have made clear our desire to have reduced interest rates and permanently low inflation—we agree with the Chancellor about the importance of that. We also stress the importance of bringing borrowing under control. I rather suspect that, because of the pressures that the Chancellor is under, we are now more concerned about that than he is.

We have set out our priority for an extra £2.5 billion for education, including £500 million to be spent on the fabric of our schools. We propose to take 750,000 people out of tax altogether, by introducing a 50 per cent. tax on earnings above £100,000. We would also harmonise the national insurance and tax thresholds. Disappointingly, the Government have left that area unreformed for a long time.

We would boost public transport, research and development, health, community care, overseas aid, child care and the spirits industry rather more than the Government have. We would also introduce specific measures to get the long-term unemployed back into work.

Those are costed, responsible priorities. What a contrast to the official Opposition. Both the other parties are off on the fantasy of trying to persuade voters that we can have higher spending, lower taxes, safe borrowing and a healthy economy.

The Labour party appears to have written its economic policy in Disneyland. It attacks the tax cuts on the ground that they are not enough, yet intends to abstain rather than support them. If Labour Members want tax cuts, why do they not have the guts to support them? If they do not want them, surely they should vote against them.

The Labour party explains nothing about how it proposes to cut tax, yet at the same time pledges more funding for education, health, transport and all kinds of welfare benefits. Labour says nothing about borrowing, inflation or interest rates. It wants to defy the laws of economics, and probably the law of gravity too. In its flirtation with Murdoch the Labour party should remember Icarus, who found that when someone flies too near the "Sun" he comes to earth with an almighty crash.

I believe that British voters are understandably disillusioned with politicians who make false promises that cannot be sustained because they never stood up in the first place. The Liberal Democrats' message is simple: "You know you get nothing for nothing. Good things have to be paid for. If tax cuts are to be sustainable, the economy has to have delivered the fruits of success. So if you vote for the economic policies of either Labour or the Tories you are doomed to disappointment. Liberal Democrats could make all the difference."

7.48 pm

Mr. John Townend (Bridlington): The Chancellor of the Exchequer has shot the fox of the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown), who expected to be able to stand up and condemn him for a giveaway Budget and an attempt to bribe the electors in order to win the general election. Clearly the hon. Gentleman got it all wrong, because one would not get an enormous number of votes with tax cuts of £3.25 billion.

My right hon. and learned Friend has acted fiscally responsibly over tax cuts, because he has matched them pound for pound with spending cuts. That should please the markets, and it will give my right hon. and learned Friend a window of opportunity to cut interest rates in weeks rather than months.

That is vital if the Government are to achieve their target of 3 per cent. growth in 1995. Growth has slowed in recent months. The housing market is flat, the construction industry is in decline, retail business in the high street is weak, business confidence is dropping, and exports are slowing. So a boost to business confidence and consumer confidence is needed. By themselves, £3.25 billion-worth of tax cuts are not sufficient. They need to be accompanied by lower interest rates.

The Budget should not be judged in isolation. There will be another Budget before the election, and it is imperative that the Government continue to cut public expenditure so that they are in a position to make further tax cuts next year. With regard to specific tax changes, I strongly welcome all of them. They will be especially welcomed by the public who have had to bear three years of tax increases. I should like to mention one or two of those changes.

I am particularly pleased with the help to be given to businesses and small businesses. The marginal relief on business rates is to be welcomed, although we should look at the whole basis of the calculation of valuation of small shops for rent. At present, they are disadvantaged compared with large shops and supermarkets. The lower corporation tax is also welcome, but, above all, the abolition of inheritance tax on private businesses is long overdue. When the Opposition were in power—there is no doubt about it—many fine private family businesses had to be sold because of the old death duties.

As a third-generation wine merchant, I am delighted that my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor has cut whisky duties. I am also relieved that there have been no further duty increases on beer and wine. But the long-term problem of higher duties will have to be dealt

with—I had hoped that this year the Chancellor might have made a start—because smuggling is increasing rapidly.

What worries me, with my experience of the industry, is that criminal elements are becoming involved. We all remember what happened during prohibition in the United states when the Mafia got involved in the drinks industry. The Mafia did not go away when prohibition ended. At some stage we shall have to deal with the problem. We cannot have an open market. Our own industry has been put at a disadvantage. We do not need to come down to the level of duties of the continentals, but we need to halve the difference. We could do that at one stroke if we put 1 per cent. on VAT. I do not expect my right hon. and learned Friend to do that. Nevertheless, the problem will not go away.

As a Member who represents a constituency where retirement is a major industry, I agree with my right hon. Friend the Member for South Norfolk (Mr. MacGregor) and strongly welcome the changes with regard to the level of assets in old people's homes.

I turn to direct taxation, which is one of the most important aspects of the Budget. I do not think that it has got home to many people that we now have a basic 20p tax rate for all savings. On all savings—in building societies, banks and shares—people will pay only 20 per cent. tax. That is a great achievement. The widening of the band brings the day nearer when the majority of people will pay a 20 per cent. tax rate.

We have heard all about the so-called 10 per cent. rate that the Labour party is proposing. It is a confidence trick. I have been on a number of media shows—television and radio—in recent days with members of the Opposition. One member of the Opposition Front-Bench team said, when challenged about how much the rate would cost, "Ah, but it is only going to be a band." A band can be as little as £500 or £1,000, which would produce only a 10 per cent. tax saving. The proposal is a confidence trick, and it is dishonest.

There is complete chaos in the Labour party. I was also on television with the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley), who said that Labour should cut taxes at the low end and pay for them by increasing them at the upper end. I think that the right hon. Gentleman represents—probably—more members of the Labour party than the Leader of the Opposition.

I want to say a little about spending, because, in view of my long-expressed views, I am naturally disappointed that reductions in public spending were not greater. I am a little perturbed that the results of the very good work done by my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury on cutting departmental spending were completely absorbed by increases in the priority areas of education, health and the police. All the tax cuts were financed by reductions in the contingency fund.

However, it would be churlish to ignore the Chancellor's achievements, for this is the first time since Mr. Healey capitulated to the International Monetary Fund and cut spending over two years by 8 per cent. in real terms that general Government expenditure has been cut in real terms by 1 per cent. If that was the beginning of year-on-year reductions, I would be delighted. However, I find it disappointing that, after a 1 per cent. cut this year, the Red Book shows that, in the following two years, spending is set to rise again by half a per cent. each year.

The Government must give priority to reducing taxation. If one turns to page 88 of the Red Book, which shows tax revenue as a percentage of rises in gross domestic product, one sees the mountain that we have to climb to return to a lower tax regime. In the four years to 2000-01, tax as a proportion of GDP is projected to rise to 39 per cent.

We have to kill the doctrine of the inevitability of rising public expenditure. We need to change the culture in the public sector of "what matters is what we spend"; that things will be better if we spend another £1 billion on health or on education. We should concentrate on output, and what is achieved. When one considers how much we are putting into education, some of the recent reports on the standard of reading and spelling are very worrying.

We must judge a service on its output rather than its input. In the long term, we must take a long, hard look at spending on education and the national health service, as we are doing with the social security budget. There is no doubt that, although they are priority areas, they are very big organisations. I am sure that there is as much waste and over-management in those areas as there is in any other.

We still have a few sacred cows. In overseas aid, there have been no cuts in bilateral aid, and the Red Book says that we are the fifth largest donor in the world. We are also told that we are the 18th wealthiest country. Furthermore, some of the money donated is wasted. "The Cook Report" on television last night was very interesting, because it showed that £1 billion has been wasted in Albania.

I draw my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary's attention to the fact that he should look next year at Scotland, Wales and Ireland. We all know that expenditure in Scotland costs 30 per cent. more per head than in England. Expenditure in England is just over £2,000 a head, in Scotland it is £2,900 a head, and in Wales it is £2,365. Yet expenditure per head in Northern Ireland is more than £5,000 a head, which is set to be increased under existing plans by adding £130 million this year and £190 million next year to the budget. There should be a peace dividend from Northern Ireland—at least they are not blowing everybody up.

We have started on a long journey to bring taxes down eventually to below the level they were at the last election. That must go hand in hand with reducing spending as a proportion of GDP and progressively continuing to move, as my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor plans, to a balanced Budget.

We have no differences in our party on those aspirations. My right hon. and learned Friend and I agree. The only slight difference we have is the speed at which we travel. But it is vital that we make a major stride forward in next year's Budget and then set out our programme for the next five-year Parliament to bring taxation and spending down in the long term to or below 37.5 per cent. of GDP. I strongly support all the taxation measures in this Budget.

7.58 pm

Mr. Thomas McAvoy (Glasgow, Rutherglen): We have just had a demonstration of what the Chancellor called "the slash-and-burn tendency". The remarks of the

[Mr. Thomas McAvoy]

hon. Member for Bridlington (Mr. Townend) about Scotland and Wales, and especially about Northern Ireland, were clearly misjudged.

I regret that the Chief Secretary is not in his place, since I took what he said at the start of his speech as a serious confession. He said that he had attacked the Government in 1980 purely and simply to get a job with them. Of course, he eventually succeeded. It certainly told me a great deal about his inner strength.

The right hon. Gentleman is the Chief Secretary of a Government who have increased taxes over the past three years, after they made an election manifesto commitment not to increase taxes. Some measure of humility might have been in order. Although it might have been hard for someone from the Chief Secretary's class to make an apology to the country, he might have said with some humility that the Government were responsible for those tax increases. The nemesis of the Government will come sooner or later, but it will certainly come; and the Chief Secretary's nemesis may come even sooner.

The Chancellor realised early on that the British people would not be fooled by the tax cuts that his Back Benchers wanted. He knew full well that to come up with those tax cuts, even against the fiscal advice of his own Back Benchers, would have told on him, because the Government still have around their neck the fact that they have increased taxes by the equivalent of 7p on the basic rate. I know that they do not like us to repeat it, but that figure should be repeated again and again. Even after the Budget, with its certain level of tax cuts, a typical family will still be worse off by £670 per annum. That is the measure and the achievement of the Conservative Government.

Another reason—I hope, the most important reason—that the Chancellor took into account in his decision not to cut taxes further was the amount of debt that the Government owe. For years, the Labour party has had to withstand lectures from Conservative Members that it was not fiscally correct, could not run a Government, and could not handle the finances of a Government or run the country. When I think of black Wednesday and the state of the Government, I am not inclined—more importantly, the people of this country are not inclined—to listen to lectures from any Conservative Member, and especially from those on the Government Front Bench, with their record of running the country.

I do not see anything in the Budget to help industry in my constituency. The Hoover domestic appliance plant, which has an excellent export record, is in my constituency. I do not see any measures to help that company to operate and expand its market. The company and its work force have an excellent export record. I do not see any measures from the Government to help such companies. There is not much joy for my constituents in the Budget.

The hon. Member for Bridlington mentioned spending in Scotland. It is a fact of life that the Scottish Office, according to the expenditure plans announced yesterday, faces a sharp reduction in its annual budget over the next few years as a result of an overall cut in Government spending. Although the Secretary of State for Scotland—as a tactical move—chose to stress that the £173 million increase in cash terms in next year's total allocation was the highest ever, the fact is that the amount of money allotted pro rata to the Scottish Office has been reduced.

The Secretary of State has failed to fight his corner, and he has failed to fight Scotland's corner. The figures show that the Secretary of State for Scotland has had to accept a £320 million cut in real terms to next year's budget, and his Department faces cuts rising to 5 per cent. in the financial year 1998-99. The Secretary of State has failed to fight his corner against the Treasury.

I echo some of the comments made by a former Secretary of State for Transport, the right hon. Member for South Norfolk (Mr. MacGregor), about cuts in the roads programme. I am a member and a supporter of the west coast main line group. I support rail services. I do not support motorway madness or roads for their own sake.

The fact of life is that the economic life of this country depends on an efficient road system for industry and commerce. Now we have a £4 billion brake on new routes because of cuts in that programme. That is purely and simply a short-sighted, short-term measure to respond to an immediate situation. The Government are putting off the evil day, because they think that we can do without the roads for another year or so, but damage will be done to haulage, freight companies and the economy as a whole because delays and traffic jams result in so much cost to the country. The Government's decision is short-sighted.

I know that the environmental lobby will argue, with some justification, about a reduction in road traffic. The Government have not mentioned the excellent report by the RAC, in which it suggests ideas which would cut car journeys by 20 per cent. I am in favour of cutting car journeys. It is ridiculous that an organisation such as the RAC, in a genuine attempt to tackle the problem of traffic, can come up with innovative ideas and methods that sometimes go against the interests of the car owner, when all that the Government can come up with is a £4 billion cut in the roads programme.

The hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) is not in his place. He was in the Chamber for some time, waiting to speak. I am sorry that he is not here. I am sick to the teeth of the hypocrisy of the Liberal party, which preaches one thing in one area and something else in another. The hon. Gentleman said that his party was in favour of cutting the roads programme, yet the Liberals make a special case wherever it suits them to do so. In my constituency, the Liberals are campaigning against a project to complete a 12-mile motorway link. I welcome the hon. Gentleman's comments, but some motorway building is essential.

Mr. Eddie Loyden (Liverpool, Garston): Does my hon. Friend think it a good idea that we should begin to consider reviving the coastal merchant fleet? It is the most environmentally acceptable method of transport and one that we should fight for. Places in Scotland and the rest of the United Kingdom would benefit from shipbuilding. Coastal vessels could transport most of our goods around the coast without all the environmental problems that roads bring.

Mr. McAvoy: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that brief intervention—I think. I look forward to intervening in his speech at some point, especially during a 10-minute limit on speeches. My hon. Friend's point is correct. We have under-utilised resources and methods of transport

such as that mentioned by my hon. Friend. The Government's short-termism has failed to take account of that.

Of all the Budget measures announced by the Government, the one that describes the Government and their ethos best is the cuts in special benefits for lone parents and in housing benefit for the under-25s. That is a disgrace. The Chancellor claims to be a one-nation Tory. The nation will pay the price of treating its young people in that way, and the Government will certainly pay the price, too. Despite the Government's efforts to discourage that section of the population from registering, young people will fall over themselves to make sure that they are registered somewhere in time for the next general election. That will be their chance to seek revenge on the Government.

8.7 pm

Mr. Robert Hicks (South-East Cornwall): The Budget confirms that my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor is determined to secure sustainable economic growth in a low-inflation environment. If, as a consequence of the measures announced yesterday, we can expect further reductions in interest rates sooner rather than later, that is to be welcomed.

Much has been written and spoken about tax rates. Given my right hon. and learned Friend's approach and his wish to help specific sectors of the economy and particular groups, he was right to limit the reduction in the standard rate to 1p. As the parliamentary representative for a low-income area, I have always argued that in a tight financial situation it is more important to increase personal allowances than to cut tax rates. I welcome my right hon. and learned Friend's decision to increase personal allowances above the level of inflation.

I am pleased about a number of other measures, one of which specifically relates to the proposed assistance for people in residential and nursing homes. The existing financial arrangements are certainly too harsh in their application, and they undoubtedly penalise the thrifty and cause widespread anxieties among families. On public expenditure, I welcome the Chancellor's decision to make additional financial resources available in real terms for education, health and the police. There will be widespread public support for that decision.

The purpose of my speech is to make a number of comments about public expenditure as part of the unified Budget as it relates to the economy of the south-west, and Devon and Cornwall in particular. The House will know that, historically, the economy of Devon and Cornwall has been dependent upon primary activities such as agriculture, fishing, mining and quarrying, and later on tourism and defence.

The south-west is the most dependent of all the United Kingdom regions on defence and defence-related economic activity. The changes in the United Kingdom's defence requirements have led to the loss of some 21,000 defence-related jobs in the past 10 years, with further reductions of 20 per cent. forecast between now and the year 2001. The loss of income to the local economy through defence reductions is estimated to be in excess of £500 million.

Unemployment levels in Devon and Cornwall are traditionally higher than in both the official south-west region and the United Kingdom as a whole. Forty-eight per cent. of the travel-to-work areas in Devon and Cornwall feature in the worst 33 per cent. of the United Kingdom's unemployment black spots. Conversely, average earnings in the area are significantly below the United Kingdom national average. In my constituency, average earnings are 16 per cent. below the national average.

It is often said that our cost of living is lower. I wish that that were the case, but nothing could be further from the truth. The cost of living in my area is some 8 per cent. above the United Kingdom average, and this is compounded by the wide discrepancy in average council tax bills. For example, the average council tax bill in Cornwall last year was £447, which was 51 per cent. above the average in South Glamorgan. I would hardly consider Cornwall to be a spendthrift county, and it is more likely that this significant differential reflects a more favourable grant settlement for Wales than for England.

While I am not seeking on this occasion to question the overall level of public expenditure, I am seeking to influence Ministers to agree to a more equitable distribution that takes into account the genuine needs of the far south-west. It is only right that we in the far south-west do everything within our power to help ourselves, and this we will do. Indeed, the fact that we are helping ourselves will be evident from our tangible achievements in attracting foreign inward investment into Devon and Cornwall.

A total of £48 million of inward investment was gained last year, which resulted in the creation of 895 new jobs and the safeguarding of a further 550 existing jobs. The figures for the year beginning April 1995 are even more encouraging. Some £64 million in investment has been gained so far, leading to the creation of 1,237 new jobs and the safeguarding of 595 jobs. That is excellent news, and it is evidence that we are prepared to help ourselves. But just as the UK's industry, commerce and business in general seek a level playing field in their dealings with our European Union partners, so Devon and Cornwall require the same conditions in terms of the support we receive from the Government through public expenditure compared with the funds allocated to other parts of the United Kingdom.

I shall provide the House with two sets of figures to illustrate the existing unfairness. Last year, Devon and Cornwall received less than 1 per cent. of the national single regeneration budget, despite having almost 3 per cent. of the United Kingdom's unemployed people. Yorkshire and Humberside—with approximately the same percentage of unemployed people—received £19.2 million, or four times the allocation for Devon and Cornwall.

Secondly, taking Government aid and support as a whole, Devon and Cornwall last year received just £50 million in total, compared with £187 million for Wales and £530 million for Scotland. All these figures are taken from either the reports on the regional economy prepared by the Plymouth business school or the two independent reports prepared by Coopers and Lybrand. In addition, our regional daily newspaper, *The Western Morning News*, initiated in September a responsible and objective campaign for a better deal for the far south-west.

[Mr. Robert Hicks]

The Prime Minister and senior Ministers are aware of the findings of the independent reports, but there is increasing frustration and anger manifesting itself within the far south-west about the inability or unwillingness of the Government to respond to our genuine economic and social needs. When the Prime Minister received these reports 12 months ago, he said:

"We shall certainly take account of your points in allocating resources".

We are at that time in the political calendar when the decisions determining public expenditure allocations are made. I just hope that due consideration will be given this year to meeting the requirements of Devon and Cornwall.

8.17 pm

Mr. Harry Barnes (North-East Derbyshire): The speech of the hon. Member for South-East Cornwall (Mr. Hicks) was very different from that of the hon. Member for Bridlington (Mr. Townend). It was not just that the hon. Member for South-East Cornwall made a constituency speech, but that he referred to equitable distribution and how that related to the income tax provisions. Those points were entirely absent from the speech of the hon. Member for Bridlington, and I found myself at the opposite end of the political spectrum from every point made by the hon. Gentleman in his speech.

I wish that there was greater honesty from the Government in our Budget debates in the House. I realise that, in politics, that may be a wild wish, but we seem to have moved into a dangerous era of news management. We have had a Budget statement and debate in which some of the priorities have not been referred to at length. We have spent a lot of time debating the extra 50 per cent. on strong cider that will raise £5 million, and we have almost passed over what is happening with regard to VAT. Only one brief reference was made to that matter, although there are some proposals in the Budget which are aimed to raise £600 million by altering the accountancy schemes that operate in the collection of VAT. That is quite important. Will the scheme function? We are talking about a large amount of money.

News management does not merely take place when the Chancellor is addressing the television cameras in here. When we get to look at documents relevant to the Budget in the Vote Office, we find that some are press releases that are intended as news management. The Treasury argues that the average family will be about £450 a year better off and certain newspapers will pick up on that, but when one reads the qualifying remarks, one finds that it is talking about hoped-for economic growth, improvements in wages and other provisions and that that is what it is all about. Really, when one talks about the financial consequences of the Budget for an average family, if there is such a thing, one should consider the amount of money that will result from the Budget itself.

What was to be the Chancellor's final word on tax cuts? That was what everyone was concentrating on. We discover from the Red Book that, all told, income tax cuts account for about £3.7 billion. More than half that amount comes from the avenues that the hon. Member for South-East Cornwall mentioned and from alterations in the bands and allowances. That is interesting because, if we had had none of that, we could have had a tax cut of 2p in the pound instead, which was the headline that many people were looking for.

At least the cut in the Budget shows that the Chancellor is giving some consideration to other factors that need to be taken into account, although the Budget is generally entirely inadequate and inappropriate for our needs and does not do anything for investment and growth, as the Opposition Front-Bench team has said.

Where does that £3.7 billion come from? As I said in an earlier intervention, £3.2 billion is from the reserves. I do not want to over-egg the argument because there are some technical reasons why it is as much as that. Higher figures are given for reserves for the year ahead and the year ahead of that. As one moves into the fresh year, one always takes a certain amount of money out of the reserve, but it is a fact that, at the time of the autumn statement in November 1992, the contingency reserves stood at £4 billion and they are now down to £2.5 billion. Those reserves are gradually being raided and we may be in a precarious position if some of the other items contained within the Red Book do not function properly.

That is a serious consideration and it seems to have been recognised in a number of contributions tonight. People realise that that is where the money is coming from. If all of it has not come from raiding the reserves, at least a part of it—the tax cuts—has, and I do not think that that is a healthy position for us to be in, especially as some of the rest is expected to come from tackling social security fraud. Hon. Members have already expressed doubts as to whether it will be tackled to the extent indicated. So there seems to be something economically dodgy about balancing the amounts.

On the equity considerations, the arguments expressed by the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce), the Liberal Democrat spokesman, are important. We have been told that local authority expenditure on education will increase by something like 4.5 per cent., which is an increase in monetary terms. When we take into account inflation rates, it becomes an increase of about 1.25 per cent. The problem is that the latter figure is then tied in with the local government figure. We are told that local government expenditure will increase by 3.3 per cent.—just a little ahead of the inflation rate—so there will be no increased money for local government, although education has been granted that increase in expenditure. Cuts will therefore have to be made in other areas.

In one area—the fire brigade—equity runs in favour of Cornwall and not Derbyshire. The length of coastline is taken into account in the formula. Cornwall has a considerably longer coastline than Derbyshire, which is in the middle of the country and so has no coast at all. On grounds of equity, it seems that that arrangement should be altered.

It is little wonder that some money is being found for education, given the organisation, petitioning, lobbying and demonstrations with which parents, children and teachers have been involved. They have got some response. As always with this Government, however, when one gets a response in one area because of pressure, there have to be cuts in other areas—often areas of considerable need.

In Derbyshire, we have considerable problems in other areas, such as social service provision. I believe that tomorrow we will hear an important statement from the

Secretary of State for the Environment, which concerns district councils and will be of vast importance to Derbyshire. The problem is not only the size of the total bill and whether it is being raided in areas other than education, but the massive problem of the avenues of distribution, which is of considerable importance in Derbyshire.

North-east Derbyshire has one of the worst-funded district councils in England per head of population. It is unbelievable when one considers the nature of the area. I know how it works because I know something of the nature of the formula that operates. It is a fiddled formula and happens to hit us from all directions.

We need a more open and honest Government, who will explain what they are up to and are not merely trying to manoeuvre and manipulate people when they produce Budgets. Greater expenditure is justified in many areas, such as overseas development. The peace dividend in Northern Ireland should be spent in Northern Ireland. Those are the sort of things that we should be able to get our teeth into in these Budget debates.

8.27 pm

Sir Andrew Bowden (Brighton, Kemptown): There is no question but that the Chancellor presented a highly responsible Budget yesterday in the face of a propaganda campaign conducted by the official Opposition in which they claimed that everything that the Government have done and said in the past six months was designed purely to provide massive sums of money for huge—and irresponsible—tax cuts. Yet again, they have been shown to be totally wrong. I hope, however, that the Chancellor will be able to follow it up in the very near future with a significant cut in the interest rate.

On education, we must be careful to recall that we are talking about expenditure in the next financial year. There is every prospect that, in that financial year—beginning April 1996—the inflation rate will not be in excess of 2.5 per cent. That means that the increase in expenditure on and money made available for education will be nearly double the rate of inflation. Local authorities will certainly be able to maintain services in their areas and, in many cases, they will be able to improve them.

In East Sussex, which covers my area of Brighton, the settlement exposes the hypocrisy of the campaign organised by the controlling political parties on East Sussex county council, which have been going around Brighton and the county saying that, within the next three financial years, there will have to be massive cuts in expenditure on education. They were talking about £24 million pounds. Such a cut was never going to happen and the new announcement of the money that is to be available has shot the campaign to pieces.

Unfortunately, many parents were seriously worried and upset by what I can only describe as a scandalous campaign. We now need a community campaign in East Sussex and Brighton conducted by parents, school governors and teachers to ensure that that additional money is spent in the county's education budget. Without one, I suspect that the county will find excuses for not doing so.

I want now to deal with pensioner issues. I warmly welcome the proposals on long-term care. They will give many families more financial security and greater peace of mind. The director general of Age Concern England, Sally Greengross, stated:

"Older people who are worried about paying for care will be delighted to hear the proposals in regard to the capital limits for residential and nursing home care."

That is indeed a major step forward, but it is just the first step.

The Government have said that they are preparing a consultative document on some of the problems of long-term care. I hope that that document will contain a range of proposals and possibilities so that there can be widespread consideration of the options. I hope that the document will include the possibility of people being able to buy equity in residential homes and/or to purchase a room in a residential home. That would help many people to preserve part, if not all, of the capital derived from the property that they owned and, when they died, the proceeds of selling their equity or room in the residential home could be passed down in the family.

There are two groups of pensioners that concern me deeply. There are those who do not claim income support when they could and those who have a few pounds a week above the income support level. Many of them will be worse off than people in receipt of income support. We have not yet found a way of giving the help and support that we should to those sections of retired people.

I am upset with one thing in the Budget—the Government's decision to cut the home energy efficiency scheme. Until the Budget, it was open to pensioners as a whole. Now, as I understand it, it will be limited to those on income support. That will create hardship and difficulties for those who do not claim income support when they could and for those who have only a few pounds a week above the level of income support. I submit to the Government Front Bench, with great respect, that that should be carefully reviewed. I hope that the decision will be reversed.

The payment of council tax on elderly relatives' annexes is another matter that has not been clarified by my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor and it needs to be clarified as quickly as possible. A compromise might be that, if a flat can be sold separately, it should be liable for council tax, but if it cannot be sold separately, it should not be liable for council tax.

The Budget is a harbinger of good things to come. The country can be grateful that we have a Chancellor with great courage and integrity.

8.34 pm

Mr. Bill Etherington (Sunderland, North): When the Chancellor of the Exchequer made his statement yesterday, I took particular note of two sentences that he uttered early on. He said that he would seek

"greater wealth and personal prosperity in which all can share"

and that he would like to

"give the weak and the less fortunate a helping hand."—[*Official Report*, 28 November 1995; Vol. 267, c. 1055-56.]

I am afraid that, given the use of those terms, the Chancellor's statement was disappointing and, indeed, a miserable failure. He is not going to do anything of the sort.

[Mr. Bill Etherington]

Another illuminating point, which the plethora of media publications since the Chancellor's statement do not seem to have picked up on, was that the Chancellor mentioned that tax receipts last year were lower than expected. I was alarmed to hear that he is looking for more privatisation of public services and more private investment in public services. I think that the Government were the first to use the term "double whammy". That is a classic example of a double whammy because it can be guaranteed that the pursuit of those philosophies will mean that the public will have to pay more for services, not less.

I was intrigued by the Chancellor's section on transport and I praise his nice attitude on the treatment of veteran vehicles. I think that they are veteran vehicles when they are over 25 years old, but they might be vintage. Certainly people treasure such vehicles. If people do not have a vehicle on the road, they should not have to pay tax.

I was somewhat beguiled by the idea that one can somehow improve things by increasing the tax on fuel for road vehicles and the road fund tax—presumably to try to cut emissions, although the only way to do that is to reduce the number of miles that are run. At the same time, however, we are led to believe that there will be a considerable reduction in public expenditure on transport, especially public transport. Albeit on a small scale, there will be an increase in the cost of motoring. Many people have no choice but to use a vehicle—and they are not all well off—yet there is no credible alternative in the way of a well-integrated public transport system with proper investment. I found that strange. It is a short-term policy.

I had the dubious pleasure this morning of listening to the Secretary of State for Social Security on Radio 4 after the 7 am news. For once, he sounded uncharacteristically unconvincing when speaking about the Government's policies on single parents. The reason that he sounded unconvincing might be to his credit because he was, after all, trying to defend the indefensible. We should take the attitude of the Secretary of State in conjunction with the proposals on housing benefit. We are talking about two of the most vulnerable sections of society, but where is the helping hand for them? They are not getting the helping hand; they are getting the reverse.

Do the Government really believe, after years and years of under-investment in housing and the rise of private landlords brought about by their deregulation policies, that people on housing benefit are in a position to negotiate with their landlords to get a reduction in rent simply because the Government think that it is possible? Does anyone really believe that that is a credible proposition? My experience suggests the opposite.

Recently, one of my constituents was being threatened by her landlord. If she was not to be out on the street, she had to give him £10 a week in addition to the housing benefit that he received directly. He would not give her a rent book or a receipt. That is the sort of behaviour that is bred by the Government's present housing policy. I will say a little more about that later.

We are also led to believe that the reduction in tax on savings to 20p in the pound is a wonderful thing. What about investment income? We are told that the Chancellor wants to reward hard-working people, but I do not think that he rewards them by taxing what they earn at a higher rate than he taxes investment income. A millionaire who has invested £1 million can get away with paying tax at 20p in the pound, yet people on relatively moderate incomes must pay tax at a rate of 40p in the pound. That does not seem very satisfactory.

The Chancellor said that he believes that the Government can afford a 1p reduction in tax. That is notwithstanding the fact that the education budget has been cut consistently for many years. The council in my constituency is so strapped for cash that it has had to cut many education services and it is dreading—as I am—tomorrow's statement. It has also closed welfare rights agencies because of chronic underfunding through the Revenue support grant. I hope that, tomorrow, my local council, Sunderland city council, will be allocated the same amount of money as Westminster city council. That would solve all of my problems.

If the Chancellor can afford the 1p reduction in tax, which advantages those on high earnings disproportionately, why can he not afford to reduce value added tax on fuel? That would have given a helping hand to those in need, but there was nothing of that nature in the Budget.

I welcome the fact that tax on beer is not to be increased. I am fairly neutral on the subject of duty on whisky, but I am intrigued about why the duty on strong cider must be increased. If the tax increase is based on alcoholic content, why are spirits and wine—which are stronger than cider—not taxed in the same manner? I am still trying to work it out; it does not seem very logical.

On housing, I must declare an interest. I belong to the Durham Aged Mineworkers Homes Association, which comes under the auspices of the Charities Commission and is involved with the almshouse legislation. There will be 51,000 new social lettings this year, which is 9,000 fewer than the Government's lowest estimate. The cut from £1.5 billion to £1.1 billion will feed through into 18,000 fewer jobs next year—almost 10,000 fewer in the construction industry—and 30,000 fewer in the following year.

That will have a drastic effect in the northern region, where next year the number of homes that housing associations can start will fall from 3,097—which was the figure first promised—to only 1,670. That is a reduction of almost 50 per cent. Yet the Chancellor says that he is trying to do something about the housing sector. The only thing that he has done is introduce the spectre of more private landlords—and anyone who has studied history dreads that.

I believe that the Budget is based on economic failure. The hon. Member for Brighton, Kemptown (Sir A. Bowden) described it as a prudent Budget which was not quite what was expected. I agree that it is a prudent Budget in some respects, but it does not address any of the problems that I face in my constituency. It will not alter society for the better—indeed, I believe that it will have the opposite effect.

Much has been said about the Labour party's position on the 1p reduction in income tax and whether we will vote against it. I do not pretend to speak for the party; I just try to speak honestly for myself. One has to be prudent, but I must admit that I shall find it very difficult to resist voting against the 1p decrease because I think that it is regressive and to be deplored.

8.43 pm

Mr. Matthew Carrington (Fulham): At the outset, I declare my interests as they appear in the Register of Members' Interests—although I do not think that they will be very relevant to my speech tonight.

It is a great pleasure to support a very cautious and prudent Budget. The last few Budgets were necessary, but I cannot say that they were altogether pleasant. It is never pleasant to be forced to raise taxes but, coming out of a recession, it was necessary. For a party that is always strongly committed to reducing the tax burden, it was an unfortunate necessity.

The medicine has worked, however, and the economy is now doing extremely well. Our inflation rate is low—historically, it is at a very low level—and there are very few signs of inflationary pressures in the economy. Unemployment is decreasing, and it has been doing so consistently for a long time. Even the public sector borrowing requirement is decreasing fast—it decreased by £7 billion last year. The only problem is that it is not decreasing as fast as was projected originally and we are contemplating being one year behind the initial predictions.

Nevertheless, growth in the economy has been good. Last year, at 4 per cent., economic growth was too good as such a level is unsustainable in our economy. This year, the growth rate has reduced to a very healthy 2.75 per cent. That is still well above the economy's trend rate, which is some 2.25 per cent. With a rise expected next year, I think that we can be content that economic growth is very strong and not leading to inflation.

We are seeing signs of long-term, sustainable growth and that means that the supply side reforms for which the Government fought over 16 years are at last having an effect. All of that good news led my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor to produce a cautious Budget in which he did fundamentally very little. Although the economy is doing well, the recovery is still patchy.

The outlook is favourable for exporters, but two sectors of the domestic market—the retail sector and the housing market—are not doing well. I believe that it is correct to put money back into the pockets of individuals who can then spend it as they wish. That boosts retail sales directly and the building and housing markets indirectly. Tax cuts are the most effective way of putting money back into people's pockets and, as such, are entirely justified. They are a very sensible way of helping two sectors of the economy that have been in serious trouble.

However, I do not believe that tax cuts by themselves are enough. We now need substantial cuts in interest rates. Such cuts will not do very much for industry directly—after all, interest rates are at historically low levels and industrial investment decisions are unlikely to be influenced by further reductions in interest rates—but investment decisions are likely to be influenced by demand in the economy for the goods that industry can provide.

I do not believe that interest rate cuts will assist the housing market. House prices are now very low and houses are extremely affordable in income terms. Interest rate cuts will put more money back into people's pockets. They will have the same effect as tax cuts to—increase demand and, in turn, increase investment in industry. They will also increase people's willingness to spend money on their houses.

I should like base rates to be cut by 0.5 per cent. before Christmas, followed by another 0.5 per cent. cut fairly soon after that. I believe that a 1 per cent. cut in interest rates is entirely sustainable and I do not believe that it would adversely affect our exchange rate—particularly as German interest rates are now on a downward trend.

I must, however, mention one or two matters about which I am less happy. The first is the uniform business rate and its effect on London. My right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor said in his Budget statement that, in parts of the country where rateable values are increasing, the uniform business rate is to be phased in more slowly than originally intended. In London, we suffer from the reverse problem. When the uniform business rate was introduced in 1988, property prices were extremely high. The revaluation that followed was done when property prices in London had come off the peak, and many businesses found that the notional reduction in their uniform business rate was phased in very slowly.

There should be a better balance between the phasing in of increases in parts of the country that are suffering them and the phasing in of decreases in London. Business in London, especially retail business, is in very poor shape at the moment and would benefit enormously from a reduction in rates.

My final argument is more technical. The Budget will lead inevitably to a very complex Finance Bill. There are technical changes in the tax structure that will be hard to put into a short and easily understood Finance Bill. As a veteran of many Finance Bills, and having sat on many Finance Bill Committees, I know the problems that confront the Committee when it has to examine highly technical clauses. There is neither the time to examine them in the detail needed nor, occasionally, the expertise in the Committee necessary to give them the scrutiny they deserve.

That problem should be tackled and there are several ways in which it might be done. The most obvious way, as several of us have suggested for some time, is to separate the technical taxes management aspects from the tax changes and put them into a separate Bill, which might be examined by a Committee that had the time to examine them thoroughly.

Alternatively, expert evidence might be taken on the highly technical clauses. That might be done by a Standing Committee with a dispensation of the House, or the Bill might be passed initially to the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee to pre-vet those clauses, take evidence if required and produce a report for the Finance Bill Committee to consider.

One thing is certain. The technical clauses in the Finance Bill do not receive the scrutiny that they deserve. We end up returning to them year after year to change what we have passed in the previous years, which is highly unsatisfactory.

The Budget has done what is needed in the economy. I believe that it gives us that wonderful goal that we have searched for for years—sustainable, low-inflation growth. I hope, therefore, that it will lead to greater things in the Budget next year.

8.52 pm

Mr. Denis MacShane (Rotherham): I joined the Labour party about a quarter of a century ago, and I

[Mr. Denis MacShane]

remember that the first great disappointment of my youthful membership was the introduction of a Budget by one Roy Jenkins, now a Member of another House, which led straight to Labour's defeat in 1970.

From a political point of view, the Budget presented yesterday by the Chancellor smacks very much of the same Treasury orthodoxy—cautious, candle-ends, steady-as-she-goes manipulation of the nation's finances, which, although the orthodox economists at the Treasury may smile about the fact that they have mastered their man, may lead to considerable political dismay in the Conservative party. We were aware of that yesterday, when the only cheer or smile came when the Chancellor announced that he would lift the vehicle tax on Bentleys and Bugattis. For the rest, it was a poor and dull reception indeed.

As we are discussing Mr. Jenkins and one of his successors, the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke), let me turn to another Conservative philosopher, who once said:

"The whole business of the poor is to administer to the idleness, folly and luxury of the rich, and that of the rich, in return, is to find the best methods of increasing the burdens of the poor."

The Paymaster General, a learned graduate of Oxford university—I wish to apologise to him and to my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Darling) for the fact that I must leave before the winding-up speeches—will recognise that quotation from Edmund Burke. Would that we had a Burke here today, to flay the creation of a two or even three-nation society, which the Budget will only exacerbate.

Twenty-one new taxes have been imposed since 1992, every one bearing mainly on the poorer members of the community. We are told that the Chancellor's decisions since 1992, reinforced by the Budget, will help to steer the British economy on to a more stable course, yet we are 18th in the world gross domestic product per capita league, having slipped from 13th since 1979.

Inflation here is higher than in the majority of European Union countries, including our main competitor partners. In its latest quarterly report, the Bank of England condemns the decrease in productivity improvements, especially the increase in unit wage costs, and we have the lowest investment witnessed for about 30 years.

That bears down especially hard on my constituents, because I have to see the Budget refracted through the eyes of the people of Rotherham, and not many live in £200,000 houses there. Not many have handsome investment incomes from savings who will benefit from the tax cuts that the Chancellor has made. On the other hand, 12.5 per cent. of the working population are unemployed—12,000 people altogether. One in five people under the age of 25 in Rotherham are out of work, and are now under a new onslaught as the money is taken from them to put into the pockets of the rich.

Is there any hope from the Budget for my constituents? It is a Budget that slashes a dagger at the arteries of investment, with £100 million taken away in grants to housing associations. That means that 35,000 fewer houses will be built this year as a result of those costs, and the construction workers and the small building firms of Rotherham will be left to face bankruptcy and despair. There are cuts of £190 million in the roads programme—another blow for domestic construction and the civil engineering programme.

The business men of Rotherham and South Yorkshire wrote to the Chancellor last week. They begged him for any tax breaks in the Budget to be targeted at industry through increased capital allowances: no hope there. They welcome the private finance initiative, but find nothing in it for South Yorkshire, especially as those business men say that red tape defeats any efforts that they make to try to get the private finance initiative to work.

There is something very strange in the Red Book—a massive discrepancy, not only in the public sector borrowing requirement, but in other sectors, between what we were told last year and what actually happened. The Chancellor collected £1.1 billion less than he forecast last year in income tax, £700 million less in corporation tax than predicted last year and £1.5 billion less in value added tax than he predicted last year. There is an odd contradiction between the mood music that we constantly hear at DTI and Treasury Question Time about the economy getting stronger—indeed, the Prime Minister said in Prime Minister's questions on Tuesday that incomes were rising—and the fact that we are collecting less and less tax.

One reason may be the fact that tax avoidance remains one of the great growth industries in the British economy. As the hon. Member for Fulham (Mr. Carrington) suggested, tax legislation is the most complex legislation that the House passes. In fact, we have much the most complicated tax legislation in the world. Last year Rupert Murdoch made a profit of £960 million, but paid only £11 million in tax. What is the Chancellor's response to the fact that £15 billion to £17 billion has been lost in uncollected tax? His response is to fire 6,000 Inland Revenue employees who might be usefully employed gaining money for the state to help to balance the books.

Then we move on to the nightmare of self-assessment. Here I address my remarks to Front-Bench spokesmen of my own party. I do not know how many hon. Members have examined the nine new complicated forms that taxpayers will be expected to fill in under the proposed new self-assessment scheme, which will cover some 9 million taxpayers, but even at the height of the Soviet bureaucracy, the Soviet citizen was never plagued with a requirement to fill in such complicated forms. The Budget does not address the question of what we mean by and want from taxation; it contains neither innovation nor inspiration.

I welcomed the ideas presented by my hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown), the shadow Chancellor, in the run-up to the Budget. He recommended a windfall tax—an appropriate suggestion, given the profits declared today by Yorkshire Water—and taking swathes of people at the bottom of the income scale out of the tax band with his 10p proposal. Here was the beginning of serious, innovative thought about our outdated tax regime. After all, the taxation of our people implies a fundamental relationship with Government.

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury made much of his conservatism. He has been a Fellow of All Souls for many years; I must add that in recent months he has helped to turn his party into a lost cause. He will recall the words of his old mentor Disraeli, who said of conservatism:

"It offers no redress for the present, and makes no preparation for the future."

For my constituents in Rotherham, who live in the "two nations" Britain that the Chancellor and the Chief Secretary have created—people who cry out for redress of present ills and investment in future growth—the only answer is a change of Government.

9.1 pm

Mr. Tim Smith (Beaconsfield): Notwithstanding what the hon. Member for Rotherham (Mr. MacShane) has said, I wish to defend the Inland Revenue's record on self-assessment. I believe that it will lead to simplification. It simply is not true to say that every taxpayer will have to fill in nine forms; the average taxpayer will have to fill in the main form and one schedule. I have just received the latest pack of self-assessment forms from the Inland Revenue. The Revenue has simplified the system considerably following consultation, and I think that it has done a pretty good job. In the long run taxpayers should save money, and we should be able to ensure that revenue is collected with fewer staff.

Listening to the speech of the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown), I wondered whether he had actually read the Red Book. I suspect that he had not. He complained a great deal about the level of investment, but if he had looked at page 30 he would have seen that manufacturing investment is forecast to increase by more than 10 per cent. this year and in 1996.

Similarly, I wonder whether the hon. Member for Rotherham took the trouble to read the Red Book. He, too, complained about the Government's record on investment. On the same page, the Red Book tells us that business investment is forecast to increase by 9 per cent. in 1996. I should have thought that that was a pretty good record.

The hon. Member for Dunfermline, East also complained about the present state of the labour market. If he had turned to page 39 of the Red Book, he would have discovered that the employer survey measure of the labour market shows an increase of 510,000 jobs since the trough at the end of 1992. The labour force survey shows an even higher figure of 650,000 over the same period. That is a pretty good record. It contrasts sharply with what happened during the recovery after the last recession, when employment did not stop falling for about four years following the trough of the recession. It illustrates the current flexibility in the labour market, which now responds much more quickly to changes in demand.

I do not know whether you saw the hon. Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith) on "Newsnight" last night, Madam Deputy Speaker. Jeremy Paxman rightly pressed him on why the Opposition refuse to make up their mind about whether they are in favour of reducing the standard rate of income tax by 1p in the pound. Labour Members are going to abstain: they are neither for nor against the proposal. I was interested to observe that the hon. Member for Sunderland, North (Mr. Etherington) clearly feels pretty uncomfortable about that. His feeling is understandable. The position of the Liberal Democrats is at least honest and straightforward: they will vote against it. What do Opposition Front Benchers think about it? Are they for or against it? How can they possibly abstain? It was no surprise to me that the hon. Member for Oxford, East looked so uncomfortable on the television last night.

This is a responsible, prudent and sensible Budget. I particularly welcome the fact that public spending as a proportion of gross domestic product will soon fall below 40 per cent. There is always an interesting table in the Red Book. This year, it appears on page 139, and it shows the record of public spending over the past 30 years. It shows that, in the recession of the middle 1970s, public spending peaked at about 47 per cent. of GDP. In the recession of the early 1980s, it peaked at around 45 per cent. and in the most recent recession it peaked at around 43 per cent. We have been moving in the right direction over the past 20 years, but we should aim, once we have it below 40 per cent. of GDP, to keep it there.

The Governor of Hong Kong, Chris Patten, was quite right—he has learnt a little from his time in the far east—to say that there is a correlation between the proportion of public spending as a proportion of national income and economic growth rates. Countries in the far east spend a lower proportion of their GDP and have higher growth rates. That is a good target. We are making good progress towards achieving it and we should stick with it.

What has led to a higher public sector borrowing requirement for the current year and for next year is not the Government's failure to control public spending, which has been kept under effective control, but rather, as the hon. Member for Rotherham said, that revenues have not come in at the anticipated level. In particular, VAT revenues are down by about £4 billion from the amount forecast, and next year's VAT forecast is lower than that for this year. That may be because of a lower level of consumer spending than was forecast. It is hard to know precisely what has contributed to that. It may not be so much VAT as the duties on alcohol and spirits, because a great deal of alcohol is now imported from France. That may have something to do with it, but revenues are down, and that is the explanation.

It is important that we ensure that public sector borrowing continues on a downward path, which is precisely what my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor proposes. It will soon be below the Maastricht level of 3 per cent. Significantly, I noticed that my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary referred in his speech to capital expenditure, which is running at around £22.5 billion. That is quite a useful yardstick, too. The Government should not borrow more than the amount of capital spending in any particular year. It looks as though the two will coincide next year.

The Budget has also been criticised for not doing anything about investment. The Opposition came up with the tried but failed formula of increasing capital allowances. That did not work last time and it will not work if they ever have the chance to do that again, because it distorts capital spending decisions. What matters much more for investment is a stable economic climate, which is precisely what we have—low interest rates and low inflation.

The PFI has been criticised on the ground that there are not enough schemes to illustrate precisely what can be achieved. I should like to mention two, both of which will benefit my constituency. The first is a massive extension to Wycombe General hospital, which will cost £32 million. The project was proposed by South Buckinghamshire NHS trust and is financed by the Royal Bank of Scotland. I understand that the developer will be Taylor Woodrow. That is a hard and fast example of a project that will benefit NHS patients in my constituency.

[Mr. Tim Smith]

Another good example is the widening of the M40 from three to four lanes between Denham and High Wycombe. It is going ahead under a design, build, finance and operate contract. I hope very much that it will start in the middle of next year. It probably could not have been achieved without the PFI. Those two schemes will go ahead in the next 12 months.

Like my hon. Friends, I welcome the fact that education spending is to be increased. The key is to ensure that the £878 million that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment announced finds its way to the schools. I know that it is difficult to ring-fence this money, but we need some examples of how much each school would benefit if its budget were to be increased by 4.5 per cent.

I welcome the fact that the police are to get extra resources, and I understand that an announcement will be made tomorrow. I hope that Thames Valley police will get their share of the additional resources.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor made a welcome announcement about simpler legislation for Inland Revenue taxes. I echo what my hon. Friend the Member for Fulham (Mr. Carrington) said. It will provide the Procedure Committee with an opportunity to consider how we will deal with the additional legislation. My right hon. and learned Friend has proposed that all Inland Revenue taxes should be rewritten over a five-year period. I think that we should reconsider the idea of dividing up Finance Bills between the main taxation elements and the more technical elements.

The Budget is prudent and sensible and it will benefit consumers, taxpayers and the British economy alike.

9.11 pm

Mr. Robert Ainsworth (Coventry, North-East): The hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith) talked about the 500,000 jobs that have been created since the trough of the recession. He compared that with the last recession. Whose recession was that? That was also the Tory party's recession. If one picks the starting date and the finishing date carefully for statistics, one can prove almost anything.

Not long after the Government took office they created a solid bottom level of unemployment of at least 2 million people out of work. There is now a wasted generation. The real tragedy is youth unemployment and the Budget does absolutely nothing to deal with that problem. Nationally, 650,000 people under the age of 25 are out of work. In the west midlands region alone, 66,000 people are out of work, and in the metropolitan area the number is over 24,000. In some inner-city estates, it is unusual for a young male to have a job. That has been the case for over 10 years since the first Tory recession that the hon. Member for Beaconsfield mentioned. In my opinion, the Budget did very little that will affect that situation.

The Chancellor usually gives the Budget a name, such as the Budget for jobs, the Budget for Britain and the Budget for investment. He did not seem to give a name to the Budget this time. We thought he might call it the Budget for the Tory party's survival, but according to the reaction of Tory Back Benchers it was not that. It must be the no-name Budget. If the right hon. and learned Gentleman will not give it a name himself, we will. The Queen's Speech was the "smoking out the Opposition Queen's Speech" and the best we can do for the Budget is probably *The Sun* offering of the "cold kipper" Budget.

The Chancellor is trying to say that it is a prudent Budget, but is it? He has slashed some capital spending, and that is hardly prudent because it only builds up problems for the future.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: For information, we toyed with the idea of calling it a Budget for lasting prosperity, but the Opposition have given soundbites a bad name so I decided to drop the tradition.

Mr. Ainsworth: The Chancellor would not have got away with "the Budget for lasting prosperity". The headlines would have called him into even more ridicule had he tried to hang that title on his offering.

The Chancellor slashed capital spending. That is irresponsible because it puts off problems until tomorrow. That is exactly what the Government are doing. They plan to cut capital spending on the NHS by 26.5 per cent. over the next five years.

Over time, the party of prudence has incurred a huge increase in debt. Government spokesmen have compared the debts of some Labour-run cities with those of third-world countries and derided them by saying that Birmingham or Coventry, for example, owe more than such and such a place. But the Red Book shows that this country pays £22 billion a year in debt interest, which is more than we spend on defence or law and order and three times what we spend on transport. It is incredible that the Conservative party tries to pretend that it is a party of prudence when it has inflicted pain on people while running up such debts. It is clearly not the party of prudence, as the Chancellor would have us believe.

The increase in petrol prices coupled with the increase in vehicle excise duty are the two measures in the Budget that are causing the most anger in the country. I understand the need to discourage the excessive use of cars, but if petrol prices and vehicle excise duty are to be increased well above the rate of inflation, poor motorists will be punished. The Government have decided to settle traffic and tax problems by driving poor motorists off the road. That simply cannot justified. We should try, over time, to move the burden of taxation from excise duty on to petrol duty so that people pay tax for using their cars, not for having access to a car. In some rural and inner-city areas, people want a car to make themselves economically viable and get themselves into the job market, yet the costs of insurance and vehicle excise duty do not allow them to become car owners.

Conservative Members hold up our car industry as an example of some kind of revival, but all that we have had is inward investment. Nowadays, our car industry, apart from small companies, is completely and absolutely owned by foreign companies. We should not boast about that. I do not knock inward investment as our country needs it badly for the jobs that it brings. But the United Kingdom, Spain and Portugal have had the inward investment in the car industry. Is that the league that we want to put our country into? We boast about inward investment by Samsung in another industry, but the two countries that Samsung has invested in are the United Kingdom and Slovakia. Is that the league that we want to be in?

I agree that we need investment from wherever it comes but, as Conservative Members know, the problem that we have had for a long time is that our indigenous companies have not invested at the rate that they should. To see how that problem developed, we must look at the decline that has taken place throughout this Government's term, back through the previous Labour Government's term to the 1960s. People think that it is a natural decline and that the number of jobs provided by the car industry will inevitably fall. Jaguar, which is in my constituency, is a relative success but, over a period, it has failed to increase the number of jobs that it provides. In 1959, it employed about 5,000 people; it now employs 6,500. Over the same period, BMW has grown from 6,000 employees to 75,000 and it has now bought out the Rover group with another 30,000 employees.

A couple of years ago, Conservative Members derided the German economy and its way of doing business. They said that we would overtake Germany and become the leading economy in Europe, and that we could not have social contracts and works councils because they would ruin the economy. However, those are exactly what have applied in Germany over that 30-year period. That is exactly what applied in BMW over those 30 years. The BMW works council played a significant role in the development of job opportunities and job creation over a long period, and the result has been a tenfold growth in the number of jobs.

We ought to see some investment and some work that helps the car industry, but as in so many other areas what we get is pretence. A short time ago the Department of Trade and Industry issued a press release about the work that is being done along with the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders in trying to assist the small businesses that form the supply sector of the car industry. Everybody knows that the growth in jobs will be in that sector and not in the front-line companies and that there will be a need for quality research.

When we look behind the boast about the work that is being done with the SMMT, we see that about 200 companies will be involved and that 12 experts in quality have been taken to Japan for quality training so that they can help those 200 supplier companies. There are 4,000 supplier companies in the car industry and the problem is that our suppliers need a huge improvement in quality to compete on the world market. We are playing games and pretending to deal with those problems.

The country needs a Government who are actively involved in tackling these problems and not a Government who are happy to see a constant 2 million people unemployed—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. *[Interruption.]* I am sorry, but the 10-minute rule is strictly enforced.

9.21 pm

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Blackpool, South): Unlike the hon. Member for Coventry, North-East (Mr. Ainsworth) I entirely welcome the Budget. The problem with hon. Members such as him is that they often attempt to rewrite history. The hon. Gentleman spoke about problems in the car industry in the west midlands and about the growth of BMW, and he compared the number of employees. But he entirely forgot to mention all the trade union militancy that was supported by so many Opposition Members when I lived and worked in the west midlands throughout the bad old days of the last Labour Government. Opposition Members should remember that it was trade union militancy and Labour apologists when that party was in government who completely wrecked the British car industry.

I want to speak about the reaction of ordinary people to my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor's excellent Budget, and I shall start by quoting a clothing and footwear assistant who told the *Financial Times* that the Chancellor had listened to the small people and thought that it was brilliant news. Those who are responsible for creating jobs in Britain are the people in the CBI. Its director general welcomed the fact that the Government had broadly stuck to the prudent economic line that the CBI recommended. He said the CBI was pleased that the Chancellor appeared to have limited tax cuts to reductions in spending and that he had resisted the temptation to go for excessive tax cuts. That is the kind of welcome that I like to hear.

On BBC 2 a Mr. Len Stone said:

"My job will be secure. The Budget is good for industry, steady growth and people will buy more vans, especially the contract fleet."

The *Financial Times* stated that the financial markets had to be convinced that the needed combination of tough spending control and economic growth would be delivered, provided that the Chancellor convinced them that he would be able to cut interest rates. I hope that the *Financial Times* is right about that because that too will help my constituents.

I am particularly pleased that my right hon. and learned Friend listened to submissions by me and by many of my hon. Friends about help for the elderly and especially for those who require now, or may require, long-term care. My constituency has the highest proportion of pensioners of any constituency and I was particularly pleased not only at the measures in the Budget but at the way in which they have been received. In particular, Sally Greengross, director general of Age Concern, is quoted in *The Daily Telegraph* as saying:

"Older people who are worried about paying for care will be delighted".

Jill Pitkeathley of the Carers National Association said:

"We are delighted that this will relieve the worries of many families".

It is rare that I quote with approval anything said by a general secretary-elect of Unison, but even Mr. Rodney Bickerstaffe was heard to say on BBC Radio 4:

"Anything that's going to help the elderly is going to be useful. It's a step in the right direction. So far as the poorest earners are concerned, there is something for them".

Even if Opposition Members do not recognise it, the country recognises that the Budget has been prudent, sensible and helpful.

I was especially pleased that my right hon. and learned Friend dealt with the difficulty that existed in relation to employee share ownership schemes. As one who, for a long time before coming to the House, supported employee share ownership, the sharing of companies' successes and the involvement of employees in those successes, I was delighted that Gill Nott, chief executive of Proshare, said about my right hon. and learned Friend's measures:

"This is the best Budget for employee share ownership that we have seen in many years".

[Mr. Nick Hawkins]

On public opinion, a Mr. Steve Spurling, a bank employee from Crawley, was quoted on BBC Radio 4 as saying about the Budget:

"I'm personally pleased with the overall package introduced covering a range of areas. It means to me about £20 a month which is a tangible sum, something I can actually get my hands on".

I am especially concerned to ensure that there should be further help for the construction industry and I declare my interest as a consultant to the Building Employers Confederation. In that regard, there has been a broad welcome to the expansion of the private finance initiative. Sir John Banham, chairman of Tarmac, is quoted in the *Independent* as saying:

"The Chancellor is on the right track and the measures he has put in place provide the best prospects for the UK building industry".

In relation to the housing market, the chief executive of the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors is quoted in the *Independent* as saying:

"On the housing market, we are pleased that there has been no attempt at a quick fix. We have argued for some time that special help for housing will not work because the problem is not one of affordability but of confidence".

I agree with that and I am sure that my right hon. and learned Friend's Budget measures will bring back that confidence.

The chairman of Siebe, Mr. Barrie Stephens, is quoted in the *Financial Times* as saying:

"I am very enthusiastic. The Government has looked at the economy dispassionately and sensibly and showed that they are good managers. It is a prudent and balanced Budget."

I especially welcome the fact that three steps have been taken towards a 20p basic rate in income tax, which helps both the lower-paid and savers. It is crucial that the Government's economic strategy should benefit the thrifty, especially thrifty pensioners. Income tax cuts that my right hon. and learned Friend has introduced will benefit 26 million people. Now one quarter of all taxpayers pay tax at only 20p.

I am delighted that my right hon. and learned Friend has cracked down on fraud and waste, and that he has helped to provide more provision for schools, for law and order and for health, the same three priorities that I and many of my right hon. and hon. Friends had urged on him.

By contrast, Labour's sums do not add up. The hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) had five questions from myself and other hon. Members. He failed to answer a single one in his speech. He cannot answer them because his sums do not add up. Labour cannot oppose the 24p basic rate because it knows that that rate is popular. Its policies are as bankrupt as it would seek to make the country if it were ever unfortunate enough to be in power.

I welcome the fact that my right hon. and learned Friend has not sought to hit the UK insurance industry. We wish to encourage more people to have proper insurance cover. He has rightly recognised the strength and importance of the UK insurance industry and not increased insurance premium tax. The problem with Opposition Front-Bench Members is that they all have backgrounds not in business but in lecturing and legal work. They do not understand the needs of the British people or the British economy. Only my right hon. and learned Friend and his right hon. and hon. Friends have that ability and I strongly support his Budget.

9.29 pm

Mr. Alistair Darling (Edinburgh, Central): I thought that the Chancellor had a legal background, as indeed do I. I was interested in what the hon. Member for Blackpool, South (Mr. Hawkins) said in praise of the Budget. If he is so confident about the Government's position, one wonders why he is, as I understand, on the lookout for a safer seat, and is joining many of his colleagues on the chicken run. Clearly he does not believe that the Chancellor or the Government have done enough to make it likely that the people of Blackpool, South will return him to the House at the next election.

It was the Conservatives, not us, who said that the Budget was designed to kick-start their political recovery. But the muted cheer when the Chancellor sat down, and the look of despair on the faces of Conservative Members, told us the real story. They knew that if that was the objective of the Budget, it had failed.

I was interested to read in the *Independent* on Saturday something attributed to the hon. Member for Bridlington (Mr. Townend). I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman is not in his place now, but I expect that he will return. Talking about the amount of money that the Chancellor should give away, he was quoted as saying:

"At £10 billion I think that we would win the next election, at about £6 billion we could be in with a chance, but if it is only £2 billion or £3 billion we can forget it."

Right on cue, the hon. Member for Bridlington has walked back into the Chamber.

It is obvious what has happened today. Conservative Members have had to change their tune. They were led to believe that there would be huge tax hand-outs yesterday, so today they have had to make different speeches, in praise of alleged prudence on the part of the Chancellor.

The Chancellor has not revived the Conservatives' fortunes, because he cannot. In particular, he has failed to revive the country's long-term economic prospects. I was amused, as I suspect others were, when the right hon. and learned Gentleman said that he had half thought of entitling his Budget, "A Budget for lasting prosperity"—but of course, we have all come to admire his sense of humour.

After 17 relaunches, the Tory party is still searching for a solution, and the Budget, like the Queen's Speech, has proved something of a damp squib. As my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry, North-East (Mr. Ainsworth) said, the Queen's Speech was supposed to smoke us out, but instead people saw the bankruptcy of the Conservative party's policies and position.

The Budget is no different. It was supposed to be designed for political purposes and to breathe life into the Conservative party, but it failed to do so. As my hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) said, the Conservatives are prisoners of their own political and economic failure. After 16 years they are running out of ideas and have no sense of direction.

The flagship of the Budget was supposed to be a dramatic cut in income tax, but when it came it was just one penny. The best that the Chief Secretary to the Treasury could say was that it was "plausible". That is

not much in the way of praise. Indeed, the right hon. Gentleman's contribution was notable for the fact that he said little about the Budget, contenting himself with making several allegations about our position, which he then had to withdraw.

There we have it—a cut of only one penny, after everything that the Government have said. Seven pence up since 1992, one penny down in 1995. And that comes from a Government who have given us 21 different tax rises since 1992. I notice that over the past three years there has been no word about the money that was taken away in tax belonging to the taxpayers. Today, apparently, only the one penny belongs to the taxpayers, not the six pence that has also been taken from them since 1992.

At the general election the Government promised to reduce taxes year on year. And they promised a recovery that would start the day after the election. No wonder people do not trust the Government, or believe a word that they say. Even after the Budget an average family is about £670 worse off than it was at the last election. What the Government give with one hand they take away with the other, and people know that. They know income tax is down by one penny, and they will welcome that partial relief, but they also know about the increased charges, the increased rail fares caused by the privatisation of British Rail and, as my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry, South-East (Mr. Cunningham) said, increased council tax.

Mr. John Townend: The hon. Gentleman talks about an increase in taxes "equivalent" to 7p in the pound, then compares it with a reduction in the standard rate of 1p in the pound. To be consistent, if he is talking about equivalent tax reductions he should compare them with equivalent tax increases. The figures are not 7p and 1p, but 7p and 2½p.

Mr. Darling: I am surprised at the hon. Gentleman. I thought that he was going to help clarify what he was reported as saying in the *Independent* on Saturday. I will not repeat it, because he obviously knows what he said to Colin Brown, the paper's chief political correspondent.

Before the Budget, and indeed in the House on many occasions, the hon. Member for Bridlington has made the point that he has felt let down by the Government putting up taxes. The 7p figure did not originate with us. We do not claim authorship of it. It came from the Chancellor of the Exchequer himself. The public know that since the election taxes have risen by the equivalent of 7p in the pound, so the Conservatives cannot really expect gratitude for giving back 1p in the pound in the meantime. *[Interruption.]*

I want to reply to the many points that were made in the short time available. One point, in respect of— *[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. There are too many seated interventions.

Mr. Tim Smith *rose—*

Mr. Darling: I think that the hon. Gentleman was one of those shouting from a sedentary position. I may give way to him later if I have time, but not at the moment.

I want to deal with a point made by the right hon. Member for South Norfolk (Mr. MacGregor). He was good enough to write to me to say that he could not stay for the entire debate. No doubt he will read what is said. He made the point, as have other Conservative Members, that a number of my Back-Bench colleagues have said things that might be interpreted as a call for further expenditure. He did that having just asked for further expenditure on the roads programme in East Anglia.

The right hon. Member for South Norfolk made that statement quite properly as the Member for an East Anglian constituency. Government Members and the chairman of the Conservative party should think long and hard about the implications of what they are doing. Are they saying that Back-Bench constituency Members cannot make constituency points in support of their constituents' position, advocating certain courses of action, such as the hon. Member for Brighton, Kemptown (Sir A. Bowden), who said that he wanted to do something with VAT on energy efficiency, like the hon. Member for Bridlington, who suggested an increase in VAT—

Mr. Townend *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Darling: Yes he did; earlier this evening he suggested an increase of 1 per cent.

Such points are legitimately made by Back-Bench Members of Parliament and it really is disingenuous for the Conservative party to interpret them as being the position that a party might take at a general election, any more than Labour Members would be correct to say that just because one Tory Back-Bencher said something, whether on the Clive Anderson show or in this place, somehow the whole weight of the party is thrown behind it. The right hon. Member for South Norfolk, who is an intelligent man, might want to reflect on the implications of what he said.

Sir Andrew Bowden: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Darling: Yes, but it will have to be the last intervention because I do not want to spoil the Minister's winding-up speech.

Sir Andrew Bowden: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that there is a difference between an individual Back Bencher presenting a case that might have a constituency connotation or a special interest, and an impression given by an Opposition Front-Bench spokesman—without saying so but implying it quite clearly so that the public assume it—that if his party wins, it will spend more money in a particular area?

Mr. Darling: The right hon. Member for Peterborough (Dr. Mawhinney), the Conservative party chairman, has been attributing commitments to the Labour party by listening to Back Benchers. I am sure that the Government would not claim that what the hon. Gentleman said this evening, or indeed what the right hon. Member for South Norfolk said, was Government policy. Unless we expect Members of Parliament no longer to advocate the interests of their constituents in this place—where after all they ought to do it—we should think long and hard about the consequences of the comments of the right hon. Member for South Norfolk.

[Mr. Darling]

As my hon. Friends have said, the Government's Budget was no surprise. The Chancellor's room for manoeuvre was restricted. Public borrowing is higher than forecast—this year it is £29 billion and forecast to move upwards in the next three years. There is slower growth and the Chancellor tells us that he thinks that there will be growth of some 3 per cent. in future. No wonder he is straining credibility.

Of course a great deal is perilled on this high growth. If next year the Chancellor is going to be able to mount a giveaway Budget—there will be pressure from Conservative Members on him to do so—that promised growth will have to be delivered. However, the record does not suggest that he is likely to be successful. The Chancellor wants us to believe that next year will somehow be different from past years. We have had higher inflation than the Chancellor predicted and the current account deficit is worse this year than he predicted.

Investment—the future for long-term sustainable economic growth—has of course been cut. There are some things that we do welcome, such as the move to simplify tax, but we think that the Government should do more to prevent tax evasion and to close tax loopholes.

I welcome the Chancellor's move to clarify and improve the position with regard to share ownership. We believe that employees should be encouraged to have a stake in their firm and that such a stake should be open to everyone from the boardroom to the shop floor. However, shares and options should be given as a reward for success. They should not be granted in anticipation of success that may never come, and they should encourage saving.

We shall have to see what provisions there are in the Finance Bill, but it would be wrong for us not to welcome the fact that the Government have moved in a direction that we have advocated for much of the last 12 months. I am only sorry that the Government have done nothing about the abuses that are happening in the boardrooms of the privatised utilities.

We welcome the promotion of saving and what the Chancellor had to say on that. I listened to the Chancellor yesterday and I thought that I was listening to my hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, East, who made exactly the same point some weeks ago. We wish to build on the PEPs experience and to create specific instruments that will encourage people to save in the medium and the long term.

We welcome what the Chancellor has done with regard to the excise duty on Scotch whisky. It is, however, to investment and the private finance initiative that I want to return since the Government have set so much store by it. The fact is that the PFI has never taken off. We have always supported the principle of the PFI. The deputy leader of the Labour party, my right hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott), was the first to float that idea before the last general election. He was denounced at the time, and then the Government promptly accepted much of what he had said.

There are two problems with the PFI. First, it has been strangled by bureaucracy and by red tape. Every capital project has been channelled through the system, which has clogged it up. Secondly, the Government have never set a list of priorities. In 1992, the Government published a list that included 78 projects, ranging from the west coast main line upgrading to the car park at Eastbourne hospital. The private sector had no idea where the Government's priorities lay.

Two things are striking about the Government press release that was issued yesterday. First, the Government have accepted that there must be some degree of prioritisation and said that they will publish an illustrative list. In fact, 1,400 projects have appeared today with an A or a B against them. The Government have to do more to indicate their priorities as between projects that have a major strategic interest and those that have a lesser interest in relation to a national strategy. The private sector has told us and anyone who is prepared to listen that the great difficulty is that it has no idea which projects the Government are likely to favour and which they are not.

The Government's attachment to right-wing dogma has meant that they have privatised the decision-making process. It is for the Government to give a lead and then invite the private sector to contribute. If they did that, there would be a better chance of seeing more projects get off the ground and under way. Once we saw some projects get off the ground, more would follow.

The second interesting thing about the Government's press release yesterday is that they promised a further £14 billion of investment by 1998-99. Of course, that includes the £5 billion promised last year. Little of that £5 billion has found its way into agreed projects which have started. We are entitled to take with a degree of scepticism the Government's commitment that the PFI can take the place of public investment. It is planned that Government investment in the public sector will fall by almost 18 per cent. between this year and 1999. That is on top of a cut of 7.2 per cent. in real terms in the past three years.

Government direct investment in the national health service will be cut in real terms by 27 per cent. in three years. Given the lack of progress in the PFI, people are entitled to ask how the Government expect it to take the place of public investment. When the PFI was originally launched, it was suggested that it would represent additional investment. The clear lesson of what has happened in the past few years is that the PFI is not additional investment but a substitute for public sector investment. It is not even that, because little of it is getting off the ground. If the Government prioritised the projects that they would like to see get off the ground and broke down some of the bureaucracy and red tape that is created, some real progress would be made.

Indeed, anyone wanting a clue as to what is going wrong need look no further than a press release put out by the Secretary of State for Education and Employment which said that "too few people" knew how to exploit the initiative to its full advantage. That was why, the release continued, the right hon. Lady's Department had "established a hotline" on the matter. So, the people

who brought you the coneline now bring you a new hotline to try to get the project off the ground. The Government really need to do more.

The projects are a matter of choice. In health the Government are spending £1 billion a year on bureaucrats, and not on front-line care. Why does a hospital need a press officer? In education, the Government have chosen to double the assisted places scheme instead of using the money to cap class sizes below 30.

The hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) is not in his place, but it would be wrong of me not to reply to his point about his party's position on the Government's reduction in income tax and how that relates to education. I take with a great big pinch of salt what the Liberal Democrats have to say on this, as in all other matters. They are the people who said that the top tax rate should be 60p, and then said a week later that it should be 50p. They said that a penny should be put on tax for education, but then said that they would consult about it. They later said that they would make that tax increase if it was necessary.

When he was challenged today, the hon. Member for Gordon did not know what his party would do at the next election. I would say to my hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, North (Mr. Etherington)—who also raised the matter—that even if the Liberal Democrats' position were carried, there is no chance that one penny of that money would find its way back into the education Budget. That option does not lie with the Opposition, only with the Government. We believe that it is quite wrong to impose further taxation on people who are already paying more than ever before by way of tax. The people who would benefit from the education system are suffering now.

The Government's position simply does not add up. They have done nothing about tackling long-term unemployment. In one in five non-pensioner households, there is no work whatsoever, and the Government are doing nothing about that. We have made a firm proposal to implement a windfall tax, which we believe would have a major impact on getting people back to work. The Government's proposals make no economic sense and no social sense. The Budget deserves to be rejected for that reason, and for every other reason advanced tonight.

9.46 pm

The Paymaster General (Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory): In his speech yesterday, my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor set out a Budget for this country's earners and savers, and a Budget that will spend more money on priority services while cutting the cost of government. It is quite clear from today's debate that that is strongly supported by my hon. Friends. It is clear too that the Opposition are in a muddle.

The Opposition are anxious to pose as the taxpayer's friend, and they have announced that they will not oppose the tax cuts—that was the one question answered by the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown)—but they will not support them either. They will abstain—at least, most of them will do so. The hon. Member for Sunderland, North (Mr. Etherington), who is in his place, hinted that he would vote against the tax cuts. Old Labour has some principles left, but new Labour will heroically abstain on the central issues of the Budget. Very new Labour may come round to support the tax cuts; the lurch to the right in the Labour party is not over yet.

The confusion and muddle on the Opposition Benches has a simple cause. When a party such as Labour abandons all its traditions, dumps its baggage and disowns its past beliefs and becomes motivated solely by the desire for office, nothing keeps it together. That is why the Opposition's response to the Budget has been so shallow and opportunistic, and why the shadow Chancellor seemed genuinely incapable of answering simple points put to him by my hon. Friends. What was his inflation target? He did not have one. What was the cost of his 10p lower rate tax proposals? He did not know. Would he support our 20p savings rate? He would not say. Would he abolish the insurance premium tax, which he has opposed? He had no idea. Yet Labour claims to be the party of government in waiting.

The contrast between that policy vacuum and the Budget laid out by my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer could not be clearer. We have balanced our tax-cutting proposals with similar cuts in public expenditure, while preserving areas such as health and education.

I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Brighton, Kemptown (Sir A. Bowden) that the extra money for education must go through to the classroom. He clearly has a similar local education authority to mine and that of my right hon. Friend the Member for Bridgwater (Mr. King)—too much of the money sticks to the local authority and never gets to the classroom.

We have increased priority expenditure by a further drive on waste and on fraud in social security expenditure and by delivering year-on-year cuts in the expenditure of Whitehall Departments. That has been driven through by my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury and I am pleased that the policy had the strong support of my hon. Friend the Member for Bridlington (Mr. Townend) and others.

The civil service is now more than 30 per cent. smaller than it was in 1979. In the next three years, the cost will fall by a further £2 billion in real terms. As the Government are the largest service industry in the country, it is right on economic grounds alone that they should also be the most efficient. The relentless drive for efficiency over that part of the economy that the Government control is without doubt one reason why the performance of the British economy generally has been so much better in recent years than in the 1970s.

Even employment, which cropped up again and again in the debate, is showing signs of a successful recovery. Unemployment is lower than in Germany, France or Italy, and we have the highest proportion of people in work of any major European economy. Of course, there are regional variations and I listened carefully to what my hon. Friend the Member for South-East Cornwall (Mr. Hicks) said, even though the bulk of his remarks about the distribution of the funding formula were perhaps more accurately directed at my right hon.

[Mr. David Heathcoat- Amory]

Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment. He will be listening and has already listened to representations from the west country and other regions.

There were persistent calls for more Government investment—an echo that we heard in the past from the Opposition. They still believe that unemployment can be solved and investment increased simply by spending more Government money. If they should have learnt anything from the sad experiences of the 1970s, it is that a thriving economy is created not by the Government but by a successful private sector.

I shall take one example—the small companies rate of corporation tax was 42p in the pound when Labour left office in 1979, but we have reduced it to 24p in the pound. We have nearly halved the tax rate on those successful companies. That does far more for growth, investment and employment than any of the spending schemes dreamt up on the Opposition Benches.

The hon. Member for Coventry, South-East (Mr. Cunningham) asked what the Government had done for industry, but I say that industry and business generally now have a choice. They will get something from Labour and, indeed, from the Liberal Democrats—the social chapter of the treaty of Rome. The Leader of the Opposition did not seem to understand it when he spoke to the Confederation of British Industry recently, but the fact is that the provisions of the social chapter—its red tape and regulations—could be imposed on us by majority voting. It is no good him saying that he would pick and choose and take only those bits that he liked. That is what Labour offers—the social chapter, and imposed on us if necessary. The choice is between that and what we offer.

We have delivered in this Budget alone a further income tax cut, a cut to the small companies rate of corporation tax, further relief from capital gains tax for those who are retiring, lower inheritance tax and a cut in national insurance contributions—funded from a tax on landfill waste—which alone will be worth £500 million off that tax on employment. We have also given more generous transitional relief for business rates. That is how to promote growth, investment and jobs.

As regards taxation, there was not only muddle on the Labour Front Bench but a persistently expressed resentment on the Labour Back Benches that there should be tax cuts at all in the Budget. That was true not only of the Labour party but of the Liberals. It was revealing yesterday that the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) described income tax cuts as a bribe. Conservative Members do not think that it is a bribe when people keep more of what they earn and save; it is their money. It shows how illiberal and statist the Liberals have become that they think that money belongs to the Government to be dished out as they like.

We are on target for our 20p basic rate and the Budget achieves that for savers. They will pay tax at a basic rate of 20p from April next year. We have also achieved our target for the quarter of all taxpayers who will now pay tax on their income at only 20p in the lower rate band. The penny off the basic rate cuts marginal rates for 18 million people, who have no hope of anything similar from the Opposition.

What did we get from the Opposition? As my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, South (Mr. Hawkins) said, Labour's tax and spending plans do not add up. Right through this debate and the debate on the Queen's Speech, we had calls for more public expenditure. Earlier today, in the social security statement, the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith), who leads for the Opposition, spent £1 billion in a few minutes in responding to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security.

The socialist wing of the Labour party clearly believes—and always has believed—in high and rising public expenditure. That is an article of faith. I do not agree with it, but I have some respect for views constantly held and consistently argued. I have no respect for the new Labour pretence that it can all be done without putting up taxes.

I read the shadow Budget of the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East. There was nothing in it about levels of borrowing, expenditure or interest rates and the only thing about taxation was the new 10p in the pound rate for the lower band. It was, of course, not costed—there was nothing so awkward as having to find the money for it.

Mr. Darling: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: If the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, I still have some points to answer and only three minutes in which to do so.

As a preface to the shadow Budget, the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East said:

"I want to see openness and honesty in tax."

He could have started by applying those precepts to his own Budget.

The hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) is not in his place. He gave notice that he would not be and I will have to send him a message through the *Official Report* that he is not exempt from a similar criticism. His shadow Budget, his so-called costed programme, for nearly £6 billion of extra expenditure was going to be paid for by "tax changes"—they are called not tax increases but tax changes—of £1.1 billion. Another item was "tax reform" of £990 million. There are no details about the reforms or the tax changes. If one reads "tax increases" for "tax reforms", one begins to realise that the words "openness" and "honesty" take on bizarre meanings in the mouths of Opposition spokesmen.

The central fact is that government is not like that: we are about having to take hard decisions and make difficult choices. We have not flinched from that and the economic indicators are now pointing in the right direction. Inflation is low, growth is up, unemployment is down, borrowing is declining, investment is increasing and taxes have been cut. That may be bad news for the Labour party, but it is certainly very good news for Britain—and there is more to come. As we move towards the introduction of the Finance Bill later in the year, we shall, we hope, find out more about the Opposition's non-proposals.

It being Ten o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.

Debate to be resumed tomorrow.

PETITION

Solicitors (Unprofessional Conduct)

10 pm

Sir Andrew Bowden (Brighton, Kemptown): With your permission, Madam Deputy Speaker, I beg leave to present a petition, signed by more than 3,700 people, requesting that an independent regulator consider complaints against solicitors for unprofessional conduct. The petition states:

That until the Law Society and the Solicitors Complaints Bureau are made accountable to an Independent Regulator members of the public remain open to abuse from the legal profession. A long overdue requested Public Inquiry into the handling by the Law Society and the Solicitors Complaints Bureau of Mary Blakeman's long standing complaints regarding a solicitor's unethical, unprofessional conduct will bring justification to bear on the issue. Wherefore your Petitioners pray that your honourable House will give urgent consideration to this Petition to make effective its desire because in all areas JUSTICE A 'MUST' IS!

To lie upon the Table.

Libya and Iraq (Sanctions)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Heathcoat-Amory.]*

10.1 pm

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): This is a debate about sanctions against two countries with which the United Kingdom has, historically, enjoyed excellent relations. Many of the decision makers in Libya and Iraq were educated in this country. As we debate the issue of sanctions, we also debate our country's long-term relations with two very important areas of the Arab world.

Anyone who visits Iraq must be dismayed that a once sophisticated society should be reduced to grinding poverty in many areas. Every recent visitor to that country—including the right hon. Members for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath) and for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir D. Steel), the former leader of the Liberal party, and many others—is appalled, as I was, by the terrible conditions in the children's hospital in Baghdad or the conditions in another hospital at Um-Kasr on the Kuwaiti border. Infants, who cannot conceivably be responsible for any of the horrors of the past 10 years, expired in my presence—and I do not exaggerate.

The most recent visitor to Iraq with whom I have been in contact is Riad El-Taher, an Iraqi-born British subject. He is concerned about the British Government's entrenched support for United Nations Security Council resolution 986. He writes:

"Can I bring to your attention . . . the long term erosion of trust and historical ties taking root among the upcoming generation".

I sensed that during my visit.

"The majority of UK educated Iraqis are reaching retirement age and are being replaced by a generation fed on suspicion of the West and particularly Britain's continued support of sanctions."

I mentioned that issue at Question Time, and I say as gently as I can, and I hope without giving offence, that I wonder whether the Minister, his colleagues and his civil service advisers really realise the extent to which a generation is growing up about to hate the west—people who have been trading partners and friends. It is tragic.

"UNSCR 986 is heavily biased, being intrusive, divisive and certainly not addressing the chronic humanitarian shortages of food and medicine. These shortages are felt most strongly among the young generation . . . and the salaried sector in general. The financial benefit, if Iraq manages to sell the allocated oil, after deduction of the heavy burden of reparations, administration and allocation to the Northern Governorate under UN supervision, will be in the region of 7-8 US$ per person per month (outside Iraq)."

That places seriously in question the assertions that it is simply up to Saddam Hussein to change policy, and all will be well. I fear that the detail of what is happening shows that that certainly would not be the outcome.

One is forced to take the view that UNSCR 986 was not intended to provide humanitarian aid to the Iraqi people, in view of five factors. Both the UK and USA hold substantial Iraqi frozen assets, which could be controlled effectively for the sole purchases of badly needed food and medicine from their respective countries and for immediate release. Even if Iraq were prepared to agree to UNSCR 986, there are no guarantees that funds would be available from the sale of oil or for the purchase of humanitarian requirements, due to the complexity of

[Mr. Tam Dalyell]

the contractual demands. The reparations burden should be set aside at this stage, as Iraq can tackle that issue when sanctions are lifted. The rest of the argument is well known to the Foreign Office.

I simply say to the Minister, and through him to the Foreign Secretary, that the right hon. and learned Gentleman the Foreign Secretary should go to some of his constituents, the Church and Nation Committee of the Church of Scotland—he represents many of the leading members of the Church of Scotland in the Pentlands constituency of Edinburgh—and speak to them about their detailed knowledge and their knowledge of the humanitarian position.

Hansard records that, on 21 December 1988, I raised the subject of Libyan sanctions in the House. From new year's eve 1988, for reasons that I have outlined in seven previous Adjournment debates, I have had a deep interest in the subject.

Tonight, I make two requests. First, is it not time, after seven years, that the crucial timing device is produced? Let independent experts examine the timing device, because so far only photographs have been produced, and the head of the firm of manufacturers, Edwin Bollier, and his engineer, Ulrich Lumpart, have not even been allowed to see it.

I ask specific questions of which I gave notice to the Lord Advocate and the Crown Office in Edinburgh, which they undertook to pass on to the Minister. Is the Minister aware that Thomas Thurman, the Federal Bureau of Investigation officer who claims to have identified the timing device, is under investigation by the US Justice Department regarding allegations by a fellow FBI officer, Frederick Whitehurst, that he fabricated evidence and committed perjury in a murder trial in the USA? That was outlined in *The Scotsman* by a remarkable reporter, Stephen Breen. I have cross-checked with other sources, however.

Does the Thurman/White House situation lead Her Majesty's Government at least to question the credibility of Thurman, and the credibility of the Crown's identification of the timing device? Should Thurman be found guilty of perjury, would the Crown reassess the evidence and case against the two Libyans, given that the timing device is the key evidence linking the Libyans and the bombing?

The whole story of so-called evidence from Mary's House in Valletta, and the 18 different identifications of Tony Gouchie, would be very flimsy in any court of law. Where, we ask, is this timer? Has it ever been out of the United Kingdom? Who found it? When was it found, and where? The imagination boggles. A timer supposedly in pristine condition was out in a Scottish winter for 15 months or so. I do not believe that the timer on the Pan Am clipper "Maid of the Seas" is in the possession of the authorities; I believe that they have a photograph of a rather different timer.

I have done my best in regard to my next point, and I also understand the Prime Minister's reasons. Before my question to him about the last issue that I shall raise is dealt with, let me issue a request that serious consideration, at least, be given to the Libyan suggestion of a trial in The Hague, under Scottish rules of evidence and under a Scottish judge. I feel that, after seven years, there is a strong argument for considering that as a serious possibility.

I am pleased to see that my right hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) is present, because he has had a deep interest in Malta ever since we worked together when he led the Labour European delegation to the European Parliament. He had a good deal to do with Malta then. I shall not speak for my right hon. Friend, however; I shall speak for myself.

I do not believe that there ever was a Malta connection. We had hoped, yet again—along with the relatives, who have been steadfast and will not go away—to see the Prime Minister before these questions were asked. I do not believe in yah-boo Prime Minister's Question Time. The Prime Minister wrote to me:

"I have considered carefully whether I might meet Jim Swire, Pamela Dix and Martin Cadman before your question. Unfortunately I fear that my diary is such that there will be no possibility before then."

The offer has been made, but I hope that the Government will look carefully at the possibility of a trial in The Hague to bring the matter to a head.

I suspect that the reason why the Government do not want to go to The Hague is quite simple: they realise only too clearly that a Scottish judge, under Scottish rules of evidence, might well humiliate them by saying at an early stage that there was no case to answer.

It really is unrealistic to suggest that the Libyan Government ought to send the two to Britain. If the boot were on the other foot, would Her Britannic Majesty's Government extradite two men whom her country believed to be innocent to Libya, with which Britain has no extradition treaty? I doubt whether any British Government or the House would do any such thing. After seven years, the time has come to take some action, at least to try The Hague, because, if not, the suspicion exists that the Governments of the United States and Britain do not want the truth about Lockerbie.

10.14 pm

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Jeremy Hanley): I should like to begin with a few general points on the use of sanctions. The decision to impose sanctions on a country cannot be taken lightly. Under the UN charter, if a country threatens international peace and security, as both Iraq and Libya have done, the Security Council is empowered under chapter 7 of its charter to take action. On that point, I should like to clarify why there are sanctions on Iraq and Libya and not on Nigeria. The human rights abuses in Nigeria, while abhorrent, are an internal situation and therefore cannot be classified under this chapter.

As much as possible, sanctions are tailored to ensure that they are not just punitive but counter the wrong that has been committed. The aim of sanctions is to counter threats to peace and security, and to try to get the penalised country back into line with the international community. That approach is reflected in our policy towards Libya and Iraq, in which sanctions play a central part.

Before I respond to the specific points raised by the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell), I shall recall the reasons behind the sanctions against Libya and Iraq—first, Libya.

Sanctions were imposed by the Security Council in March 1992 and in November 1993 because Libya had failed to comply with the requests of the United Kingdom, United States and French Governments, following the bombing of Pan Am flight 103 over Lockerbie on 21 December 1988 and a Union des Transports Aérien aircraft over Niger in September 1989. It is worth reflecting just for a moment on the scale of those outrages. The first involved the death of 270 innocent persons; the second, 171—a total of 441 victims.

After the biggest criminal investigation in British history, the Dumfries and Galloway constabulary had by November 1991 uncovered sufficient evidence to enable charges to be brought against two Libyan nationals in connection with the Lockerbie bombing. The UK and the US called on the Libyan Government to surrender the accused for trial, to tell what they knew of the crime, and to pay appropriate compensation.

The Libyan Government failed to do any of those things. Through UN Security Council resolution 731, in January 1992, the international community endorsed the UK and US calls on Libya in connection with Lockerbie, and the French calls regarding UTA, but still Libya failed to comply. The sanctions resolutions 748 and 883 were designed to put pressure on the Government of Libya—not its people—to surrender the suspects for trial and to meet the other requirements. We regret that Libya has still not complied. By its failure to do so, it continues to deny justice to the victims or to prove the innocence of the accused.

The House will recall that, on 1 February this year, my right hon. Friend the Member for Witney (Mr. Hurd), who was then Foreign Secretary, reported exchanges that Foreign Office officials had been having with the Libyans about the material and financial assistance that Libya had given to the Provisional IRA, at a time when it was waging a terror campaign against British interests. That was in the context of one of Libya's obligations under the resolutions: to demonstrate its renunciation of terrorism.

At the time, there remained some unanswered questions. Since then, there has been another exchange of questions and answers. As a result, on 20 November last, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office issued a statement making it clear that, while there remained gaps and omissions in the information given by the Libyans, we were satisfied that, when the disclosures were considered in their entirety, they largely met our expectations.

In acknowledging that as a positive step towards Libyan renunciation of terrorism, a path that we hoped that Libya would follow, we made it clear that we regarded Libya's co-operation as just one step in the context of one of its obligations under the resolutions. We remained committed to the UN sanctions against Libya until such time as Libya complied with all the requirements, in particular that it surrender those accused of the Lockerbie bombing for trial in Scotland or in the United States. I can tell the House that we have no further questions to put to the Libyans about that.

At the most recent four-monthly review of sanctions by the Security Council of 22 November, the UK permanent representative to the United Nations, Sir John Weston, drew the attention of the Security Council to the statement on the Provisional IRA questions. He added that we remained committed to bringing to justice those responsible for the Pan Am and UTA bombings, and that alternatives put forward by the Libyans for trial elsewhere—including The Hague, as the hon. Gentleman said—were simply not acceptable. Sir John Weston reminded the council that all countries must continue to implement the mandatory sanctions rigorously. There was no proposal at that review for a change to the existing sanctions, and they must therefore remain in force.

We have regularly and carefully considered the various proposals that have been put forward from time to time that a trial be held in a third country, and we remain convinced that they are unacceptable and unworkable. The reasons have been stated before in the House, but since the hon. Gentleman has raised the matter, they bear repeating.

First, the practical and legislative difficulties would be enormous. They would involve secondary and possibly primary legislation in both countries.

Secondly, it would be quite unacceptable to the Government, as well as to the House, effectively to allow suspected terrorists to dictate where and how they should be tried. The Scottish and US courts both have jurisdiction. The trial should be held in one of those jurisdictions.

Thirdly, the Security Council resolutions call for a trial in the UK or the US.

Fourthly, holding the trial in a third country might imply that the Lockerbie suspects could not get a fair trial in Scotland. The Libyan Government indicated in 1993 that they accepted that the suspects would get a fair trial in Scotland.

Finally, even if it were possible to set up such a court, there is no credible guarantee that the suspects would be made available for trial. Even if all the other difficulties that I have just outlined were resolved, I would be most reluctant to set in motion a complex procedure of legislation and international agreements that could too easily lead to nothing.

The Libyan Government have never undertaken to hand the accused over for trial anyway. Indeed, they have maintained that they have no powers to force the suspects to go for trial anywhere. Against that background, the scope for further prevarication after all the arrangements had been put in place would be enormous. So for all those reasons, we have concluded that a trial in a third country remains unacceptable.

We understand that the proposal currently preferred by the Libyans, and endorsed by the Arab League, is a trial before Scottish judges under Scottish law at the seat of the International Court of Justice in The Hague. As I have said, that proposal is unacceptable, for the same reasons as any trial in a third country.

We are conscious that Libya has been under the pressure of sanctions for over three and a half years. Libya's attempts to promote so-called compromise solutions and alternatives to trial in Scotland and the US show that the pressure is having an effect, and we should not waver. The pressure should remain on Libya until it does what the international community demanded in 1992. We ask no more or less than that.

In the meantime, we must at all costs avoid prejudicing the trial. For that reason, we cannot, as has been suggested, show the timer used in the explosion to its manufacturer, or, for that matter, disclose any of the other evidence.

[Mr. Jeremy Hanley]

The hon. Gentleman referred to the activities of Mr. Thomas Thurman, an American forensic scientist. The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, my hon. Friend the Member for Upminster (Sir N. Bonsor), told the hon. Gentleman on 10 November that the forensic examination in the Lockerbie investigation was conducted by the Royal Armaments Research and Development Establishment. My noble and learned Friend the Lord Advocate told the hon. Gentleman on 6 October that the Lockerbie case did not depend on any evidence that Mr. Thurman might give.

What may or may not have happened in the United States to cause the FBI to investigate the activities of Mr. Thurman has no bearing on the evidence that forms the basis of the Scottish petition warrant.

Widely diverging stories have appeared in the press and elsewhere on the recovery of fragments of the timer in that case. Those stories have been based on speculation, and it should therefore come as no surprise that they are indeed divergent. I can go into no further detail on the evidence, which includes recovery of any of the physical evidence, for fear of prejudicing the case.

As in the case of Libya, the aim of sanctions against Iraq is clear. It is to ensure that Iraq fully complies with its obligations under the relevant UN Security Council resolutions. It is simply not true to say that sanctions are not working. They have achieved a measure of Iraqi compliance with the requirements of UN Security Council resolutions—notably, Iraqi recognition of Kuwait and UN-demarcated borders.

Without the pressure of sanctions, it is unlikely that Iraq would have revealed to the UN special commission information on its development of weapons of mass destruction. UNSCOM has recently discovered the horrifying capabilities that Iraq has tried to conceal: enough chemical and biological weapons to kill the world's population several times over. UNSCOM's work on Iraq's weapons of mass destruction programme is essential for the security of the region, indeed the world. We give it strong support.

Nevertheless, Iraq still falls short of its other obligations. Time permits me to mention only a few. First, despite UNSCOM's recent discoveries, much remains to be done in respect of Iraq's weapons of mass destruction programme. Secondly, Iraq has an appalling human rights record. To hon. Members who have a strong stomach, I commend the recent report by the UN's special rapporteur on human rights, Mr. van der Stoel, which recounts nauseating acts of torture committed by the Iraqi regime, as well as denial to Iraq's population of the most basic human rights. Thirdly, Iraq has failed to account for the whereabouts of more than 600 missing Kuwaiti and third-country nationals and property, including military hardware, stolen from Kuwait.

Recent history shows that Saddam Hussein cannot be given the benefit of the doubt. The UN Security Council reviews sanctions every 60 days in the light of Iraq's behaviour. At the last review on 8 November, it agreed that sanctions could not be modified. There is no doubt that that was right. Sanctions must be maintained until Iraq fully complies with its international obligations under relevant UN Security Council resolutions.

We share the concern of many right hon. and hon. Members about the desperate plight of Iraqi citizens. The hon. Member for Linlithgow said that we were making enemies of a whole generation of young Iraqis, but I wonder whether it is right to make enemies of the rest of the world. It is nonsense to blame the shortages and deprivations on the UN. Food and medicines are not subject to sanctions.

Rather than buy food, Saddam Hussein has chosen to spend the regime's limited resources on military procurement, ostentatious construction projects and luxury items for his hangers-on. For example, Mr. van der Stoel notes that members of the Ba'ath party and military officers have their own food distribution network. Saddam, not the UN, bears full responsibility for the suffering of the Iraqi people.

To try to alleviate the suffering of the Iraqi people, the UK played a leading role in the unanimous adoption of UN Security Council resolution 986, which would allow Iraq to export a substantial quantity of oil in return for humanitarian aid. The resolution was designed to accommodate criticisms of earlier offers made by the UN under resolutions 706 and 712. It increases the amounts of oil that Iraq could export and is more flexible in the arrangements for monitoring distribution of supplies. Were it to implement resolution 986, Iraq could purchase substantial amounts of humanitarian supplies. The hon. Gentleman said that this was about $6 or $7 per person per month. That is approximately $2.5 billion-worth per annum. That compares with $5 billion spent on all civilian goods before the Gulf war. Sadly, Iraq has refused to implement it. We urge Iraq to implement this humanitarian resolution, to relieve the suffering of the Iraqi people.

We have also been helping the Iraqi people more directly. Since 1991, we have given more than £72 million to the humanitarian effort in Iraq. The Overseas Development Administration is also spending substantial sums on aid to Iraq this financial year. I pay tribute to the British and other humanitarian non-governmental organisations working in the area, and to the group from the Scottish churches. My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State asked me to meet them only last week. I did, and I was pleased to listen to them and discuss matters, but they too recognise that resolution 986 has been implemented by a unanimous international agreement.

The recent developments in the resolution of the Bosnia crisis are an example of sanctions being effective. The promise of the suspension of sanctions was a key factor in bringing President Milosevic to the negotiating table in Dayton, and in bringing about the signing of the peace agreement. The resulting UN resolution which the Security Council adopted last week was a just reward for that achievement.

Let us pray that the leaders in Libya and Iraq rise to their responsibilities, and take the necessary steps to help their people to answer those who demand justice, and to rejoin the international community of good will whose only aim is to work for peace.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-nine minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 30 November 1995

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

MESSAGE FROM THE QUEEN

QUEEN'S SPEECH (ANSWER TO ADDRESS)

THE VICE-CHAMBERLAIN OF THE HOUSEHOLD reported Her Majesty's answer to the Address, as follows:

I have received with great satisfaction the loyal and dutiful expression of your thanks for the speech with which I opened the present Session of Parliament.

Oral Answers to Questions

HOME DEPARTMENT

Unlawful Actions

1. **Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on how many occasions in the last two years his actions have been declared unlawful in the courts. [1351]

5. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on how many occasions his policies have been the subject of court decisions. [1356]

7. **Mr. Jim Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what has been the cost to public funds since 1979 of judicial reviews following which his actions as Minister have been judged unlawful. [1358]

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Michael Howard): Hundreds of applications for judicial review are made each year. Detailed information on individual cases is not collected centrally. The vast majority of cases are judged by the courts to be without foundation. No information is available on the total cost of the applications.

Mr. Banks: I actually asked how many of the Home Secretary's actions over the past two years had been declared unlawful. The answer is squillions, it seems to us. If the Home Secretary were not so smug, complacent and arrogant, he would not get turned over in the courts so often. Why does he not start listening to his own advisers and experts, and other people who know about such things? Or is he satisfied to carry on following his own prejudices? If he carries on like that, he will become known as the old lag of British politics.

Mr. Howard: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will be encouraged and much comforted to know that the proportion of cases that succeed is not as high as it used to be. The difficulty is that the many cases that fail just do not seem to get as much publicity as the few that succeed.

Mr. Skinner: Why does the Home Secretary not have the nerve to admit that he has persistently offended—nine times since he has had his present job? Is he aware that Government money is available for sending young children who are persistent offenders on safari trips? We would be prepared to fund one for him. Better still, he could go to California, where if someone persistently offends, not nine times but three times, it is "Three strikes and you're out."

Mr. Howard: I had not intended to visit California in the summer recess, but now that I know that the hon. Gentleman will fund my visit I shall certainly consider going.

Mr. Cunningham: The Home Secretary has demonstrated by his reply that he is a bad bookkeeper. Can he explain why, although the Prime Minister said that there would be an extra 5,000 police officers over the next two or three years, the right hon. and learned Gentleman, through the local authority standard spending assessments, has cut £80 million off local authority budgets—budgets that have to provide for the fight against crime?

Mr. Howard: The hon. Gentleman is entirely wrong. The police settlement has increased by 4 per cent. for the forthcoming year, and that will include funding to pay for the extra officers that the Prime Minister announced to the party conference. We are making good the promises that we made.

Mr. Charles Wardle: If the European Court of Justice feels able to make a mockery of his decisions on excluding foreign nationals on the ground of national security, what does my right hon. and learned Friend think that it will do with our internal frontier controls and the legally worthless 1985 declaration, which for years senior officials and legal advisers have told the Government has no protection in law?

Mr. Howard: As my hon. Friend knows, we have made clear on many occasions our determination to maintain our frontier controls. As for this morning's decision, to which I believe my hon. Friend was referring, it goes not to the substance of the exclusion order-making power, but only to procedures. So far as I can see, the only likely effect is that those subject to it are likely to be detained in custody instead of being allowed to leave the country while the exclusion order is being considered.

Sir Teddy Taylor: How on earth can the Home Secretary justify or explain the European Court's statement that this country unlawfully excluded people who were a threat or a danger to this country solely because we were contravening article 9A of the Maastricht treaty, bearing in mind the assurances which the Government gave to the whole House during the debates on the treaty that security matters were entirely for this particular Government and other democratic Governments? Is not this a terribly serious issue? Will we now have to give compensation from taxpayers' funds to those whom we excluded on the ground of national security?

Mr. Howard: I have some sympathy with the views expressed by my hon. Friend, and I very much regret the European Court's decision. But it is a very narrow and

limited decision which does not deal with the substance of the exclusion order power. The decision deals only with the procedural aspects of that power, and we shall resist—I believe successfully—any claim for compensation that is made.

Sir Ivan Lawrence: Is it not the nature of my right hon. and learned Friend's Department to be subject to more judicial reviews than any other Department? Has life not become impossible for Ministers, whose every administrative decision is challenged in the courts? Is he aware that the courts are spending much more of their resources on dealing with judicial reviews than they want to, bearing in mind the rest of the ordinary activities of the courts? Is it not time that we seriously started to consider reducing the scope of that remedy?

Mr. Howard: It is certainly true that the number of applications for judicial review is increasing considerably. I am surprised at the enthusiasm which is shown for the process by Opposition Members. The shadow Lord Chancellor, Lord Irvine of Lairg, recently warned against

"greater activism in judicial review".

He went on to describe some of the views recently expressed by judges as

"contrary to the established law and usages of our country".

I have never gone that far.

Mr. Alex Carlile: Does the Home Secretary agree that this morning's decision by the European Court simply declares what is, in almost every case, the existing practice—namely, that prevention of terrorism exclusion suspects are given the opportunity to make representations, that those representations are made to an entirely independent person and that the Government recognise that judicial review is a remedy which is available to all who are affected by Government action if permission is granted by a court? Will he tell his hon. Friends who have been babbling about the effect of Europe on this issue that, in fact, the Government have no difficulty whatsoever with this decision, which does not undermine the provisions of the prevention of terrorism Act in any significant way?

Mr. Howard: It is true that the decision does not undermine the provisions of the prevention of terrorism Act, and we would never allow the provisions of that Act to be undermined. But it is clear that the European Court takes a different view of the procedures that we follow.

Mr. Carlile: It does not.

Mr. Howard: Oh yes it does. We must consider the precise implications of that decision, which—as I have indicated to my hon. Friends—I very much regret. The only consequence of the decision appears to be that people who are suspected will have to be detained in custody, whereas now they do not have to be detained.

Mr. John Greenway: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that this House—the sovereign Parliament of the United Kingdom—has, year upon year, made its view on the prevention of terrorism exclusion orders abundantly plain? Does he agree that the House has stated that the Home Secretary should have the power to exclude those people? We are now told that there is something wrong with that arrangement because of a directive agreed 31 years ago when we were not members of the Community. Is not the sovereignty of this House at risk because of the European situation?

Mr. Howard: I would be more concerned if the effect of the decision was in any way to take away the powers of the Home Secretary to decide on exclusion, but it does not do that. The court has made a limited criticism of some of the procedures, but we can adapt our procedures without any difficulty. As I have stated, the only consequence of the decision is likely to be that people will have to be detained in custody while we consider their representations, whereas at present they can leave the country without being detained.

Fire Service

2. **Mr. Jamieson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the original estimate of fire service spending for 1995-96; and by how much this exceeds the amount of the capping limit for England and Wales. [1352]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Tom Sackville): The estimate of revenue spending by fire authorities in England and Wales in 1995-96 is £1,324 million. One metropolitan fire authority—South Yorkshire—set a budget £640,000 above its provisional cap and this was accepted.

Mr. Jamieson: Is the Minister aware that the local authority associations are saying that, nationally, there is an £80 million shortfall on fire service expenditure? Given the grim picture for public expenditure next year, do not we face a serious funding crisis in the fire service? When will the Government listen to the local authority associations, the Audit Commission and many others, and face their responsibility for funding a vital emergency service?

Mr. Sackville: The hon. Gentleman mentions the Audit Commission, which said in its report that at least £67 million-worth of savings could be made if all fire authorities came up to best practice. I have no evidence to suggest that best practice is the maximum efficiency that can be reached. Extensive further efficiencies may be possible. The hon. Gentleman should remember that, in his county of Devon, the standard spending assessment for fire was increased by 9.5 per cent. this year.

Mr. George Howarth: May I welcome the Minister to his new responsibilities? Is he aware that although the Audit Commission report, "In the Line of Fire", suggested where savings might be made, it pointed out that there were serious structural problems in the method of funding fire authorities? Is he also aware that, within the past two years, the chief fire officer commented on the serious possibility of a funding crisis for fire authorities throughout the country? Is it not time that the Government stopped hiding behind statistics and got down to sorting out the serious structural funding problems within the fire services? Are they prepared to stand by and let a vital emergency service drift towards being unable to fulfil its functions?

Mr. Sackville: May I remind the hon. Member for Knowsley, North (Mr. Howarth) that the responsibility for setting budgets for fire services lies with the fire authorities. They must satisfy themselves that they can

fulfil their duties under the Fire Services Act 1947. It is open to them to set a budget above the Government's capping requirements if they can justify it, and one metropolitan county that did that last year had its budget allowed. If the hon. Gentleman is asking for extra spending on the fire service and everything else, how will he fund his party's promised reductions in income tax?

Crime, West Yorkshire

3. **Mr. Sutcliffe:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to visit West Yorkshire in the near future to discuss crime levels. [1354]

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. David Maclean): My right hon. and learned Friend has no immediate plans to visit West Yorkshire. However, we congratulate West Yorkshire police force on the 10 per cent. reduction in vehicle crime, the 3 per cent. reduction in other theft, and the 5 per cent. reduction in burglary recorded in the 12 months to June 1995.

Mr. Sutcliffe: I congratulate the police, but will the Minister tell us how many extra police officers will be on the beat in West Yorkshire as a result of his proposals? Is he prepared to fund the pilot schemes like the one in my constituency, where two dedicated officers are funded by city challenge? Will he guarantee that, if those schemes are successful, they will receive long-term funding from the Home Office?

Mr. Maclean: The hon. Gentleman is behind the times. He should know that we do not dictate to chief constables how many officers they may have. As a matter of interest, with the funding made available to West Yorkshire since the Government came to power in 1979, there has been a 7 per cent. increase in police officers and a 65 per cent. increase in police civilian staff, allowing more bobbies to go on the beat. This financial year, the chief constable of West Yorkshire plans to recruit more bobbies and hopes to have 135 more this year alone.

Mr. Riddick: May I join my right hon. Friend in welcoming the chief constable's announcement of 135 new police officers by the end of this financial year? Is he aware that the chief constable has managed to achieve that by slimming down the bureaucracy in Wakefield and reducing the number of senior ranks? Does not that show that extra money from the Government is not always needed to put more police officers on the beat?

Mr. Maclean: My hon. Friend is right. That pattern is being repeated throughout the country. In nearly all police forces, chief officers have streamlined senior and middle ranks—particularly inspectors, chief inspectors and superintendents—and used the savings to recruit more constables. That means that more constables are out on the beat. They are available for operational duties and that practice has been encouraged by this Conservative Government. There is also the fact, of course, that the first thing that the Government did in 1979 was to recruit the 8,000 bobbies that that lot let slide.

Mr. Straw: Is the Minister aware that over the three years since the last general election, the number of police officers in West Yorkshire has gone down by 107 and across the country, according to the chief inspector's latest report, by 823—wholly contrary to a pledge given at the last general election of 1,000 more officers on the beat? Given that broken promise, what guarantee can the Minister give that the latest promise on police numbers of 5,000 over three years is going to be honoured or is that going to be yet another broken promise from the Tories?

Mr. Maclean: With that statistic, as with all the others that the hon. Gentleman uses, especially when he tries to compare falling crime in Britain with crime in other countries, he gets stuck at a particular point in time. He does not like to take the latest, up-to-date facts. He should be aware that the chief constable of West Yorkshire is predicting that by the end of this financial year, he will have 135 more bobbies. If the hon. Gentleman does not understand that getting rid of senior ranks and recruiting constables instead puts more people on the beat, then God help this country if he were ever Home Secretary.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: When my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary visits West Yorkshire and meets the chief constable, could he suggest that when the chief constable deals with the case of PC Godber, the policeman who clipped a young thug round the ear, that police constable should be congratulated rather than disciplined?

Mr. Maclean: I am sure the House heard what my hon. Friend said and no doubt those remarks will be drawn to the chief constable's attention. Neither my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary nor I interfere in these disciplinary matters. Cases such as this come to the Home Secretary on appeal once the procedures have been followed. I could not comment.

Community Policing

4. **Mr. Rendel:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to improve community policing in the Thames valley. [1355]

Mr. Maclean: The Government fully support community policing and I want to congratulate the chief constable of Thames valley on setting objectives in the Newbury area to prevent vehicle crime, to prevent burglary, and to prevent misuse of drugs by an active programme of partnership and community intervention.

Mr. Rendel: I am delighted that the Minister congratulates the Newbury police force on its partnership with Newbury district council, which, as he knows, is Liberal Democrat-led. Given the fact that the violent crime record in the Thames valley is currently the second worst in the country and given the amount of money for new policing in the Budget for the next financial year, just how many of the much-trumpeted 5,000 extra police officers are going to be in place by the end of the next financial year?

Mr. Maclean: The hon. Gentleman will have to wait. I am not going to announce at this moment the settlement on police funding. He will have to wait at least an hour for that. The chief constable of Thames valley has been very successful in tackling crime. In the past two years, burglary has come down 20 per cent. total crime 13 per cent. 25,000 fewer crimes have been committed in the Thames valley; and theft is down 17 per cent. Where a chief constable finds that any particular sort of crime is rising, I am sure that he will use the increased resources that we have made available to target that crime. If there

is an increase in robbery or violence, chief constables will use the resources to get those crimes down just as they have tackled other crime.

Mr. Simon Coombs: Speaking from the head-waters of the River Thames, may I say how warmly welcomed in my constituency was the Chancellor's confirmation of the recruitment of an additional 5,000 police officers across the country over the next three years, following as it did the news of the 5 per cent. fall in crime in the county of Wiltshire in the previous year? Will my right hon. Friend bear it in mind that the ability of the chief constable of Wiltshire to deliver good community policing depends to a large extent on his ability to fulfil other responsibilities such as security in the county?

Mr. Maclean: I appreciate what my hon. Friend says. When he studies the settlement that we have made available, not only for Wiltshire but for all the other forces in England and Wales for which my right hon. and learned Friend has financial responsibility, I hope that he will conclude that Wiltshire has been well satisfied and has had not only its ordinary policing needs met but those for its special security responsibilities.

Europol

6. **Mr. Rathbone:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to support the functioning of Europol; and if he will make a statement. [1357]

Mr. Howard: We already provide substantial support to the existing Europol drugs unit. We shall build on that commitment when Europol comes into operation. We expect Europol to make a very valuable contribution to the fight against international organised crime, particularly drug trafficking, in the European Union and more widely.

Mr. Rathbone: Although the House will welcome the Home Secretary's commitment to Europol, on which the British Government have given the lead right from its inception, I believe that there is general disappointment at the Government's inability to sign the convention supporting Europol. Can the Home Secretary inform the House that that difficulty will be overcome speedily?

Mr. Howard: I am happy to tell my hon. Friend that the convention was in fact signed in July following the agreement on it reached at the Cannes summit. We intend to ratify it shortly, and I hope that other countries will as well.

Mr. Henderson: As such matters must be dealt with at an intergovernmental level, does the Secretary of State accept that the House should be consulted more systematically on proposals, tentative agreements and agreements? Does he agree that there is a need for inter-country police co-operation to fight racist extremists in Europe? If he does agree, does he intend to conclude an agreement on these matters, and, if so, when?

Mr. Howard: On the hon. Gentleman's first point, the Europol convention was the subject of an explanatory note sent to Committees on 22 February 1994; supplementary notes were submitted on 17 November 1994 and 31 May this year; and the final text was deposited on 28 July.

On the hon. Gentleman's second point, I agree that there ought to be intergovernmental co-operation on racism and xenophobia. That is a very different matter, however, from a legally binding document that would require us to consider changing the laws of the United Kingdom in a way which does not meet our circumstances. That was something that I was not prepared to go along with in Brussels last week. If the hon Gentleman thinks that he would go along with that and that the United Kingdom should have signed up, perhaps he would be clear and say so.

Mr. Fabricant: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree with me that racism must be fought wherever it happens, whether on mainland Europe, in the United Kingdom or, indeed, in Leicester? Will he join me in condemning the Opposition spokesman, who was reported on "Dispatches" last night, for his outrageous, disgraceful racist comments?

Mr. Howard: We look forward to an explanation from the hon. Gentleman at the earliest possible moment.

Closed Circuit Television

9. **Mr. Pike:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many closed circuit television schemes are financially supported fully or in part by the safer cities initiative. [1361]

Mr. Maclean: Forty-two CCTV schemes received funding under phase 1 of the safer cities programme, seven are being financially supported under phase 2, and of course 106 schemes were supported by my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary's challenge funding scheme.

Mr. Pike: Will the Minister ensure that schemes such as that in Burnley, which are doing an excellent job, continue to have the necessary finances made available to them? Will he also give an assurance that steps will be taken to stop any illegal use of the tapes made in any of these schemes anywhere in the country?

Mr. Maclean: I can assure the hon. Gentleman that we shall have another round of challenge funding. We have in fact announced another round of funding, and this time we are putting up not just £5 million but £15 million. We are inviting bids from all around the country, from communities large and small. A key condition of the funding is that there will have to be a code of practice on the proper use of video tapes. We shall also insist that if any scheme that is up and running wants any top-up funding, it should have a proper code of practice as well. I condemn totally the irresponsible use of any CCTV images for commercial gain.

Mr. Bellingham: Does the Minister agree that it is not just CCTV tapes which need to be looked at carefully, but police interview tapes? Will he look specifically at the bizarre and worrying case involving one of my constituents who bought, at a car boot sale, 20 police interview tapes marked "Essex and Cambridgeshire Constabulary", which contained highly confidential information, including an interview with a schoolmaster who was alleged to have interfered with a choirboy? That could have been highly damaging to individuals—*[Interruption.]* I do not know why Opposition Members

are smirking and laughing—it is a serious matter. Will the Minister ensure that such an incident never recurs and will he comment on it?

Mr. Maclean: Inquiries are being made by the police. We must be careful about apportioning blame before the inquiries are completed. I understand from the reports that the police say that they have all their master tapes intact and it is likely, or certainly possible, that the tapes came from a solicitor—from the defence copy of the tapes, possibly from a practice from which a solicitor was eventually disbarred. I understand that to be the case and I would not wish to go further without having more information. I hope that when the facts are fully revealed we will not be blaming the police service.

Mr. Michael: As the Minister knows, the Labour party has encouraged the effective use of CCTV in cutting crime. He will share, as he has suggested, my concern about the sale of films. Does he agree that it would be tragic if public confidence was undermined by people selling surveillance films, whether from the police, the public sector or the private sector? We are willing to help the Home Secretary to pass legislation through the House quickly in this Session to outlaw such activity by anyone in the public or private sector. Will he accept our offer?

Mr. Maclean: I am grateful for what the hon. Gentleman has said. We must be careful and I warn the House that we should not hype up the episode, which is probably just what the promoter of the film wants. We must not get the matter out of proportion. I condemn irresponsible use, but at times it is helpful for the police and others to release certain video tapes or for programmes such as "Crimewatch UK" to show them as it helps detection and prevention.

We do not want to prevent, through hasty regulation, the sensible use of pictures because of a shoddy, poor-quality, over-hyped film. There is hardly any material on the film from public CCTV and the little that was released by the police for promotional purposes was mostly from private videos inside buildings. The quality of the film was worse than Logie Baird's first pictures in 1925—the public should rightly condemn such rubbish by not buying it.

Mr. John Marshall: Does my right hon. Friend think that the safer cities initiative is helped by racist comments such as those uttered on the "Dispatches" programme last night?

Mr. Maclean: I hope that the Opposition will respond quickly with a total denunciation of the comments and the colleague who made them. Racist comments of that nature are unacceptable from any quarter, particularly from Front-Bench spokesmen from a party which hopes one day to be in government.

Bingo

10. **Mr. Hutton:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proposals he has for deregulating the bingo industry. [1362]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Timothy Kirkhope): We are at present reviewing the controls on bingo clubs as part of the Government's deregulation initiative.

Mr. Hutton: Does the Minister accept the need to establish a level playing field on which all sections of the gambling industry are able to compete against each other fairly? How much longer will bingo clubs in my constituency and elsewhere, which perform a valuable social role in the community, continue to face petty and bureaucratic restrictions on advertising and on the number of coin-operated machines that they contain?

Mr. Kirkhope: I am very pleased that the hon. Gentleman shares my concern and interest in the bingo industry; I have recently seen a number of groups representing the industry. I hope to be able very shortly to address the points that he has mentioned and help the bingo industry to achieve greater success in the future.

Mr. Whittingdale: Does my hon. Friend accept that it is impossible to lose more than a handful of pounds in the course of an evening's visit to a bingo hall, unlike a casino, where literally thousands of pounds can be lost in a short time? Does he agree that there is no reason for bingo to be subjected to the same degree of regulation as the casino industry? Will he consider subjecting the industry to the deregulation process?

Mr. Kirkhope: I shall certainly do so. My hon. Friend is right to refer to the difference between bingo and casinos and other forms of gambling. I am sure that the deregulation process can be selective in that way, but it is important to ensure that those who want to go about perfectly legitimate entertainment such as bingo should be able to do so with the minimum of regulation.

Capital and Corporal Punishment

11. **Mr. Nicholas Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to review the possibility of restoring to the courts the option of capital and corporal punishment. [1363]

Mr. Howard: None. Capital punishment is a matter for the will of the House. I am not satisfied that corporal punishment would be useful in practice. It had virtually fallen into disuse some time before it was abolished.

Mr. Winterton: I am sure that my right hon. and learned Friend would not expect me to be happy with that reply. Does he accept that, as I believe, a decent and civilised society should be permitted to protect itself against an uncivilised, heinous and brutal act? I refer to the killing of women following rape, the killing of children following sexual molestation, the killing of police and prison officers in the course of their duty, killings resulting from terrorist bombs and bullets and killings resulting from premeditated armed robbery.

Is it not right that a civilised society should be able to protect itself from those brutal crimes, and is not the only answer capital punishment? Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree with me, speaking as a grandfather and father, that the phrase, "spare the rod and spoil the child" is more applicable today than it ever has been?

Mr. Howard: I tend to agree with my hon. Friend's last observation, and of course I agree with him that any civilised society must protect itself against barbaric behaviour of the type that he described. Where we differ is that I believe that there are other ways in which that protection can be provided, including the sentence of life imprisonment, but it is important that someone

accountable to the House continues to have a role in deciding how long someone sentenced to life imprisonment should actually serve, including the minimum sentence for those who are convicted of the murder of police officers.

Mr. Soley: If the Home Secretary decided to support capital punishment, would he give an absolute guarantee to the House that he would first develop the scientific skills that were necessary to restore life to a person who had been wrongfully convicted?

Mr. Howard: It is true that the danger of miscarriages of justice and the impossibility of remedying them is one of the strongest arguments against capital punishment.

Mr. Hawkins: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that it is highly likely that, if there were a referendum on the re-introduction of capital and corporal punishment, voters would vote for it, as my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton) has said?

Does my right hon. and learned Friend also agree that the Leader of the Opposition might consider corporal punishment for his Front-Bench spokesman on inner cities for his appalling racist comments reported on "Dispatches" on Channel 4 last night?

Mr. Howard: We condemn and deplore racist comments, whenever they are made, wherever they are made and whatever quarter they come from. I hope that the Opposition will take seriously the observations that were made in the House this afternoon and take appropriate action.

It is my impression that the Leader of the Opposition administers corporal punishment to members of his Front-Bench team almost daily.

Crime and Unemployment

12. **Mrs. Anne Campbell:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the relationship between crime levels and unemployment. [1364]

Mr. Maclean: A wide range of research studies, including those conducted by my Department, have failed to uncover any consistent causal link between unemployment and crime.

Mrs. Campbell: There is no excuse for committing a crime—[HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."]—but does the Minister consider that Government policies that produce high youth unemployment, inadequate youth training programmes and cuts in benefit for the under-25s create conditions in which crime and law breaking can thrive? Are not the Government's policies responsible for the continuing high level of crime?

Mr. Maclean: The admission in the first part of the hon. Lady's supplementary question will keep Alastair Campbell spin doctoring for the rest of this afternoon. If she does not want to believe Home Office research studies and studies from other independent researchers, perhaps she will believe the highly respected chief constable of Strathclyde who, last Saturday, poured cold water on her pet theories about unemployment and crime. If police chiefs throughout the country can see that, and we see it in our research studies, perhaps one day it will get through to the Opposition; but I am not hopeful.

Drug Trafficking

13. **Mr. Spring:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to tackle the international trade in illegal drug trafficking. [1367]

Mr. Howard: The Government are committed to vigorous action at home and abroad to tackle international drug trafficking and other serious organised crime. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister recently announced a series of measures to improve law enforcement in that field, including a role for the Security Service in support of the police. We are also pursuing, with our European partners, an international initiative to improve drug interdiction in the eastern Caribbean.

Mr. Spring: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that if illegal drug trafficking is to be combated, a high level of international co-operation will be required? Is he aware of the success of Operation De Niro which, with considerable British help, resulted in 88 arrests world wide and the seizure of $52 million, $11 million-worth of paintings and 9 tonnes of cocaine?

Mr. Howard: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend, and I am grateful to him for giving the House that example. The resources available to many of the organisations that are involved in international drug trafficking are far in excess of those available to a number of nation states. International co-operation, in which we play a prominent part, is essential if we are to combat the activities of those organisations effectively.

Mr. Bermingham: Does the Home Secretary agree that one of the problems involved in fighting crime such as drug trafficking is the fact that Great Britain is an island? Does he agree that the fact that the Government have cut the number of drug enforcement and customs officers and the number of officers available to both coastguards and others, has not really helped to stop the importation of drugs?

Mr. Howard: I entirely reject the hon. Gentleman's allegations. We are now concentrating on more effective measures—particularly the use of intelligence—so that we can target the offenders and deal effectively with this menace.

Immigration and Asylum

14. **Mr. Ian Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received regarding the problem of illegal immigration and bogus asylum applications. [1368]

15. **Sir Michael Neubert:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he is taking to tackle bogus asylum claims and illegal immigration; and if he will make a statement. [1369]

The Minister of State, Home Office (Miss Ann Widdecombe): I have received numerous representations on a wide range of asylum and immigration issues. My right hon. and learned Friend announced to the House on 20 November the further measures that he proposes to take to tackle the problems caused by unfounded asylum claims and illegal immigration.

Mr. Bruce: Does my hon. Friend agree that, by speeding up the handling of applications by genuine

asylum seekers, we shall improve the position for those who are in real need and reduce the social security budget? Will my hon. Friend hammer the nail home once and for all and stress that that will improve race relations? The vast majority of bogus asylum seekers are now Europeans from the eastern bloc.

Miss Widdecombe: My hon. Friend is right on every count. Nothing in our Bill is intended in any way to disadvantage the genuine asylum seeker. Britain has a proud record of looking after those in need of a place of safety, and we shall continue to maintain that record.

The Opposition have consistently accused us of introducing a racist measure. That sits ill with what was said by their spokesman, the hon. Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz). Before Opposition Members accuse us of racism, perhaps they will apologise for their spokesman.

Sir Michael Neubert: Did my hon. Friend read the story, earlier this week, of a man from Zaire on benefit who defrauded the British people of £1 million while awaiting a decision on his application for asylum? Does that not make our right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary's action on asylum applications and illegal immigration very welcome? Would not any political party that failed to support such measures—Labour, Liberal or Monster Raving Loony—be absolutely barmy?

Miss Widdecombe: That is perfectly true. Moreover, only the Conservative party is prepared to tackle the problem. Indeed, the Opposition have not made up their minds whether to acknowledge that there is a serious problem. They say that, even if there is a problem, we should not get round to tackling it. It is true that our asylum procedures are heavily abused. It is also true that our social security system acts as a magnet for the unworthy, as does the ease with which people can work illegally in this country. We shall support British taxpayers, no matter what their ethnic origin. We shall ensure that those who are here lawfully are not taken for a ride by those who abuse our system.

Mr. Timms: I welcome the assurance given by the Home Secretary last week that Nigeria is not now being considered for inclusion on the white list. Will the Minister now put the minds of many people at rest by giving a similar assurance in respect of Sri Lanka, where many thousands of people have been forced to flee their homes in recent weeks because of the civil war?

Miss Widdecombe: We have made it very clear that, at an early stage of consideration of the Bill, we shall give an indication of our thinking on which countries should be designated. I am not willing to anticipate that announcement, and the hon. Gentleman must possess himself in patience.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Nigel Griffiths:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 30 November. [1381]

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): This morning, I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mr. Griffiths: Why is the Prime Minister undermining the Post Office price freeze by increasing tax on the post, taking £1 million every working day and forcing up the price of stamps? Is not this yet another case of higher Tory taxes and the Government giving with one hand and taking away with the other?

The Prime Minister: I can see that the hon. Gentleman was very carefully rehearsed for this week's soundbite. He should look at the record on the Post Office. If he does, he will see that stamp prices have been frozen for some time and that it is two and a half years since the last increase. That is the longest period of stability since the 1960s, and stamp prices continue to fall in real terms.

Mr. Mark Robinson: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the extra resources for schools announced in the Budget are very good news? Will he also do everything in his power to encourage local authorities to ensure that that money is passed on to schools?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend touches on two important points. The increase in resources to schools through the local authority budget will be welcome. It is also important that it is clear to parents and to schools that the money provided to the local authority settlement for education should go to education.

Mr. Blair: Before asking my question, may I tell the Prime Minister that, on Northern Ireland, we reiterate our congratulations to all involved in the peace process? The American President's visit to Northern Ireland today marks a moment of history in which we all rejoice. May I express the hope that these new and strong voices for peace can drown out the old cries of violence and allow everybody, not just there but here, to unite and put aside their differences and work for a common end?

I do not know whether the Prime Minister remembers the Budget, but may I ask him to withdraw the remarks made by the Conservative party chairman, who has claimed that the Budget will make the average family in Britain £9 a week better off? Will he confirm that, of that £9, almost £7 has nothing to do with the Budget but has to do with the Conservatives' projection of wage increases next year? The real Budget figure is just over £2, and that does not take account of extra costs, charges and taxes. Is that right or wrong?

The Prime Minister: I welcome what the right hon. Gentleman had to say about Northern Ireland. The President's visit to Belfast this morning was a spectacular success and everyone welcomes what he has had to say about terrorism.

On the subject of withdrawing claims, the right hon. Gentleman, when he replied to the Budget statement, made a series of comments, the vast majority of which were specious, wrong or misleading. If he cares to examine them, he will find that those that were not wrong were misleading, and that those that were not misleading were wrong. My right hon. Friend said that people will be better off by £450 next year, and that is our expectation.

Mr. Blair: We are entitled to an answer on this point. The claim was made that people are £9 a week better off as a result of the Budget, but £7 of it comes from earnings

rises next year as projected by the Conservative party. The true Budget figure is just over £2, and that is confirmed by the Treasury press release. Is that right or wrong? If it is right, does not it show how the Tories give with one hand and take with the other—[HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] They do not like it because it is true. If it is true, does not it also show that we can never trust the Tories on tax?

The Prime Minister: It really is a rich day for the soundbites. After all that they have said about the Budget, it is interesting to hear that the Opposition will not vote against the Budget provisions. They cannot say yes and they will not say no; they have at best a qualified "maybe" about the Budget. My right hon. Friend said that, next year, the average family will be around £9 a week better off and that is our expectation.

Returning to the issues of taxes and trust, does the right hon. Gentleman recall saying that he did not propose to put up taxes? Does he recall the deputy leader of the Labour party saying:

"high income levels are going to pay considerably more"

and that there would be a higher top rate of tax under Labour? There seems to be some difference of opinion between the right hon. Gentleman and his deputy. It does not matter if the deputy goes on shouting at me. It would be better if he stuck to the party line instead of behaving like the mouth of the Humber.

Mr. Blair: I shall tell the Prime Minister what people will recall at the next election. He went into the election saying that he would never raise VAT, and he raised it. *[Interruption.]* They can shout, but they will never again be trusted.

Madam Speaker: Order. I insist on the Leader of the Opposition being heard.

Mr. Blair: They want a question. Is it not the case that the Prime Minister went into the election promising not to raise VAT and then raised it? Is that simple enough for them?

The Prime Minister: I can tell the right hon. Gentleman what people will remember at the next election. They will remember a 33 per cent. rate of tax under a Labour Government and a 24 per cent. rate now. They will notice that interest rates have come down by 8 per cent. and that net disposable income is rising—and they will recall that that is not what happens under Labour Governments.

Mr. Cash: Given the fundamental importance of NATO to Britain and western security and the fact that we are about to send 13,000 British troops to Bosnia, will my right hon. Friend consider vetoing the prospective appointment of Mr. Solana, the Spanish Foreign Minister, as Secretary-General of NATO as he has expressed views against NATO and nuclear deterrence?

The Prime Minister: I understand from the information that I have received that that most certainly is not Mr. Solana's view. I do not know what he may have said in the past and my hon. Friend may have seen quotations of which I am not aware, but it is my understanding that that is not his view on NATO or nuclear weapons.

Q2. **Mrs. Anne Campbell:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 30 November. [1382]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Lady to the reply I gave some moments ago.

Mrs. Campbell: Will the Prime Minister unreservedly condemn the callous actions of Tory-controlled Westminster city council in moving 100 families with 150 babies and children into tower blocks riddled with the most virulent and dangerous form of asbestos? Are there any depths to which his party will not sink in order to hang on to political power?

The Prime Minister: On the subject of depths, the hon. Lady might address her question to the Monklands, Lambeth or Walsall councils, or to any one of many other Labour-controlled councils whose activity in local government is a disgrace.

Sir Fergus Montgomery: Did my right hon. Friend read in the *Sunday Express* the article about the strange goings-on in the Sedgefield constituency, where the Hurworth comprehensive school is applying for grant-maintained status? Is he aware that the Labour party there is accused of campaigning on dirty tricks and misleading information to stop the Leader of the Opposition being embarrassed? If my right hon. Friend had a son at a grant-maintained school, would he feel that his constituents were entitled to the same opportunity?

The Prime Minister: I did not read the article, but if what my hon. Friend said is correct, I am sure that the Opposition would wish to examine the matter, investigate it, condemn what has happened and ensure that such campaigning ceased immediately. Of course people have a right to a ballot on grant-maintained schools. They have a right also to have that ballot without undue hindrance, either from the local authority or from Labour Members. I very much hope that they will have that right.

Q3. **Mr. Madden:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 30 November. [1383]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Madden: As the Prime Minister is aware of the importance of prisoners in building still further confidence in the Irish peace process, will he support the early transfer, on humanitarian grounds, of Patrick Kelly and Michael O'Brien to prisons in Northern Ireland, and the repatriation of Irish prisoners to prisons in the Irish Republic—I hope before Christmas?

The Prime Minister: I think that the hon. Gentleman knows that there is the question of the health of one of those prisoners. They have both been convicted, as he knows, of serious terrorist offences. One of the solicitors involved has submitted medical evidence in support of a transfer. That matter, under the normal procedures, is being examined.

Mr. Deva: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that, if a member of his Front Bench had made a statement such as

was made last night by the hon. Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz) in a public television programme, he would have fired him instantly?

The Prime Minister: I regret any remark that has any connotation of the sort that I believe lies behind my hon. Friend's question. I hope that it is a matter that the hon. Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz) will clear up.

Q4. **Mr. Mudie:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 30 November. [1384]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Mudie: The Prime Minister will be aware that many Yorkshire households are still facing the prospect of using standpipes and that many businesses are facing rotational water supply cuts. Given the obscene profits that were announced yesterday, will the Prime Minister join me and the people of Yorkshire in condemning the directors of Yorkshire Water both for their greed and for their incompetence?

The Prime Minister: I am pleased to tell the hon. Gentleman that I understand that Yorkshire Water plans to invest £2.5 billion over the next 10 years and that it will invest more than £200 million this year for its customers' benefit. I believe that that is double its half-year profits. I hope that that will go a long way to ensuring that the difficulties that have occurred after years of a nationalised water industry will not be repeated under private ownership.

Q5. **Mr. Sims:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 30 November. [1385]

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Sims: Is my right hon. Friend aware that thousands of pensioners will welcome the new 20p rate of tax on savings? Is it not clear proof that the Government are working towards a 20 per cent. basic rate, as distinct from the policies that the Labour party is espousing, which mean that it is heading for a 30p rate?

The Prime Minister: Given the demands for extra spending that come from Labour Back-Bench Members, there is no doubt that a 30p rate might be exceeded were there ever to be a Labour Government. My hon. Friend is right; the 20p rate is particularly good news for thousands of people with savings, especially, perhaps, for many hundreds of thousands of pensioners with savings.

I think that it was the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) who said a few days ago, when talking about Labour policy, that these days it amounts to little more than a marketing exercise. We saw that with the gimmick of a 10p tax rate for the allegedly lower-paid. The reality is that we are proceeding towards a lower tax rate of 20 per cent. whereas the Labour party's spending plans add up to substantially more than the current level of taxation, whatever it may care to claim about them.

Mr. Janner: Would the Prime Minister be good enough to look at the awful case of my constituent, Jasmine Sorabjee, aged three and a half, born in this country and ill, whom the Home Office has seen fit to deport to Kenya with her mother? Is not that a cruel, disgraceful decision, devoid of compassion that shows the disgraceful way in which the Government are abusing immigration rules and failing to exercise any compassionate concern in cases of real human suffering?

The Prime Minister: I think that the hon. and learned Gentleman knows that the Government are not bypassing any of the immigration regulations. He knows that that is the case and he really should not have indicated the contrary. There are strict ways in which these matters are examined. They are examined with compassion.

Mr. Janner: They are not.

The Prime Minister: They are examined with compassion. Without any shadow of doubt they are examined with compassion. I have no details of the particular case, but the person removed from this country would have been the parent who, presumably, was an illegal immigrant.

Local Government Finance

3.31 pm

The Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. John Gummer): With permission, Madam Speaker, I should like to make a statement about the local authority finance settlement for England for 1996-97.

In forming my proposals, I have listened carefully to the views of local authorities and their associations, and I have considered fully the demands which will be placed on local authorities in the coming year.

I have also given weight to the interests of the economy as a whole, and in particular the Government's objective of reducing the public sector deficit. Local government accounts for around a quarter of general Government expenditure and has been rigorously examined, as have all other spending programmes. It is clear that many authorities continue to have scope to increase their efficiency.

I have also taken into account our policy that increases in pay and prices within the public sector must be offset, or more than offset, through efficiency savings or other economies. Within available resources, our approach to public sector pay is flexible enough to allow pay to be set to reflect the circumstances of individual groups.

That is the background to the aggregate figures that I published on 28 November. The Government's view is that the appropriate level of revenue spending for local authorities in England—the total standard spending or TSS—in 1996-97 will be £44.92 billion.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health will be making a separate announcement on resources for community care, which are included in the figures that I have just quoted. The figures also reflect the transfer of waste regulation to the Environment Agency from 1 April 1996 and certain other minor changes in local authorities' functions next year, and include provision of £100 million for the transitional costs of local government reorganisation.

The figures do not include resources to compensate local authorities for lost income from community care charges, arising from capital disregard changes announced by my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer on Tuesday. A special grant report will be laid before the House in due course to authorise an additional grant in 1996-97 for that purpose.

My proposal, including provision for community care, reorganisation costs and the police, provides for a 3.3 per cent. increase in local authority spending year on year. In allocating these resources, we have reduced provision for capital financing to bring it more into line with authorities' need to spend.

The Government have to decide what local government expenditure the nation can afford, because the national taxpayer foots most of the bill. Last year, we decided on £43.5 billion. This year, it is £44.9 billion. Of course, every year some local authorities spend more than under this system. They have their own resources: council tax, interest, fees and charges. So every year, on top of what the Government allow for, they budget to spend more. That is what we all expect. However, every year they use that difference to try to confuse the electorate. They take this year's spending, which includes all their resources, and compare it with the Government's settlement, which, of course, excludes much of their resources. As a result, even though the Government provide for them to spend £1.4 billion more, they claim it as a cut.

I dwelt on that, because the confusion reaches even as far as the House of Commons. It is very important that at least we start by getting the facts straight.

I am comparing—*[Interruption.]* I am pleased that Labour Members think that, because it will be the first time—for any settlement under the Government—that they have bothered to think about the facts at all. I have to tell the House that the Labour party circulated a note before the Budget statement, saying that, whatever the settlement was, Labour Members had to say that it was inadequate. That shows how interested the Labour party is in the facts.

I am comparing the Government's settlement for last year with that for this year. Last year, local authorities spent more than the settlement, and they will do exactly the same this year.

As for local authority services, we have decided to give the main priority to education. My proposal is that, after adjusting for changes in function, education standard spending should increase by 4.5 per cent. I must emphasise that the amount spent on schools is a decision for the local authority concerned, but no doubt parents, governors and teachers will wish to ensure that the whole of that increased funding feeds through into school budgets.

The provision that I have announced for the transitional costs of local government reorganisation in 1996-97 will need to cover both a further tranche of transitional costs in the areas where reorganisation takes place on 1 April next year, as well as costs where reorganisation is not due to take place until April 1997. Orders have not yet been placed before Parliament to implement all the changes that the Local Government Commission recommended as part of its main county reviews. In addition, we must await the commission's final recommendations on the fresh district reviews; these are due later this year. We envisage a staging of the implementation of reorganisation in England which takes account of the resources available.

Central Government grant and the distributable amount of non-domestic rates in support of TSS will be £35.62 billion, a year-on-year increase of 2.8 per cent. I announced on 28 November that the distributable amount of non-domestic rates in 1996-97 should be £12.74 billion, and I am today publishing the detailed basis for the distribution. I propose that the revenue support grant for distribution should be £18 billion. In addition, some £4.88 billion of specific and special grants would be available. The total of revenue support grant for England, on which I am consulting, may need to be altered slightly if the balance of the police funding formula as between Welsh and English police authorities changes as a result of consultation.

I turn now to the means of distributing revenue support grant. At its heart is the standard spending assessment for each authority.

Standard spending assessments are never likely to be popular, but they must be fair. More SSA for one authority means less for everyone else, because the total is fixed. We are continually discussing with the local authority associations how the SSAs might be improved. I am sure that it would be helpful to the House if the Labour party also discussed that with the local authority associations. They certainly think that they are fair, even

though the counties would like more for the counties and the metropolitan authorities would like more for the metropolitan authorities. It is very difficult, when one has an objective system, that the only people who do not think that it is objective are the official Opposition—in this House, but not outside. We share with the local authority associations all the detailed data and analyses that might form the basis of changing the SSA formulae.

The system is as open and objective as we can make it. Those who claim otherwise simply do not understand the SSA system. The formulae we use are not applied selectively to achieve a particular result for a particular authority—*[Laughter.]* If Opposition Members wish to press me, I will give them figures that will be very embarrassing to them. I shall be happy to show that the authorities about which they complain got more proportionately under Labour Governments than under Conservative Governments—[HON. MEMBERS: "Westminster."]—and one of them is the very authority they mention.

For each local authority service, the same formula is used for every authority that provides that service. If the formula specifies £2,000 per pupil or per kilometre of road, that is what the authority's SSA is.

All the local authority associations understand the need for a SSA system. The differences between them are about the indicators that they believe are important and the ways in which they should be weighted. We have no choice but to assess the strengths of the conflicting arguments when deciding what changes to make.

For 1996-97, we have brought up to date the data on SSA indicators, such as population and pupil numbers, wherever that is possible. It is right that we should reflect changing circumstances.

We propose only limited changes in the method by which we calculate SSAs. Authorities will generally welcome relative stability in their SSAs. We have, therefore, made changes only where we were satisfied that there is a sufficiently strong case for doing so. Most of the changes have been the subject of representations from authorities. The arguments for and against change have been discussed at length with the local authority associations.

There are, therefore, six main changes. We have responded to suggestions that the allowance for special educational needs and support services should be based on the number of pupils attending maintained schools, rather than the total number of children living in an area.

We have responded to requests that we make distinct provision for local authorities' contributions to the cost of rent allowances, over which they have limited discretion. We have also responded to those who wish a distinct element of the SSA to be allocated to authorities that pay the levies of the national parks and the Broads.

We have responded to those who believe that a larger proportion of the SSA for the police should be related to the cost of pensions and a lesser proportion to the police establishment.

We have followed up the Audit Commission's report entitled, "In the Line of Fire", introducing a distinct element in the formula relating to pensions and a new element relating to the work of the fire service on fire prevention and fire safety. And we have brought up to date the basis on which we allow for district councils providing some county council services and vice versa.

One controversial part of the formula in which we have retained the existing methodology is the area cost adjustment. We have agreed with the local authority associations that we will set up an i dependent review, which will report in June 1996. The aim will be to identify a way of calculating the area cost adjustment that is conceptually sound, achieves a wide measure of acceptance among local authorities in all parts of the country and is practical to apply, year by year.

Meanwhile, the area cost adjustment for 1996-97 will reflect the narrowing of differentials in earnings between London and the south-east and the rest of the country. Compared with the adjustment made for 1995-96, SSAs in London and the south-east will be more than £150 million lower, and those in other parts of the country higher by a similar amount, through using the more recent figures on earnings.

I therefore propose that authorities should receive a special grant to damp the effects on council tax of changes in the method of calculating SSAs. I stress that that applies only to changes in the method. Changes in data have their full effect, without being moderated through damping, as is our usual practice.

That means that the change in the area cost adjustment, which I have just mentioned, comes through in full because it arises from changes in the data on earnings. That is even-handed; when the earnings data were changing in a way that was favourable for London and the south-east, London received the full benefit without damping.

The damping grant will operate at a threshold of 2 per cent., taking account both of the change in the SSA and of any damping grant being paid in the previous year as a result of earlier changes in SSAs. In the case of police authorities, the damping arrangements will also take account of the police grant. I know that that will be widely welcomed.

The council tax is now well established as an equitable means whereby local residents contribute to the cost of local services. Council taxes will vary widely, depending on the spending decisions of each local authority and its performance in collecting the tax, on the circumstances of each household, and on individual entitlement to exemptions or benefits.

However, I am required to identify notional taxes for each valuation band, for a standard level of spending—the so-called council tax for standard spending, or CTSS. My proposals incorporate a CTSS for band C of £505. I emphasise to the House that that is merely an element in the grant distribution formula. It is neither a prediction of individual council tax bills nor a national average.

I believe that we have now fully met our commitment to help those facing the largest increases above their community charge bills when the council tax was introduced. I therefore do not propose to continue the scheme of transitional relief in 1996-97. However, I do propose a scheme to protect council tax payers in areas to be reorganised from 1 April 1996 from unacceptably large increases in council tax if those are a direct consequence of reorganisation.

Local authorities need to make a full contribution to the control of public expenditure and to set budgets that their local taxpayers, and the country as a whole, can afford. I am today announcing my intentions for capping criteria.

[Mr. John Gummer]

First, however, I shall draw attention to a technical change in the capping rules. Billing authorities have until now been required to include in their budget requirement, on which capping bites, a proportion of the income forgone in granting certain discretionary non-domestic rate reliefs. I propose to remove those reliefs from the scope of capping. I am sure that billing authorities will welcome that change. Decisions on the granting of relief are entirely for them, but I hope that the change will encourage greater consistency of policy in that area—for example, towards village shops suffering financial difficulties.

I am issuing today proposed notional amounts for authorities whose boundaries or functions will change from 1 April 1996, including the reorganised authorities in Avon, Cleveland, Humberside and North Yorkshire.

In addition, the provisional capping principles make allowance for a number of changes since last year, such as in the funding of rail services in metropolitan areas. That is necessary to allow a fair year-on-year comparison of budgets. Subject to those and other technical adjustments affecting individual authorities, my proposals for capping criteria are as follows.

As in previous years, when authorities set budgets 12.5 per cent. or more above their SSAs, the proposed criteria will not permit any increase over their 1995-96 base budget. However, I do not intend to seek reductions from the few remaining authorities that set budgets substantially above their SSAs.

In this year's settlement we have given priority to the police, to education, to personal social services, including care in the community and to the fire service. I propose to reflect these priorities in changes that I am introducing into the capping system; changes which will allow those authorities that are local education authorities, police, or fire and civil defence authorities, a greater measure of flexibility.

County councils and the Isles of Scilly, new unitary authorities, metropolitan districts, London boroughs, police and metropolitan fire and civil defence authorities will benefit from the new approach. For authorities budgeting up to 12.5 per cent. above their SSA, there will be two capping criteria. The increase in their budgets will be limited to whichever gives the greater increase.

Under the first criterion, the increase in an authority's budget will be limited to an amount calculated by adding together the increases compared with 1995-96 in the authority's SSAs for education, for personal social services, for fire and—in the case of police authorities—the increase in their police SSA and their principal formula police grant. The second criterion will limit an authority to a flat-rate year-on-year increase compared with its 1995-96 base budget.

The second criterion will give permitted increases as follows—for county councils and the new unitary authorities in Avon, Cleveland, Humberside, York, and the Isle of Wight, and for the Isles of Scilly, I propose that the year-on-year increase should be limited to 3 per cent. For metropolitan districts, outer London boroughs and the London and metropolitan fire and civil defence authorities, I propose that the increase should be limited to 2 per cent. For inner London boroughs and the City of London, I propose that the increase should be limited to 1.5 per cent. For police authorities, I propose that the increase should be limited to 3.5 per cent. These percentages will be used if higher than the figures arrived at by adding relevant SSA increases, as I explained earlier.

For shire districts, I propose that the criterion should be the same as last year. That is, any increase of 0.5 per cent. over last year will be considered excessive if it gives a budget requirement above an authority's SSA. These criteria are necessarily provisional, and I cannot take my decisions on capping until authorities have set their budgets. When I come to take those decisions, I shall of course take into account all relevant considerations.

The new approach that I have outlined will allow individual authorities greater flexibility to adapt their budgets to local circumstances. Authorities have repeatedly said that they would use such flexibility in a responsible way, and would not take this as a licence for a general increase in spending and taxes. The Government, and council tax payers, will watch with interest how authorities respond to the greater responsibility that this places upon them. We shall see where their true instincts lie.

Alongside this new approach to capping, the Government are also proposing an expansion of challenge funding in local authorities' capital programmes. Challenge funding is one of the greatest successes of this Government. Earlier this week, the Environment Select Committee reported that the single regeneration budget challenge fund has already demonstrated its potential to achieve excellent value for taxpayers' money. The SRB challenge fund supports the regeneration of cities, towns and smaller communities throughout England. It is also and increasingly promoting genuine community and private sector involvement, integration of different Government programmes and a new sense of partnership between local authorities, training and enterprise councils and others.

The challenge fund is therefore a proven concept, demonstrated by a substantial programme which is making a very noticeable impact. We are already building on it by applying the challenge approach to the housing investment programme and other initiatives, including the new deprived estates challenge fund.

The Government have been enormously encouraged by the imaginative and constructive way in which local authorities have so far seized the opportunities the fund presents. They have found that challenge funding stimulates a new approach to priority setting. Separate service departments come together to co-ordinate an approach which best suits the authority as a whole. The contributions levered in from the private sector enable them to increase the total spend to the benefit of local people, businesses and competitiveness.

We believe that we should build on that progress, and pilot approaches which would accelerate the drive towards challenge funding beyond the relatively small proportion of public spending to which it applies at present. I will therefore publish a discussion document shortly, which will set out options for a pilot scheme for introducing challenge funding for an element of local authority capital programmes. I want to hear from those with further experience of the benefits of challenge funding, and I hope that we will be able to move forward very quickly.

My Department is today writing with the details of the settlement to every local authority in England. That package includes a consultation paper setting out how we propose to distribute central Government support among authorities, including my proposals on SSAs, for continuing to damp SSA losses and for the police authorities. It sets out my provisional capping criteria, illustrates them by calculations of the proposed cap for each authority and includes my proposals for notional amounts. Copies of this package have been placed in the Vote Office and the Library.

The proposals that I have outlined today represent a balanced and reasonable response to the conflict between the pressure to provide ever more resources for local government and the need to control public spending. They provide for a 3.3 per cent. increase in local authority spending, including police and the transitional costs of reorganisation. They incorporate significant improvements in how available resources are allocated, while continuing to protect people in those authorities that stand to lose most from changes in SSA methodology. They would allow council taxes next year to be set at reasonable levels, offering protection from excessive bills. They represent a package which the country as a whole can afford.

Mr. Frank Dobson (Holborn and St. Pancras): Today's statement shows that the Government are determined to force local councils to increase council tax and reduce the services that they provide for local people. Next year, as this year, local people will have to pay more and get less. *[Interruption.]* Madam Speaker, we kept quiet for 25 minutes. It would not be a bad idea if Conservative Members could keep quiet for five.

Madam Speaker: The hon. Gentleman makes a good point. He will be heard in good order.

Mr. Dobson: On the basis of the Government's figures, council taxes could rise by as much as this year's average increase of 5.2 per cent. That council tax increase, combined with higher charges for local services like school meals, meals on wheels and home helps, and the cost of service reductions, will cost an average household £108 next year.

The Government's figures also show that they expect council tax payers to cough up an extra £3.5 billion over the next three years, which is about equal to an extra tuppence on the standard rate of income tax. That is just another example of the Government furtively taking away with one hand the highly publicised cuts that they have been making with the other.

The Secretary of State and the Prime Minister today, like the Chancellor of the Exchequer on Tuesday, claimed that the Government will provide more money for education next year. That is simply not true. According to their own figures, councils will spend less on education next year than they are spending on it this year. An extra 86,000 children will be at school next year. It they are taken into account and councils fall into line with the Government's published spending plans, the amount spent per pupil next year in our schools, far from rising, will fall by £40 per pupil.

Let us compare the Government's world of fantasy finance with what is happening in the real world. In the real world, there are more schoolchildren; hard-working schoolteachers expect a pay increase next year; inflation drives up the price of books and other school equipment; and councils or schools will have to meet the extra costs of measures like installing seat belts in school coaches.

A landfill tax will be levied on councils, costing them £77 million next year. That is a straight transfer from council tax payers to the Treasury. This morning the Secretary of State said on the radio that councils could save more money by putting services out to tender. As he well knew when he said it, councils are already obliged by law to put their services out to tender and, if a contract does not go to the Tories' friends in the private sector, it can be only because a council's own work force put in a lower and better bid. He also suggested that councils can increase charges to help keep up their current level of spending. Which charges does he want to see increased? Does he want parents to have to pay more for school dinners or pensioners to pay more for meals on wheels or home helps?

This mean-minded settlement will increase council taxes, push up charges for vital local services and cut those services for local people. It means that next year, like this year, the Government will force local people to pay more and get less.

Mr. Gummer: The hon. Gentleman is saying, on the one hand, that the settlement is inadequate and on the other that we are putting taxes up to pay for it. The curious thing is that those two ideas do not hang together. How much would he think was adequate? How much more tax would a Labour Government impose to pay for an adequate settlement? They cannot have it both ways. He wants more money without anybody paying it. That is the traditional Labour attitude.

When the hon. Gentleman works out how much the council tax, as he says, will go up, he is saying that every Labour council will put up its tax to the highest level that it can manage within TSS and therefore take that tax off its local taxpayers. In other words, he is proving what we have always said: that Labour councils tax people more, and that immediately they are given the chance to tax more, they take that chance. Yet what did the local authority associations, which are all run by the Labour party, say? They said that if we gave them more freedom they would deal with it responsibly, but Sir Jeremy Beecham has now told us that they will use every corner of that freedom to put up the council tax by 10 per cent.

Already the Labour party has halved that increase to 5 per cent. because it does not accord with the Blair rule, which was circulated around the Opposition Front Bench and was very clear. First, before the Budget was announced, Labour Members had to say that any settlement, whatever it was, was inadequate. Secondly, they could not promise any more money.

The questions of the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) beg the question: how can people have more money to spend without any increase in taxation? The answer is that one cannot spend money one does not have. It is a simple answer, but it is one that Labour—new, old or indifferent—has never learned. We have heard today that the Labour party has not learned anything. Wherever it is in power, it intends to spend right up to the limit that it is allowed.

The hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras went on to say that it was fantasy finance. How interesting. The hon. Gentleman was comparing what councils are

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spending this year with what their allowance from the Government is for next year instead of comparing like with like.

Mr. Dobson: That is not true.

Mr. Gummer: The hon. Gentleman did. I suggest that he looks at *Hansard* to see it. He knows that councils will have 4.5 per cent. more, on average, to spend on education and if that money does not get through to the schools, it will be the Labour and Liberal councils that have stopped it. The Government have given 4.5 per cent. to the schools. The only people who can stop it getting there are the Labour party and its local councils.

Lastly, we will be watching carefully the argument about going out to tender. The metropolitan authorities have gone out to tender and in well over 80 per cent. of cases, the in-house team has won but in the shire districts, only 40 per cent. of in-house teams have won. Does that mean that Labour in-house teams in metropolitan authorities are much more efficient than Labour in-house teams in shire districts or does it mean that it is almost impossible to win a contract in a Labour metropolitan district because the local council trade unionists make sure that they are the paymasters and that those local authorities therefore pay them with the council tax payers' money?

Sir David Madel (South-West Bedfordshire): My right hon. Friend will be aware of the difficulty that Bedfordshire county council has had this year in relation to its school budgets. Can he confirm that his announcement will make it perfectly possible for Bedfordshire county council to put more money into school budgets in Bedfordshire next year?

Mr. Gummer: My hon. Friend is perfectly right. If Bedfordshire county council does not increase significantly the money going to its schools—it has a permitted budget increase of 3 per cent., and more in terms of its education budget—it will be because the council has pinched the money to spend on something it wants more.

Mr. David Rendel (Newbury): Will the Secretary of State confirm that if there is to be extra real spending by local councils next year in education and other spheres, which he has tried to pretend there ought to be, that money will have to come from an increase in council tax? According to the Department of the Environment's own figures, which were contained in a press release issued on Tuesday, the Government's central subsidy to local councils will be precisely the same in real terms next year as it is this year. There are no extra real resources from the Government. Moreover, is it not the case that a large proportion of the extra resources come from business rates, which are simply a transfer from businesses to the local community, while the amount coming from other taxation is actually falling considerably?

Mr. Gummer: First, it would be more helpful if the hon. Gentleman, when looking at the Red Book, could distinguish between British figures and English figures; otherwise we do not get the comparison right. His comparison is wrong. Secondly, I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman has run a business, but most business men do not start off by saying that the only way to save money is by getting more. They start by asking themselves whether they can be more efficient and then use the money that they save. The Labour party and its annexes, the Liberals, have said the same thing: that the only way that we can find the money is to increase council tax. Sir Jeremy Beecham, who is of course supported on this matter by the Liberals, today let the cat out of the bag. He said that Labour and Liberal councils will spend every penny that the Government allow them to spend. Whether they need it or not, the council tax will increase by 10 per cent., and it will be a Labour and Liberal increase.

Sir Timothy Sainsbury (Hove): Will my right hon. Friend accept that the priority that he has given to education in the form of a 4.5 per cent. increase and the recognition of that in the capping formula will be very widely welcomed? Will he join me in condemning the irresponsible party political scaremongering in which East Sussex county council and a number of others led by Labour and the Liberal Democrats have indulged, frightening parents, teachers and governors by saying that their education budgets are going to be cut instead of increased?

Mr. Gummer: My right hon. Friend is perfectly right. His county council will have an increase of 3 per cent. It has been going around, as my county council has—it has been a nationally run operation—telling people that it would suffer a 5 per cent. cut. If I may use my own county council as an example, in Suffolk there will be an increase of 5.7 per cent. for education. The county council has been scaremongering and saying that there will be a cut of 5 per cent., which shows how the Opposition parties will use anything to try to get party political support.

Mr. Terry Davis (Birmingham, Hodge Hill): On the question of schools and the area cost adjustment, does the Secretary of State intend to continue the distribution of money on the basis that Birmingham should spend 20 per cent. less than Westminster on the education of a child?

Mr. Gummer: The area cost adjustment is something about which we argue with the local authorities. Of course, the hon. Gentleman could have used Tower Hamlets or any other inner London borough as an example because the position is the same for all the inner London boroughs and, indeed, the south-east in general. That is how the system works. There is a real argument between Labour, Conservative and Liberal authorities which get money from the area cost adjustment and the similar authorities which do not get the money. That is why, having tried with their help—they also tried, together and separately—we decided that the only way to proceed is to have an independent inquiry to see whether we can find a better method. But there is a fundamental difference: those who receive from the present system like it and those who do not receive do not like it. The trouble is that even the independent group will find that difficult to square.

Sir Dudley Smith (Warwick and Leamington): Is my right hon. Friend aware that the socialist and soggy Liberal councils will almost certainly say that that is not enough money? Does my right hon. Friend realise that anyone who studies the figures will welcome the 4.5 per cent. increase on the SSA for education? Will he encourage recalcitrant county councils such as Warwickshire to release more of their financial assets to

which they still cling on in difficult times? Will he tell such councils that they should live within the inflation figure like everyone else has to?

Mr. Gummer: My hon. Friend makes a good point. If local authorities wanted to help people on the basis of inflation—if they tried to push inflation down—which would help them in future years, they would seek to live at least within the inflation figure, if not try to make savings. In my hon. Friend's case—in Warwickshire—there is a permitted increase of budget of 3.2 per cent., which will feed through into education more significantly. The concerns that both he and my hon. Friend the Member for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey) have pressed on me so often have been met this year by that change and will be met in the future by the agreement for an independent review of the area cost adjustment which, as my hon. Friend the Member for Warwick and Leamington (Sir D. Smith) has often told me, is particularly difficult for Warwickshire.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): The Secretary of State has made great play of local authorities' ability to pass on the money that he says is being provided for education, presumably by way of the SSA. Does he agree that the SSA does not provide the money, which comes through the revenue support grant? For the past few years, with the best will in the world, Newham has been unable to pay its SSA in education because £6 million had to be spent on the homeless and another large sum had to be spent in respect of capital receipts, which it is impossible to pay out of the revenue support grant provided by the Secretary of State. How can Newham, with an increase of 2.5 per cent. in permitted budget—compared with Westminster's permitted increase of 11 per cent. for next year—afford the increase in the figure for education?

Mr. Gummer: The answer is simple. Newham has been overspending right at the top of the level and Westminster has kept its costs low. According to the independent assessment published in the *Independent* only a few weeks ago—

Ms Hilary Armstrong (North-West Durham): It is yours.

Mr. Gummer: It is an independent assessment and has nothing to do with me. According to that assessment, Westminster is the fourth most deprived borough in London. *[Interruption.]* I hope that the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras will read the *Independent* newspaper to see where the statistic came from. That newspaper does not support, nor is it written by, my officials. The hon. Gentleman seems to want to discount those independent figures. Is he honestly saying that, in future, if there were ever a Labour Government, he would hand out money on the basis of his own—bottom—ideas? If he does that, he will be returning to the old Labour system which gave Westminster significantly more than the present system.

Mr. Barry Field (Isle of Wight): As my right hon. Friend has said that the review of district councils is nearly complete, will he promise the House that there will be an early review so that the people of East Cowes can have the parish council to which they have been looking forward? Is he aware that the Liberal Democrat-controlled Isle of Wight council published a leaflet only last week, on the front of which it said that there would be £630 million of Government cuts to local authorities? Will he condemn that and ensure that the money is used for education on the Isle of Wight? We had had an excellent budgetary record on the Isle of Wight—we drive round in our 25-year-old cars and are all over the age of 60—and we now have a local government settlement specifically for the Isle of Wight. I want the good news to get through to the people, not to be gerrymandered and tinkered about with by the wretched Liberal Democrats who want to spend the money, waste it and do anything with it but provide a decent education for the people of the Isle of Wight.

Mr. Gummer: The people of the Isle of Wight have a very good advocate in my hon. Friend. It is a great sadness that they have a Liberal county council, because that county council will, no doubt, having promised the people cuts, want to deliver on that Liberal promise. It will be the only promise that the Liberals ever made that they will deliver on, but that is the one that they will want to deliver on.

I hope that my hon. Friend and local governors and teachers will insist that the Liberal county council on the Isle of Wight passes back money that has been given to it by the Government from the taxpayers, to every school in the Isle of Wight. I am sure that my hon. Friend will ensure that we soon know if it does not.

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton): Will the Secretary of State comment on the proposal to withdraw large amounts from the SSAs for the operation of the nursery voucher system? Are not the proposals that the Government are considering unfair, in that the withdrawals from SSAs would be on a per pupil basis, whereas the SSA is allocated on a needs basis? Will not that lead to those authorities with relatively little nursery provision having large amounts of SSA and those with a large nursery provision having very little SSA—perhaps even a negative SSA?

Mr. Gummer: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman has not noticed that the only people to whom that applies are the four volunteer councils, which do not include his local council. He should not be worried at all.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): In thanking my right hon. Friend for concentrating on education, may I ask him whether Staffordshire will have its very significant problems solved? May I also ask him whether he will try to make the whole business of local government finance a little more intelligible to the ordinary man? Is he aware that the doctrine of the Trinity and the Schleswig-Holstein question are positively kindergarten subjects by comparison with:

"B+C+M-O+V, where B, C, M and O and V have the same meaning in subparagraph (1) above"?

Mr. Gummer: The matter is simple for my hon. Friend. His local council will be able to increase its budget by about 3.2 per cent. It should be able to get a significant amount of money through to the schools, and I am sure that he will ensure that it gets that money through to the schools. If the money does not go to the schools, it will be the Labour-controlled Staffordshire county council that will have failed.

Mr. John Heppell (Nottingham, East): Does the Secretary of State remember that last year, Nottinghamshire county council predicted a cut of £20 million and was told that it was scaremongering? In

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the event, it had to make cuts of £22 million. This year, it predicts cuts of £50 million. Even if the council is completely wrong about that and it has to make cuts of only £25 million, it is not scaremongering: it will mean fewer teachers and larger classes.

Mr. Gummer: No, because there are no such cuts. The only way in which the council can produce those cuts is by deciding how much it would like to have spent in the best of all possible worlds, placing that figure before the public and then saying that it is not receiving that full amount and therefore the bit in between is called a cut. That council could ensure that its local schools had more money, and no doubt the hon. Gentleman will ensure that it does.

Sir Peter Emery (Honiton): Will my right hon. Friend drive home the fact that this year, for education in Devon, there is an increase of more than £17 million—10 per cent. more than the average increase of 5.3 per cent.—and that that means that, on a rough calculation, there is more than about £140 per pupil in Devon extra for the Liberal county council to distribute to the schools instead of keeping it, as the council did last year, to distribute elsewhere? Will he therefore consider whether certain councils should have the SSA ring-fenced to ensure that they get the money to the schools rather than keeping it for the county?

Mr. Gummer: My right hon. Friend is right. He will notice that Liberal Members are busy trying to pretend that that money is not coming to them, because Liberals want to do again this year what they did last year, which was to starve the schools in order to blame the Government and to use the money for something else.

We know how the Liberals operate. They will no doubt try to operate in that way again this time, but, with a settlement of more than 5 per cent., as my right hon. Friend says, if that money does not get to every school in Devon, I am sure that he in his constituency and his colleagues in other constituencies will ensure that every parent and governor knows that the reason why the money has not got there is the Liberals at Devon county hall.

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley): Does the Secretary of State accept that increasing the standard spending assessment for education by 4.5 per cent. does not give local authorities a penny more because Lancashire county council, for example, is already spending 108 per cent. In fact, the right hon. Gentleman said in the early part of his statement that the real increase in local government expenditure was only 2.8 per cent. Is that not the crux of the issue?

Mr. Gummer: The hon. Gentleman must face the fact that Lancashire county council can increase its budget by 3.2 per cent. By concentrating on education, which represents a significant part of its budget, the council can significantly raise the amount spent on schools. The hon. Gentleman knows that; any attempt by him to suggest otherwise demonstrates that he is in league with Lancashire county council—one of the least satisfactory county councils in the country—in trying to excuse the fact that the council has not given the money to the schools. We shall wait and see. If the council does not give the money to the schools, we shall know who to blame—and the hon. Gentleman will be one of them.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): My right hon. Friend will be aware that I have frequently questioned Ministers on the Floor of the House about the allocation of resources to Cheshire—my constituency is in that county—especially in relation to personal social services and education. May I thank my right hon. Friend for the additional allowance of 5.1 per cent. for education—that is more than £17 million—and for the additional sum of £1.25 million for personal social services? I know that that will be welcomed by those who run Cheshire county council, and by my constituents.

Will my right hon. Friend clarify one point, however? The Minister of State has launched an inquiry into the area cost adjustment. When the committee or commission that conducts that inquiry has reported, will its recommendations be implemented without delay? If Cheshire is to benefit, will the adjustment be implemented retrospectively to cover the current year, or will it apply only to the next financial year?

Mr. Gummer: I thank my hon. Friend for his supportive words, but I should have known that there would be a sting in the tail. I fear that the adjustment will not be retrospective; but I promise that as soon as we have the report and are able to consider it, we shall seek to implement its recommendations as far as is possible, certainly in the next financial year. We are talking not about this year, but about the next settlement. This is the last settlement under the present system, given that the recommendations stand up and are different from the current arrangements.

Mr. Stephen Timms (Newham, North-East): Is it not rather misleading to concentrate on the increase in the education part of the revenue support grant? It is only one element in a larger single sum. What percentage change in the non-education element does the right hon. Gentleman propose?

Mr. Gummer: I hope that the hon. Gentleman has noticed that I have used the increase in the total budget in all the figures that I have given. Some hon. Members have referred to education, but I have given the total sum. I assure the hon. Gentleman that the increase in spending permitted in Newham will be more than 2 per cent.

Sir Michael Shersby (Uxbridge): I am pleased to learn that Hillingdon's education SSA is to increase by £4,865,000, or 5.5 per cent., in the coming year. Can my right hon. Friend assure me that nothing in the capping arrangements which have existed in the past, and which have been revived this year, will prevent Hillingdon borough council from passing the money on, particularly to grant-maintained schools in my area?

May I also express my gratitude, on behalf of the Uxbridge police, for the element in the statement relating to pensions? That is a great improvement, which will be welcomed by the Uxbridge police.

Mr. Gummer: I thank my hon. Friend for his second point, and I can give him the assurance that he requires on the first.

Mr. Robert Ainsworth (Coventry, North-East): Will the Secretary of State drop the smokescreen with which he

has been trying to obscure the facts, and answer a simple question? Given the same level of service next year as this, does not the settlement impose a 5.2 per cent. tax increase? Is this not another Tory hidden tax—and not very well hidden at that?

Mr. Gummer: Only if every council decides to spend to the full increase in the SSA and nobody makes any savings whatever. In other words, Labour councils will no doubt force this upon their electorates, but sensibly run councils can make savings and start there. The hon. Gentleman is right only if he assumes a badly run Labour council.

Mr. Tim Smith (Beaconsfield): Is my right hon. Friend aware that the extra resources that he has announced for education are extremely welcome? What can be done to ring-fence that money to ensure that it actually reaches the schools? Will my right hon. Friend ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment to publish a list showing each school in each constituency and how much their budgets would increase if the SSA percentage were passed on to them?

Mr. Gummer: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment is here and will have heard my hon. Friend's comment. In his county, we will not have much difficulty in ensuring that the money goes to the schools, because he has a well-run council that seeks always to find savings in order to improve what it can do with education. Elsewhere, we will have to keep a beady eye on what happens.

Mr. Richard Burden (Birmingham, Northfield): Does the Secretary of State accept that he cannot claim to be increasing the amount available for education when he is screwing down the overall level of support for local authorities in the way implied by his statement? Is he aware that every £1 million not allowed to Birmingham threatens 200,000 hours of home care; or four libraries and four community centres; or four elderly persons homes; or 100 places in special schools? Which would he cut—or would he put taxes up?

Mr. Gummer: The hon. Gentleman cannot have it both ways. On the one hand, he complains about the settlement by saying that unless we can make savings, we might have to increase council tax. On the other hand, he says that he wants to spend more. The hon. Gentleman must answer the question that Opposition Front Benchers have not answered: if there were a Labour Government, by how much more would they put up taxes in order to make the settlement what they would call adequate? They will not answer that question because they have been told to say both that the settlement is inadequate, and that they would not increase taxes in order to meet the inadequacy.

Mr. Tim Rathbone (Lewes): May I add my thanks to those already extended by my right hon. Friend the Member for Hove (Sir T. Sainsbury) for the amount made available to East Sussex?

I wish to ask my right hon. Friend about manners in local government. How can he stop local government carrying on the sort of pseudo-consultation exercise that East Sussex county council has performed on the basis of an anticipated increase in education funding of 0.5 per cent., which was ludicrous months ago and has been proved absolutely ludicrous today?

Mr. Gummer: Although the rough and tumble of party politics is perfectly reasonable and most of us rather enjoy it, I think it is intolerable to frighten parents about the future of their children and old people about their future in council homes. That is part and parcel of most Liberal party politics. The Liberal party is the only party that stoops so low, and I exclude the Labour party from that.

Mr. John Gunnell (Morley and Leeds, South): The Secretary of State has recognised that the change in capital disregards for people in long-term care will have a substantial effect on finances in local government, as we will hear later. Can he guarantee that the disregards will be taken into account for the capping criteria; and that the funds will be adequate? If the funds are inadequate, the Secretary of State will be responsible for the impact on services. What steps has he taken to mitigate the impact?

Mr. Gummer: There have been full discussions on this matter. The announcement and details will be given very soon. I hope that the hon. Gentleman can contain himself till then. If he has further questions, I will be happy to meet him and discuss them.

Mr. David Wilshire (Spelthorne): Is my right hon. Friend aware that Surrey county council has not waited for today's announcement and has been busy telling parents in my constituency that schools in Surrey are likely to receive £8 million less next year? Now that he has announced that the schools will receive £8 million more, how does he rate my chances of an apology from Liberal and Labour councillors?

Mr. Gummer: The chance of getting an apology is poor. Perhaps my hon. Friend should ask his Liberal and Labour opponents to use the same mechanism to circulate to every parent and every school the fact they are getting £8 million more. If they did that, they would not need to apologise, but they might have to explain to parents why they tried to mislead them in the first place.

Mr. Paddy Tipping (Sherwood): Will the Secretary of State consult parents about the settlement? What will he say to parents in Nottinghamshire when they bring to his attention the fact that the county council currently spends 7.5 per cent. or £25 million above the Government guideline on education? The county council will receive, at best, £15 million from the settlement, leaving a budget gap of £10 million. There will be bigger class sizes and fewer teachers, so people will be paying more and getting less. How will he respond to them?

Mr. Gummer: The hon. Gentleman has to say that 3.3 per cent. goes on in addition—it goes straight through. However, he should point out to the leader of his county council that Nottinghamshire is one of the most profligate counties in the country and could give a great deal more to schools if it stopped spending as wildly as it does now.

Mr. Iain Mills (Meriden): Does my right hon. Friend recall our conversation in a similar debate last year, when he admitted that the methodology of the SSA calculation was unfair to Solihull council? Does he now believe that he has corrected that in his statement today?

Mr. Gummer: I am pleased that my hon. Friend reminds me of that occasion, which was not a comfortable one for me because I had real sympathy with Solihull. As he knows, I cannot change individual arrangements as they are made by classes. Solihull is one of a class and the arrangements last year had a particular effect on

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Solihull. He will note that the budget can rise by 3 per cent. I have announced an independent inquiry into the way in which we deal with the area cost adjustment, which is particularly important to Solihull. I hope that when it comes through, my hon. Friend will be happier about the arrangements.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Order. Despite the fact that the statement has now taken more than a hour, I shall try to call all the Conservative Members who have been standing for so long. Perhaps we can have a reasonably quick exchange as there are two more statements.

Mr. Richard Alexander (Newark): Would it not be fraudulent of local authorities to use the money directly allocated for schools for some other purpose? Bearing in mind the fact that schools in Nottinghamshire were seriously underfunded last year, surely we should take steps to ensure that the money specifically allocated to schools goes to schools. It is not enough to say that it must be left to parents, governors and local Members of Parliament. We should take a closer interest in ensuring that the money goes to the right quarter.

Mr. Gummer: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment and I will certainly take a very close interest, but there is a difficulty. If one believes in local accountability, local councils must make such decisions for themselves. When I refer to governors, parents and local Members of Parliament, I am talking about local accountability. We have told people quite clearly that they can spend significantly more money on schools. Nottinghamshire can save money in many other ways and spend it on schools, but Nottinghamshire taxpayers will have to press to make sure that the money gets through to the schools. If my hon. Friend knows of any case in which they are not doing so, I shall look at it myself.

Mr. Nigel Forman (Carshalton and Wallington): Although I warmly welcome the increase of the education SSA by 4.5 per cent. this year, which is generous, has it ever crossed the mind of my right hon. Friend when he was Minister for Local Government or now, as Secretary of State, that the two main weaknesses of the system that we are discussing are its excessive complexity and centralisation? Is it not time that the Government took a long, hard look at those aspects, particularly if my right hon. Friend is sincere—as I presume him to be—in saying that he favours local accountability? Is not the real answer to give local authorities more possibility to take their own spending decisions and then to be held directly to account by their local electorates?

Mr. Gummer: I have great sympathy with what my hon. Friend says, but there are two problems. First, if local authorities are spending a quarter of the spending of government as a whole, it must have an effect on the ability of national Government to spend. If local authorities were to push up spending, we, national Government, would have to reduce our spending on the national health service, for example, to keep the general economy in shape. There is a real difficulty.

Secondly, money does not necessarily come easily from a local community in the sense that the poorest communities may have the greatest needs but the lowest rate bases. We need a system that provides a real redistribution of income, which is what the SSA does. There will always be a significant amount of central Government spending, over which we need to have some control. A modest movement, however, in the direction of more money coming from the local community, would be reasonable. In that context I have gone some way towards the Labour party. Its latest policy document, entitled "Renewing Democracy", states that

"it would be far healthier for democracy if councils were responsible for raising locally a much higher proportion of the money they invest and spend".

I am interested that Labour Members are prepared to attack any move to increase council tax when they want a "much higher proportion" and we are suggesting a small proportion.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): Has my right hon. Friend taken account of Labour councils such as Ealing, which have substantial reserves from previous Conservative administrations? Will he be pressing for those reserves to be used where that is needed? Does my right hon. Friend agree that following the education settlement for Ealing it will be indefensible for the council to continue its policy of refusing a travel grant to children who wish to travel to schools some way away from home, even if their parents are on income support, on the ground that they could choose a nearer school? Parents have a right not to do so under current legislation.

Mr. Gummer: I must declare an interest. One of my children attends the local Church school in Ealing. The education provided by that school is very good. I have noticed, however, since Ealing borough council changed hands, that a series of petty and vindictive steps has been taken by the new council, including a step to which my hon. Friend has referred. The council does not like the possibility of parents choosing. I hope that my hon. Friend will join me and other parents to ensure that the money that is provided for Ealing gets through to the schools.

Mr. Eric Pickles (Brentwood and Ongar): Does my right hon. Friend remember a time when a 4.5 per cent. increase in education SSA would have been welcomed throughout the House? My right hon. and hon. Friends have done even better for Essex, where there will be an increase of 4.9 per cent. That will be worth nearly £26 million, a sum that is larger than some district councils' total budgets. Does my right hon. Friend agree that some of the alibis that we have heard this afternoon—it has been suggested that there will be no increases—will not wash with parents and head teachers? The councils that do not pass on the extra funding will be rightly brought to retribution.

Mr. Gummer: It is important for my hon. Friend to ensure that every head teacher, governor and parent in Essex realises that there will be a 4.9 per cent. increase in the funding that should be available for their schools. Essex county council, like Suffolk county council, sought to frighten people by talking about a 5 per cent. decrease. Against that background, Essex county council owes it to parents to write, "Sorry, the figure was not minus 5 per cent. but plus 4.9 per cent.", and to ensure that every penny of the increased funding gets through to schools.

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cirencester and Tewkesbury): Does my right hon. Friend recall that last

year the Liberal-dominated Gloucestershire county council cut individual school budgets by between 4 and 7 per cent. Will he confirm that this year's figures will allow that council to set a council tax, if it wishes to, which will provide for a generous 5.3 per cent. increase in funding for education? Would not every parent, governor and teacher be able to regard it as a scandal if the county council did not substantially increase individual school budgets?

Mr. Gummer: It will be a scandal if school budgets do not increase in that way in Gloucestershire. It will not be a surprise, however, if that does not happen. Liberals in Gloucestershire have shown themselves willing to play party politics with children's education. They have done it in Gloucestershire and elsewhere. I know of nothing in the past that has been like that. I am sorry that the Liberals should have lowered themselves to that level.

Mr. Richard Tracey (Surbiton): I thank my right hon. Friend for the care that he has given to education in Kingston upon Thames. I reassure him that I will support any measure which ensures that the £1.25 million extra spending for schools in Kingston goes to schools and is not milked off by the local authority.

On a separate issue, will my right hon. Friend use the greatest caution in relation to the area cost adjustment as it affects London? Although my right hon. Friend represents a constituency elsewhere, he lives in London, so he will know that London is more expensive simply because of the number of tourists, the greater use of the roads, the increased use of the city because of the railway stations and the airports, and the increased cost of care for the elderly.

Mr. Gummer: As a Minister, I live in London during the week, but at the weekends and when Parliament is not sitting, I live in the country, so I am entirely independent on the matter. I can see both sides of the case, which have been adequately presented in the House. That is why I have decided that there should be an independent inquiry, which will no doubt look carefully at the points raised by my hon. Friend. However, it will also have to consider my county's concerns regarding sparsity, distance and the difficulty of paying for small schools which are necessary if adequate and proper education is to be provided for small communities. I cannot say that the argument is all on one side. That is why the argument is so difficult to get straight and that is why we have asked for an independent inquiry.

Mr. Ian Bruce (South Dorset): My right hon. Friend will know that the Minister of State, Home Office, my right hon. Friend the Member for Penrith and The Border (Mr. Maclean), has sent round a letter putting in layman's terms what the increases could mean to police authorities—for example, 66 additional officers for Dorset and a total increase of 6.2 per cent. Will my right hon. Friend ensure that his other ministerial colleagues do something similar, particularly with regard to education? Last year, when it came to ensuring that schools were adequately staffed, Dorset county council said that it was £5 million short, yet we have now discovered from the auditor that the county filched £10 million that it did not need to spend.

Mr. Gummer: My hon. Friend points to the generality. One could understand that being accidental if it occurred in one council, but when it occurs in almost every Labour or Labour-Liberal-controlled council, one has to recognise that there is a concerted effort, which goes as follows. People are frightened by the prospect of a cut which will not come; the council gets an increase but says that there has been a cut, and then the money is put into something else. In my county, money for schools has been put into road signs and red lines across roads. I hope that this time the county will ensure that every penny goes to the schools.

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): People in Kent will be delighted to know that the Government are putting an additional 4 per cent. of funding into the county and into its schools. They will also be more than a little relieved because they were led to believe by a document produced with council tax payers' money that there would be no additional money for inflation or pay awards. Bearing in mind the fact that the schools were short-changed last year, what are the prospects for that money finding its way to the Kent schools?

Mr. Gummer: There is no doubt that Kent schools will be able to cover reasonably expected increases in expenditure and probably something rather better than that. But if Kent county council was more concerned about its priorities and spent its money in the schools, it could do even better. But I fear that we may have to wait for Kent county council to cease to be run by the alliance and return to sensible Conservative control.

Mr. Dobson: Rather than have a rant, which is the Secretary of State's usual response to questions from Opposition Members, will he simply confirm that none of the figures quoted by Conservative Members with regard to funds for education makes any allowance for the 86,000 increase in the number of school pupils, the expected pay increases, the expected level of inflation or the additional legal duties which the House has placed on local education authorities?

Mr. Gummer: Some of the money that has been given to the local authorities and some of their added spending will obviously have to cover their additions during the coming year, which is what always happens. But if this is an inadequate settlement, the hon. Gentleman might like the opportunity to say publicly how much would be an adequate settlement, and from where the money would come. The hon. Gentleman is incredible in the House.

Welsh Grand Committee

4.44 pm

The Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. William Hague): With permission, Madam Speaker, I should like to make a statement about the future proceedings of the Welsh Grand Committee. I have a number of proposals to make, which I hope will ensure that Welsh concerns are debated effectively in the House and which will bring the business of Parliament more effectively to Wales. With that in mind, I am proposing to seek to amend Standing Orders so as to extend and enhance the role of the Welsh Grand Committee.

The Welsh Grand Committee has for many years provided the House with a mechanism by which Members can give detailed consideration to matters relating exclusively to Wales. It is a mechanism which, in recent Sessions, has been relatively little used. In the past three years, there have been only eight meetings of the Committee, even though they have generally been held whenever requested.

I wish to change that disappointing picture. The Welsh Grand Committee has the potential to bring the business of the House to the attention of the people of Wales, and provide a more useful forum for discussion than at present.

First, I wish to introduce Question Time proceedings to the Committee. Interest in Welsh questions is considerable. On every occasion, there are many questions that cannot be reached, and I want to extend the opportunities for oral questions, to the Welsh Grand Committee.

I am therefore proposing that the Committee's Standing Orders should provide for an additional Question Time at some meetings, on dates to be specified in advance with the agreement of the House.

The normal arrangements for giving notice of questions would apply. Each member of the Committee would be able to table one question for answer on a specified day, and 10 sitting days' notice would be required. Questions will be taken at the beginning of sittings of the Committee, and could last for up to 30 minutes. Replies to questions not reached would be printed in the *Official Report*.

I hope that Members on both sides of the House will welcome this additional opportunity to put questions directly to me and my colleagues about the conduct of the Government's business in Wales, and appreciate that that will significantly increase their ability to raise issues of immediate concern.

I would like the Committee to be able to consider issues of current topical concern in more depth than is possible at present on the Floor of the House. I am therefore also proposing that the Committee will be able to hold short debates to allow more detailed consideration of a smaller number of specific questions.

Each member of the Committee will be able to give notice of a subject to be raised in a short debate on a specified day, with 10 days' sitting notice required. Proceedings on short debates will be allowed to continue for 30 minutes, which should be sufficient time to allow two or three subjects to be raised on each occasion.

In addition, and because I am aware that Members may from time to time wish to raise matters of particular concern to their constituents, I am proposing that in future the Welsh Grand Committee should be able to hold Adjournment debates on matters raised by Members, at the end of the Committee's normal business.

I am also proposing that in future any Minister in the House, whether or not he or she is a Minister for Wales, may take part in debates in the Welsh Grand Committee, enabling them to participate fully in discussion of matters relating to their United Kingdom responsibilities. Any Minister, whether or not he or she is a Member of the House, would also be able to make a statement and to answer questions arising from that statement.

That would represent a very significant and beneficial change in the Committee's procedures. It would enable Members representing constituencies in Wales to listen to and question a Minister with UK or Great Britain responsibilities that affect Wales. It will give the Welsh Grand Committee the scope to examine all aspects of Government policies affecting Wales, and not only on matters that are the responsibility of the Secretary of State for Wales. It will give Welsh Members a further opportunity to debate Welsh affairs while benefiting from their role in a United Kingdom Parliament.

I am pleased to be able to tell the House that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer have both said that they will be prepared to attend a meeting of the Committee if the amendments to Standing Orders are approved by the House.

All those changes will, of course, be in addition to the Committee's existing provisions, and the emphasis will still be on broad-ranging debates on issues of general concern about policy in Wales. Wales does not have a separate legal framework and I am therefore not proposing an additional legislative role for the Committee. I propose that there should be a minimum of four meetings of the Committee each year and that they should be timetabled in advance, allowing notice for the tabling of questions and subjects for short debates. In addition, I would expect it to meet on at least a further two or three occasions, as business permits and issues arise.

To date, two meetings of the Welsh Grand Committee have been held in Cardiff. I want to see it meet more frequently in Wales, and not just in the capital city. It is important to give people in other towns and cities the opportunity to witness the Committee's debates and thus to recognise that the business of the House and of the Committee is intimately concerned with the impact of Government policy on people in all parts of Wales. I appreciate that meetings outside the House place special demands on the House authorities, and officials at the Welsh Office will be ready to offer whatever assistance may be needed in establishing meetings of the Committee in suitable venues across Wales. I would envisage half the timetabled sessions of the Committee taking place in Wales each year, and up to half the additional meetings.

The new Standing Orders will be brought forward for approval shortly. Should the House agree them, I would expect soon thereafter to table a motion setting out a timetable for the rest of this Session.

I hope that the House will welcome my proposals to give the Welsh Grand Committee a more prominent and visible role in the consideration of matters relating to Wales. My proposals will greatly enhance the ability of Members to raise constituency matters and other issues in Parliament. They will help to ensure that discussion of

Welsh business is made more accessible to the people of Wales and that our procedures better reflect the Welsh dimension.

Mr. Ron Davies (Caerphilly): The statement holds out the tantalising prospect of the Prime Minister addressing a meeting of the Welsh Grand Committee at Machynlleth, talking about the efficacy of the hill livestock compensatory allowance. It really would be an interesting experiment.

The statement itself is a welcome admission by the Secretary of State of the inadequacies of the current arrangements for the exercise of democracy in Welsh affairs. The greatest need, of course, is for the representatives of the Welsh people to control our own devolved affairs in Wales, in our own directly elected assembly. That is and will remain our priority, and no amount of tinkering with the existing procedures will divert us from that.

Does not the Secretary of State understand that the only meaningful change, short of devolution, would be to allow the Welsh Grand Committee to take decisions or to influence policy? Without such policies, the Welsh Grand Committee is and will continue to be nothing more than a talking shop. In his statement, the Secretary of State criticised the existing arrangements for being ineffective. Does he not realise that the House of Commons Standing Orders already allow for great discretion to be exercised by the Committee? It does not require to be given, as he suggested, an additional legislative role. It already has one, specified in Standing Order No. 98. The trouble is that the Government have always prevented the Committee from exercising those powers on, for example, local government reform or the Welsh language Act, by suspending Standing Order No. 86.

Will the Secretary of State confirm that the only reason why he is not prepared to allow the Welsh Grand Committee a real role is that he realises how hostile the opinion of Welsh Members of Parliament is to the record of cuts, unemployment, social divisions and abuse of power, which are his Government's hallmarks? Nothing illuminated that better than yesterday's meeting of the Welsh Grand Committee, where he was forcibly reminded of the virtually unanimous opposition in Wales to the introduction of the nursery voucher scheme. Will he now acknowledge the weight of opinion that was expressed at that Committee and drop that petty and divisive scheme, if only as a sign that he is sensitive to the majority of Welsh opinion? Does he not realise that failure to do that would make a mockery of his pious statements about reforming and improving democracy in Wales?

We in the Labour party certainly want to see improvements. Will the Secretary of State confirm that he has received, through the usual channels, our own radical and constructive proposals for change? I also remind him that without the co-operation of Opposition Members, the Committee would not function, so I ask him now for his confirmation that the details of any changes will be implemented only after agreement has been reached via the usual channels.

The prospect of Ministers coming to introduce themselves to the people of Wales via sittings of the Welsh Grand Committee is a novel one and, presumably, is part of the strategy for the Conservative party rather than for the better government of our country. As the Prime Minister has never visited Wales as Prime Minister, except to fulfil the occasional party political engagement, will the Secretary of State confirm that the most appropriate subject for any debate involving the Prime Minister is the failure of the Conservative party to deliver economic prosperity, social cohesion and democratic government to Wales?

The Secretary of State's proposals are modest, but provided he is prepared to work with all the Opposition parties on the Committee, they can be made to work to bring about improvements in the way in which the House conducts its business. However, that will be for a short and experimental period only. These changes, if accepted, must and will be superseded by more far-reaching democratic reforms when the right hon. Gentleman's discredited Government are finally removed from office.

Mr. Hague: It is ironic that the hon. Gentleman should refer to talking shops when he wishes to set up an assembly in Wales that would be a highly expensive talking shop. It would be expensive to the taxpayer and damaging to jobs and investment in Wales, and it would diminish the role of the United Kingdom Parliament in Welsh affairs, whereas what we seek to do today is to enhance the role of the United Kingdom Parliament in Welsh affairs.

It is surprising that the hon. Gentleman describes my proposals as modest, as they go further than the proposals that he tabled two weeks ago, which, as he said, he communicated through the usual channels and which were published for public consideration in newspapers in Wales. My proposals go further: in involving Ministers with UK responsibilities, in bringing the work of Parliament closer to people in Wales, and in holding meetings of the Committee in different locations in Wales. None of those was contained in the proposals that he tabled two weeks ago. Nor was there any proposal about legislative consideration, to which he refers as the only meaningful change. I know about the provision in the Standing Order to which he referred. That is why I said in my statement that there would be no additional legislative role for the Grand Committee.

There is no question but that my proposals go further than those of the hon. Gentleman. I look forward to discussions about the proposals and am open to every idea and suggestion about developing them further, but the eventual decision about changes to Standing Orders is one for the House as a whole to take.

Mr. Alex Carlile (Montgomery): Will the Secretary of State assure the House that he has no intention of amending Standing Order No. 98, which gives the Welsh Grand Committee the right in certain circumstances to consider Bills that are referred to it, in other words, to have a legislative role? If he has no intention of repealing Standing Order No. 98, will he explain why he made no mention in his paltry, miserable statement of referring any legislation to the Welsh Grand Committee under Standing Order No. 98, and explain why the Government are so frightened of using it that we were not even allowed to consider the Local Government (Wales) Act 1994 when it was presented by the Government to the House? Will he give us one example of a measure about Wales on which he is prepared to give those who are elected to be legislators for, among other places, Wales, the right to legislate for the country that we represent?

Mr. Hague: I do intend that we should amend Standing Order No. 98, but not in the way that the hon. and learned

[Mr. Hague]

Gentleman fears; I have no intention of removing the provision to which he referred. But he will also know that Wales does not have the separate legal framework that exists in Scotland and that has enabled the Scottish Grand Committee to discuss particular measures. We are talking about something in a quite different context, and no specific Welsh legislation is coming before the House in the current Session. I can reassure him, however, that I have no intention of proposing the sort of change in the Standing Order to which he referred and which he would oppose.

Mr. Richard Spring (Bury St. Edmunds): Does my right hon. Friend agree that his proposals to hold meetings of the Welsh Grand Committee in different parts of Wales will add locally to the interest and activities of the Committee and, indeed, the proceedings of the House in general?

Mr. Hague: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The proposal was not put forward by Opposition Members, but I hope that they will welcome it. It is a procedure used by the Scottish Grand Committee and it has been well received in Scotland. There is no reason why people in Wales should not have the same opportunity to see their Grand Committee at work, and it will be widely welcomed throughout Wales.

Mrs. Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley): Does not the Secretary of State realise that, for the past 16 years, the Welsh people have seen the Welsh Grand Committee at work and they look on this proposal as yet another meaningless sop to the true aspirations of the Welsh people? But then, of course, we have seen a succession of Secretaries of State for Wales who do not represent Welsh constituencies or understand the Welsh people, and whose party will never represent the people of Wales. Does not the right hon. Gentleman understand that the real aspirations of the people of Wales are for a Welsh Assembly, with devolution and proper control over their own affairs, not the useless suggestion that he has made yet again today?

Mr. Hague: The hon. Lady will recall that those 16 years began with an emphatic rejection by people in Wales of the idea of such an assembly. I do not think that it is meaningless for the hon. Lady, under these proposals, to have additional opportunities to put questions to Welsh Ministers, raise Adjournment debates and have short debates about matters of constituency concern. Those are not meaningless matters—they are enhancing the ability of Welsh Members of Parliament to represent their constituents and to bring matters before the House of Commons. That is a long way from being a meaningless proposal.

Mr. Hartley Booth (Finchley): In terms of the United Kingdom constitution, will my right hon. Friend confirm that having the Prime Minister and senior members of the Cabinet travel to Wales to meetings of the Grand Committee is a constitutional novelty? Rather than call it a talking shop, would it not be more appropriate to call it a listening channel?

Mr. Hague: My hon. Friend is right. It is a novelty and it will happen in Scotland and Wales. It will be a popular procedure, it will be widely appreciated and it will enable my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer to point to the many successes of Government policy and the improving situation in so many aspects of the Welsh economy, to which Opposition Members are always determined not to refer.

Mr. Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): Although he was a youngster at the time, the Secretary of State may recall that in 1979, after the referendum, the incoming Conservative Secretary of State, Lord Crickhowell, said that he would consult about various proposals, including a forum for Wales. It was assumed at the time that specific legislative proposals—institutional proposals—would follow. Sixteen years have passed; this is it. If it is a revamped talking shop, it is a peripatetic talking shop. Surely it will go down in the "Guinness Book of Records" as the longest recorded gestation period of a mouse.

Mr. Hague: What we are seeing is a genuine attempt to improve the workings of the Welsh Grand Committee. At present, its workings are not regarded as satisfactory by people on either side of the House or any party in it. We shall be able to make the proceedings of the Committee more meaningful and more topical, and to ensure that a greater variety of matters can be raised and that particular constituency matters can be raised. Those are proposals that deserve a warm welcome in the House.

Mr. Ian Bruce (South Dorset): Will my right hon. Friend confirm that those changes in the Standing Orders of the Welsh Grand Committee mean that more subjects can be raised—indeed, all subjects to do with the United Kingdom? Perhaps more importantly, can he contrast the cost of that sort of Welsh Grand Committee with that of a directly elected Parliament, which would have no more powers than the Committee would have anyway?

Mr. Hague: My hon. Friend is right. A far greater range of topics can be raised, and they can be raised by Welsh Members of Parliament in their role as Members of Parliament in this House in the United Kingdom Parliament. Such proceedings will have an additional cost, but the cost of having a completely separate assembly for no obvious purpose would be vastly greater. The direct costs to the taxpayer would be vastly greater, as well as the costs to the Welsh economy in lost inward investment and jobs, from the people who would be frightened away by the prospect of a fracturing of the United Kingdom—or the Balkanisation of the United Kingdom, as one Opposition Member referred to it not long ago.

Mr. Ted Rowlands (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney): Even in these modest proposals, is it not an assumption that there are distinctive policies that should be followed in Wales for the needs of Wales? If, as a result of all his listening, the Secretary of State finds out, for example, that nursery vouchers have no support in Wales, will he be willing to change the policy?

Mr. Hague: Of course, there is often a need for distinctive policies in Wales. I and my predecessors have pursued distinctive policies, which are different from policies for England in several respects. The Welsh Grand Committee is an additional forum for discussing what those differences should be.

Mr. Alan Williams (Swansea, West): The Secretary of State's proposals are to be welcomed in the spirit that any

change is bound to be preferable to what we have at the moment. In pursuit of his greater topicality, why is he introducing a system in which, unlike on the Floor of the House where questions can be tabled two days before, he will require 10 sitting days' notice, which is two calendar weeks?

In addition to the minimum four meetings that the right hon. Gentleman specified, will he consider the possibility of another four, to consider the reports of the Select Committee on Welsh Affairs, which are never debated? Finally, since he refuses to let the Committee have any legislative functions, does he recognise that, although legislation is not separate for Wales in most instances, there are Welsh dimensions, so the Welsh Grand Committee could provide a useful function as a Special Standing Committee? We could hear evidence from experts and others on the Welsh aspects prior to dealing with legislation on the Floor of the House.

Mr. Hague: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his constructive welcome for the proposals. On oral questions, the rule would be the same as it is on the Floor of the House, that is, 10 days' notice of an oral question. Written questions can, in any case, be submitted for answer in two days or more and the proposal will not interfere with that procedure. I envisage that there would be scope for supplementary questions at the meetings and not merely for the questions tabled on the Order Paper.

As to the other subjects that could be debated, for instance the Select Committee reports, there need be no restrictions, as there are no restrictions now, on the subjects that the Committee could discuss. That would be for discussion between the usual channels. Of course, members of the Grand Committee must have a say in what the business of that Committee should be. I envisage that the two, three or more meetings that will be additional to the four timetabled meetings would be used to discuss some of the matters to which the right hon. Gentleman referred.

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones (Ynys Môn): Is not the Secretary of State aware that this timid little mouse of a statement is totally irrelevant to the needs of the people of Wales? He needs to address his mind to the enormous democratic deficit in our country, given that he is a member of a Government who have been rejected four times since 1979. Is not it right that the people of Wales, far from wanting a tarted-up talking shop like his proposal, are looking forward to the day when they can have a real Parliament in which real decisions are taken—a Parliament with legislative powers that will respond to the wishes of the people of Wales, not those of a Conservative Government who have been rejected by them?

Mr. Hague: The hon. Gentleman and I have an obvious difference of view: I believe in the United Kingdom and he does not. I believe that the Government of the United Kingdom are elected by the people of England, of Scotland, of Wales and of Northern Ireland, and that that should continue to be the position. I do not think that we shall be able to reconcile that fundamental difference of view, but I would have hoped that the hon. Gentleman could have found it in himself to give a stronger welcome for what will be a distinctive improvement in the workings of Parliament for Welsh Members. They will be able to raise a wider range of issues and more constituency issues, and will be able to question Welsh Office Ministers and debate with other Ministers more often.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): Has the Secretary of State noticed what happened on the two most recent occasions on which public opinion in Wales was measured? Conservatives managed to win 4 per cent. of the council seats, and at the Islwyn by-election they secured 3.9 per cent. of the total vote, narrowly beating the Natural Law yogic flyers and Lord Sutch's Loony party. Now that the Conservatives have established themselves as the prime loony party in Wales, how can they claim the right to dominate Welsh legislation—legislation that affects Wales alone? When 85 per cent. of Welsh Members signed amendments to Bills on the Welsh language and on Welsh local government, their opinions were swept aside by the dominance of Members from other parts of the United Kingdom, whose constituents were not affected in any way by the legislation. Is not that a travesty of democracy?

Mr. Hague: The hon. Gentleman knows that we all live and work in a United Kingdom Parliament. If he does not believe in a United Kingdom Parliament—and that is the implication of what he is saying—he had better say so.

Mr. Flynn *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Hague: I think that the hon. Gentleman does not believe in a United Kingdom Parliament; we have got that clear, because he is shaking his head. Those of us who believe in a United Kingdom Parliament—I happen to think that the great majority of the people of Wales believe in one—should be concentrating on ensuring that that Parliament works well. My proposals will ensure that it works better for Welsh affairs.

Mr. Peter Hain (Neath): Surely the announcement is a panic reaction to the overwhelming support for Labour's policy for an elected assembly in Wales. *[Laughter.]* Yes it is. Why does not the Secretary of State admit that he is adopting the same old English establishment approach to demands for constitutional reform? We have seen that reaction over votes for working-class citizens and over votes for women. First, people deride such demands as loony. Then, when the pressure keeps coming, they resist forcibly. Then they try to buy the protesters off, which is what this pathetic proposal is about. Finally they cave in, and when they have done so, nobody ever admits to having opposed the demands in the first place. Why does not the Secretary of State short-circuit that miserable process and grant the Welsh people's demand for an elected assembly now?

Mr. Hague: The hon. Gentleman knows why I do not want a Welsh Assembly. I have explained several times this afternoon. He also knows that when the opinion of the people of Wales was tested, they emphatically did not want an assembly either. Even if we agree to differ on the question of a Welsh Assembly, the hon. Gentleman knows that the Labour party published proposals for reforming the Welsh Grand Committee a couple of weeks ago and that our proposals go further than Labour's. The way in which the hon. Gentleman has characterised the whole process is highly inaccurate. We are making a sincere attempt to improve the workings of Parliament, and I think that it will succeed in that objective.

Mr. Alan W. Williams (Carmarthen): Over the past 20 years, I have spoken to more people about devolution than

[Mr. Alan W. Williams]

almost anybody else in the House, while the Secretary of State has been in his post for only a few months. No one has ever put it to me that the answer to the problems of Wales lies in extending the powers of the Welsh Grand Committee, because 99 per cent. of the population of Wales are completely unaware of its existence. Did not the Secretary of State's statement underline how out of touch he and the rest of the Government are with the rightful demands of the people of Wales? We want the budget that he quite improperly controls to be administered democratically and accountably by an elected Welsh Assembly.

Mr. Hague: The hon. Gentleman is right to say that most of the people in Wales would not know about the Welsh Grand Committee or what it does. But that makes the case for changing its procedures, for breathing new life into it by revitalising and rejuvenating them. That is what the proposals are about. We strongly differ across the Floor of the House about the prospect of a Welsh Assembly. Conservatives believe that it would be a threat to the future of the United Kingdom, and an expensive talking shop. However, we should all be able to agree that the procedures of the Welsh Grand Committee need improving and that it needs to be made into a more topical and useful forum for discussion. That is what we propose to do.

Mr. Rhodri Morgan (Cardiff, West): Having listened to the Secretary of State's proposal, I fear that Mogadon man is proposing a Mogadon marathon of meetings all over Wales of a Welsh Grand Committee with zero powers. I am afraid that the right hon. Gentleman peaked as a speaker at the age of 16. We would not want to see any changes in the powers of the Welsh Grand Committee unless they were a lead-in to a genuine democratically elected body for Wales. By now, the Secretary of State must have the clear impression that that is our attitude.

We do not want a talking shop, even a travelling talking shop, because it would still be toothless. The right hon. Gentleman talked about changing Standing Orders, but he must realise that we want a guarantee that the Standing Orders of the House will be respected in the future, in a way in which they have not been respected in the past. We want a guarantee that he will not use the Tory majority on the Floor of the House to remove the rights conferred by Standing Orders Nos. 86 and 98 for the Welsh Grand Committee to consider exclusively Welsh legislation.

Is not the Secretary of State attempting to parallel the meaningless gesture of Edward I, seven centuries ago, who promised that he would create a Prince of Wales who spoke no word of English, and then offered the young infant Edward II, who was only three months old and could not have spoken any language at all? The people want not meaningless futile gestures but a democratically elected body for Wales with real powers.

Mr. Hague: I am not sure whether to take it from the hon. Gentleman's remarks that he does not want the Welsh Grand Committee to travel to different parts of Wales, but that was the clear implication of what he said. I believe that that is an important part of the proposals and should be strongly welcomed throughout the House, as it will be in Wales.

The Labour party has one policy for Scotland, another for Wales and another for the different regions of England. It has a dog's breakfast of a policy on constitutional matters, which has not remotely been thought out with the interests of the United Kingdom at heart, but has been designed to do what Labour thinks will appease nationalist sentiments in each separate part of the kingdom.

Conservatives emphatically reject that approach. We want the United Kingdom Parliament to work effectively, so that Members from every part of the United Kingdom can use it to full and beneficial effect. I am surprised that Opposition Members have not been able to welcome more enthusiastically something that they will be able to use as much as Conservative Members will, to the benefit of their constituents and of wider public debate.

Business of the House

5.17 pm

Mrs. Ann Taylor (Dewsbury): Will the Leader of the House please give us the business for next week?

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Tony Newton): After all that excitement, I shall make a statement about next week's instalment. The business for next week will be as follows:

MONDAY 4 DECEMBER—Continuation of the Budget debate.

TUESDAY 5 DECEMBER—Conclusion of the Budget debate.

WEDNESDAY 6 DECEMBER—Until about 8 o'clock, Second Reading of the Audit (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill.

Remaining stages of the Chemical Weapons Bill.

Motion on the criminal injuries compensation scheme.

THURSDAY 7 DECEMBER—Debate on the European Union on a motion for the Adjournment of the House. Details of the relevant documents will be given in the *Official Report*.

FRIDAY 8 DECEMBER—Debate on the Government's policy against crime on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

The House will also wish to know that European Standing Committees will meet at 10.30 am on Wednesday 6 December, as follows:

European Standing Committee A, European Community Document 8962/94 and COM(95)434 relating to the fruit and vegetable regime.

European Standing Committee B, European Community Document 9554/95 relating to food aid.

In the following week, on Monday 11 December there will be the Second Reading of the Asylum and Immigration Bill. On Tuesday 12 December there will be the Second Reading of the Armed Forces Bill. On Wednesday 13 December, there will be Government business, the nature of which has yet to be determined. I expect Thursday 14 December to be an estimates day, subject to the recommendations of the Liaison Committee at its meeting on 5 December. Friday 15 December is, I remind the House, a non-sitting day.

[Wednesday 6 December:

European Standing Committee A—Relevant European Community documents: (a) 8962/94, Fruit and Vegetable Regime; (b) COM(95)434. Relevant reports of the European Legislation Committee: (a) HC 48-xxvii (1993-94) and HC 70-ii (1994-95); (b) HC 51-i (1995-96).

European Standing Committee B—Relevant European Community document: 9554/95, Food Aid; Relevant report of the European Legislation Committee: HC 70-xxvi (1994-95).

Thursday 7 December:

Debate on the European Union—Relevant documents: The Twenty-fourth Report of the Select Committee on European Legislation, Session 1994-95, on the 1996 Intergovernmental Conference: the Agenda; Democracy and Efficiency; the Role of National Parliaments (HC 239-1); Resolution of the European Parliament on the functioning of the Treaty on European Union (A4-0102/95); Report by the Commission on the operation of the Treaty on European Union (SEC(95)731); Report of the Council on the functioning of the Treaty on European Union (Cm 2866); Unnumbered Report by the Court of Auditors on the operation of the Treaty on European Union; Unnumbered Report of the Court of Justice on certain aspects of the application of the Treaty on European Union; White Paper on Developments in the European Union January-June 1995 (Cm 3130).]

Mrs. Taylor: I thank the Leader of the House for that information. May I remind the right hon. Gentleman of the exchanges at business questions last week, when the Leader of the House was asked about the BBC World Service, but said that he felt he could not respond because he could not anticipate the Budget statement? Will he look at the issue of the World Service again, because we now know that the Chancellor has slashed the World Service's capital funds by £5.4 million—a massive 20 per cent.? That tears up an agreement which was negotiated in good faith by the World Service and which was to have lasted for three years.

The BBC chairman, I understand, has expressed his concern about the impact of the cuts on the World Service, and I believe that there is widespread public support for the BBC World Service which is shared by Members on both sides of this House. Will the Leader of the House now consider a specific debate on this cost-effective service which has been struggling with a tough financial settlement and which may now have to reduce its—and therefore Britain's—voice in the world? Will he think again on that issue?

Secondly, we heard the Prime Minister today at Prime Minister's Question Time trying to defend the actions and record of Yorkshire Water in recent months. The latest figures show that while Yorkshire Water has been threatening thousands of families in Yorkshire—and West Yorkshire in particular—with rota cuts, it has been making record profits. That shows, as Yorkshire Waterwatch has said, that

"it is clear that the company has had enough cash sloshing about all Summer to have dealt with the underlying problems much more quickly".

There is also a danger that Yorkshire Water might seek to use the cost-pass-through mechanism to try to make sure that investment costs are passed to consumers. Is it not time that we had a full debate on the need for better regulation of the privatised utilities so that we can air our concerns that, time after time, the interests of shareholders are put before the interests of consumers? We have seen clear examples of the concerns that have been caused by that behaviour, especially in Yorkshire, and the House should have a full debate on the regulation of the public utilities.

Finally, is the Leader of the House aware that, in recent days, Resurgence Railways has been dropped as the Government's preferred bidder to take over the Great Western Railway because it could not offer adequate financial guarantees? Today we have learnt that the first part of the passenger railway service to be privatised, the special trains division, is in deep trouble as its new owners, Waterman Railways, is in bitter dispute with BR and Railtrack about charges for track access and other services. Given the scale and frequency of the difficulties

[Mrs. Taylor]

arising with rail privatisation, surely we should have a full-scale debate in the House before this fiasco goes any further.

Mr. Newton: The hon. Lady was perhaps more political than she usually is on these occasions, and I shall not reply in quite those terms. I cannot give any commitment to provide time for debates on any of the matters that she has raised although, as always, I shall consider what she says. I have no doubt that there will be opportunities to raise those matters in various ways in the next few weeks.

In response to the hon. Lady's comments on the first subject, I would have thought that it would probably be in order to raise that matter during the Budget debate, since it arises from what she attributes to the Chancellor of the Exchequer's statement on Tuesday. I shall bring all of the hon. Lady's remarks to the attention of my right hon. Friends who have responsibility in those areas.

I thought that the Prime Minister made a perfectly sensible point at Prime Minister's Question Time today when he simply stated the fact that Yorkshire Water will, we understand, be investing more than £200 million this year—more than double its half-year profits. The fact is that money for investment clearly must come from somewhere, and the Opposition are always demanding more investment.

Mrs. Jacqui Lait (Hastings and Rye): In view of today's statement on the revenue support grant, would it be in order to debate education in the Budget debate? We could then put under the microscope the behaviour of local education authorities such as East Sussex, which are scaring parents, teachers and governors into unnecessary concerns about potential cuts which prove to be totally wrong.

Mr. Newton: It is not for me to advise my hon. Friend about what is or is not in order during the Budget debate. But I understand that it would be in order to refer to the expenditure side of the Budget under the arrangements that we now have. I am sure that even if my hon. Friend is unable to participate in the debate, her remarks will be carefully studied.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): May I commend the Leader of the House for his noble efforts to give us as much information as possible as early as possible? Close study of the Order Paper makes it very clear that the fruit and vegetable document—a very important piece of European legislation that will have a direct effect upon a great many fruit and vegetable growers and customers in this country—is to be debated on Wednesday morning and immediately voted upon on Wednesday evening.

I did hope that the Government had got away from this cavalier attitude, which assumes two things—first, that European Standing Committee A will totally accept whatever it is told on Wednesday morning, and secondly, that there will be no dissenting amendment. I hope that this will not become a habit. If it does, Parliament will get a reputation for ignoring the interests of its constituents.

Mr. Newton: I am grateful for what the hon. Lady said at the start of her question. I am not absolutely sure of the background to the point that she then went on to raise, but I shall look into it. We try to avoid the occurrence of such matters, but sometimes it becomes inevitable because of the timing of business in Europe. I shall look into what may have happened on this occasion.

Mr. Bob Dunn (Dartford): Will the Leader of the House provide time for an urgent and early debate on the future of selective schools in England? If those schools are not allowed to select their pupils—either by examination or by interview—they will become comprehensive schools. That is an important fact to advertise in the House and elsewhere in the nation.

Mr. Newton: My hon. Friend has raised an important point, but I do not think that I can promise time for a dedicated debate, as it were. But it was clear from the Gracious Speech that there will be a number of opportunities to debate education matters during this Session.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): Following on from the question from the hon. Member for Hastings and Rye (Mrs. Lait), will the Leader of the House confirm that there will as usual be a debate before we rise for Christmas on the local government settlement pursuant to today's statement? Can he give an indication as to the dates of the specific supplementary legislative proposals to implement the Scottish and Welsh procedural changes announced by the two Secretaries of State yesterday and today?

Mr. Newton: On the latter point, I cannot at present give a specific time for the debates. We would like to get the changes agreed by the House as soon as possible in order that their beneficial effects should be felt as soon as possible. I have forgotten the first part of the hon. Gentleman's question.

Mr. Hughes: The local government settlement.

Mr. Newton: I am not sure if the hon. Gentleman is right to say that there is normally a debate before Christmas. I shall look into it, but my recollection is that the matter is normally debated when the orders are brought before the House in the early part of the new year.

Mr. Anthony Coombs (Wyre Forest): May we have a debate next week on race relations, so that we can investigate the deplorable remarks apparently made by a prominent member of the Labour party from Leicester on "Dispatches" only last night? Regarding the deputy leadership of Leicester city council, he asked:

"Why should we have a white person?"

May we have a debate so that we can discuss whether such overt racist language is Labour party policy?

Mr. Newton: I did not see the programme, but I am aware of reports of it. In view of the serious nature of the allegations that have been made, I am sure that they will be carefully examined, not only by the hon. Gentleman himself but by the Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): In view of the excellent work being carried out by President Clinton, be it now in Northern Ireland or what he has done in Bosnia, and the excellent speech that he gave to us yesterday, will the Prime Minister make some sort of apology next week for how the Conservative party actively tried to stop

President Clinton being elected and quite likely used Home Office records to try to prove that he dodged the draft?

Mr. Newton: Such a question contributes nothing to what we would all like to achieve. I endorse the hon. Gentleman's remarks about the quality of the President's address yesterday. Having been present at that speech and at some more informal exchanges between the President and the Prime Minister, I assure the hon. Gentleman that the relationship between them is very warm.

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): May I support the call for a debate on the funding of the BBC World Service because it has an immensely high standing around the world, giving intensified stature to this country among listeners around the world? I would differentiate strictly between the World Service and the BBC's domestic service which is not of such a high standard. The advantage of such a debate is that it would show that Ministers have paid careful attention to the funding of the World Service. They could explain the split funding between grant through the Foreign Office vote and the possibilities for commercial income for the BBC.

Mr. Newton: I note my hon. Friend's suggestion. Like the representation of the hon. Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor), I shall bring it to the attention of my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): As a debate on the local government settlement has been called for, would not it be a good idea, as Ministers have lessons in French and German on the all-party Whip—I have never been—to hold arithmetic lessons for Ministers? We heard the story about £870 million extra for education. Along comes a Minister today and we find out that it is all made up of wage increases and inflation. The result in Derbyshire and many other authorities is that schools will be about £40 per pupil worse off this year than last. It is all a mirage. Let us get the sums done properly.

Mr. Newton: I do not, of course, accept the hon. Gentleman's suggestions. This is a substantial additional sum for education. One thing at least is clear: the hon. Gentleman needs no lessons in English.

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): Will my right hon. Friend arrange for an urgent debate on early-day motion 3?

[*That this House calls on the Government to acknowledge that over 3,000 people with haemophilia have been infected with hepatitis C virus (HCV) as a result of NHS treatment with contaminated blood products; recognises that over 50 people with haemophilia are now understood to have died from liver disease contracted as a result; and considers giving similar financial assistance to those infected with HCV, who currently receive no additional help, as for those infected in the same way with HIV who have been compensated by the Government.*]

He will be aware that the motion has been signed by 250 hon. Members from both sides of the House, which is almost a majority of those eligible to sign an early-day motion. The cost of such a concession would be relatively slight, and it would right a fundamental wrong.

Mr. Newton: My hon. Friend knows of previous responsibilities that I have had in similar matters. I therefore have great sympathy with those who may inadvertently have been infected with hepatitis C through national health service treatment, but the patients received the best treatment available in the light of medical knowledge at the time. In the absence of negligence, I understand that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health has no plans for special payments.

Mr. Jim Marshall (Leicester, South): When is the Leader of the House likely to proceed with the orders dealing with reorganisation of local authorities that are to have elections in 1997? I hesitate to mention my authority today in view of the criticism, much of it unfair. As the Leader of the House knows, Leicester has been a model for race relations in the United Kingdom for the past 20 years. However, there is increasing concern in my city about the delay in proceeding with the order. Will he seek to allay that fear and give a definite date?

Mr. Newton: I am afraid that I cannot give a definite date this afternoon but I shall bring the hon. Gentleman's question to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment, who will be responsible for proceeding with the orders.

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): If we cannot have a debate on the water industry, particularly Yorkshire Water, will the Leader of the House encourage the Secretary of State for the Environment to make a statement to the House, I hope to announce a wholly independent public inquiry into the affairs of Yorkshire Water, which seems to combine breathtaking incompetence with awesome contempt for its customers?

On the Asylum and Immigration Bill, will the Leader of the House ensure that the so-called white list of safe third countries is published before the Bill's Second Reading, which is to take place a week on Monday?

Mr. Newton: I cannot be as helpful as I would naturally like to be on either point. I have already referred to the Yorkshire Water question, as did my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister. On the latter point, I was present at Home Office questions earlier today when the Minister of State, Home Office commented on that subject. I cannot add to that this afternoon.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): When can we debate the savings that could be made by replacing Select Committee trips abroad by techniques such as video conferencing? Not only would that be much more efficient and save a great deal of money, but it might produce much better reports. Has the Leader of the House noticed that many of the reports compiled in the House are much better than those delivered by Committees that travel far abroad? Does not that prove the Chinese proverb that the further one travels, the less one knows?

Mr. Winnick: I would not put it to the vote.

Mr. Newton: The hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) has been more helpful than I can ever remember him being before. I shall rest on his comment.

Mr. John Spellar (Warley, West): I draw the attention of the Leader of the House to early-day motion 134:

[*That this House welcomes the visit of President Clinton to this country and looks forward to the continuation of good relations between the United Kingdom and the USA; believes, however, that this would*

[Mr. John Spellar]

be better served by good corporate behaviour of British firms in America; and deplores the attempts by Hanson to cut the wages and conditions of their employees in California.]

Will he arrange time for a debate on the behaviour of British corporations abroad? Should not they enhance Britain's reputation abroad rather than damage it, as Hanson is doing by cutting the wages and conditions of workers in California?

Mr. Newton: Just as the corporate activities of United States companies here would be a matter for them subject to United Kingdom law, the corporate activities of British companies in the United States are a matter for them as governed by US law.

BILLS PRESENTED

Rating (Caravans and Boats)

Mr. Secretary Gummer, supported by Mr. Secretary Lang, Mrs. Secretary Bottomley, Mr. Secretary Forsyth, Mr. Secretary Hague, Mrs. Angela Knight, Mr. David Curry and Sir Paul Beresford, presented a Bill to make provision about liability for non-domestic rates in England and Wales in relation to certain caravans and boats: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Monday 4 December and to be printed. [Bill 9.]

Health Service Commissioners (Amendment)

Mr. Secretary Dorrell, supported by Secretary Sir Patrick Mayhew, Mr. Secretary Forsyth, Mr. Roger Freeman, Mr. Secretary Hague and Mr. Gerald Malone, presented a Bill to make provision about the Health Service Commissioners: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Monday 4 December and to be printed. [Bill 10.]

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Probation

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(4) (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.),

That the Probation (Amendment) Rules 1995 (S. I., 1995, No. 2622) be referred to a Standing Committee on Delegated Legislation.—*[Mr. Bates.]*

Question agreed to.

Orders of the Day

WAYS AND MEANS

Order read for resuming debate on Question [28 November].

AMENDMENT OF THE LAW

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That it is expedient to amend the law with respect to the National Debt and the public revenue and to make further provision in connection with finance; but this Resolution does not extend to the making of any amendment with respect to value added tax so as to provide—

(a) for zero-rating or exempting any supply, acquisition or importation otherwise than by—

(i) zero-rating or exempting supplies of goods which are, or are to be, subjected to a fiscal or other warehousing regime; or

(ii) zero-rating or exempting supplies of services on or in relation to such goods;

(b) for refunding any amount of tax otherwise than to persons constructing or converting buildings in cases where the construction or conversion is not in the course or furtherance of a business;

(c) for varying any rate at which that tax is at any time chargeable; or

(d) for relief other than relief applying to goods of whatever description or services of whatever description.—*[Mr. Kenneth Clarke.]*

Question again proposed.

Budget Resolutions and Economic Situation

5.38 pm

The President of the Board of Trade and Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Mr. Ian Lang): I welcome the opportunity of this resumed debate on the Budget to emphasise what my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor has made clear in each of his Budgets: that the single most important contribution that the Government can make to fostering growth and improving competitiveness—both of which are essential for business success and national prosperity—is to provide a stable macro-economic background. That means controlling public spending, achieving and sustaining low inflation and keeping Government borrowing and taxation low. Hence we have a Budget that works towards those objectives: Government borrowing falling to zero in the medium term; getting public spending to below 40 per cent. of national income; getting inflation down below 2.5 per cent. and keeping it there; and progress towards a 20 per cent. basic rate of income tax. The Budget that my right hon. and learned Friend delivered on Tuesday enshrined all of those objectives. It leaves people and business with more of what they earn and spends more on what they care about.

The Budget reaffirms our overriding commitment to providing the framework and conditions under which enterprise and wealth creation can flourish. It cannot be said too often that businesses and individuals, not

Governments, create wealth. We need to encourage and reward their hard work and prudent savings, which are the foundations for future investment.

All 26 million income tax payers will gain from the income tax cuts that my right hon. and learned Friend announced on Tuesday. Savers will benefit from the reduction, from 25p to 20p, of tax on savings income. The package of help for business announced by my right hon. and learned Friend addresses business concerns directly, which is perhaps why it was so warmly welcomed by the Confederation of British Industry.

Mr. Peter Hain (Neath): On the concerns of business, why has the right hon. Gentleman reneged on the commitment given by his predecessor to reduce the Post Office's external financing limit and instead doubled it so that an extra £400 million will be taken out of the Post Office? That will increase prices for the ordinary customer and massively restrict the Post Office's ability to modernise and invest in new sorting equipment and so forth. Is that not just another hidden tax and an example of the Government giving with one hand and taking away with the other?

Mr. Lang: My right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister did not give the firm commitment that the hon. Gentleman suggests. He gave an indication of what the Government's aim would be and expressed the hope that it would be possible to make progress. We have indeed made progress with the arrangements that my right hon. Friend set out last May.

We have abolished the capital expenditure limit with its associated scrutiny of individual projects. We have a new corporate planning process. We have said that we shall consider moves by the Royal Mail into adjacent markets and that we shall continue to build on that progress. It is surely beyond reason to expect that the Post Office, a major organisation, should be entirely exempt from the sort of budgetary pressures that afflict every other public service and Government Department. That is the approach that my right hon. Friend took.

Mr. Hain: I am probably testing the right hon. Gentleman's patience, but may I remind him that his predecessor imposed an external financing limit for the coming financial year which the right hon. Gentleman has now increased by £120 million? The Post Office cannot borrow on the open market because the Government will not let it. It has to invest from its own resources. Why is the right hon. Gentleman denying it the ability to do so and therefore denying it the ability to compete in Europe and become the best Post Office in Europe, not just the best Post Office in Britain?

Mr. Lang: We have an extremely good record on the performance of the Post Office. It is certainly not being starved of investment. It is an organisation which is spending, and should have the scope to continue to spend, at double the rate that it spent when the Government came into office. At constant prices, it spent a total of £800 million in the five years Labour was in power. Between 1989 and 1994, that figure increased to £1.7 billion. We have a good record on the Post Office and I am anxious to build on it as soon as circumstances allow.

I shall now revert to the benefits for business that my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor announced in his Budget. We have cut employers' national insurance contributions by £500 million a year from April 1997 and we have cut the maximum real increase in business rates under the relief scheme by 2½ per cent. compared with last year's Budget, but the request that I hear most often from business is for low inflation.

All the major business organisations called for the safeguarding of the stable macro-economic environment that the Government have put in place. We have set a firm target for underlying inflation and we remain resolved to drive it down and keep it down. Inflation has now been below 4 per cent. for more than three and a half years and below 3 per cent. for much of that time. That is the best performance for 50 years. We are breaking the inflationary culture that the policies of the Labour party did so much to engender.

The stable and profitable climate for business that we are delivering is the surest way to encourage investment in our economy, but we have also been engaged in a programme of long-term structural change to the United Kingdom's economy. It involves reducing burdens on business, extending the scope of market forces, promoting competition at home and abroad and helping business to help itself.

We have at all times been concerned to create an economic climate that encourages and rewards enterprise. We recognised long ago the importance to our economy of a thriving small business sector. It is the backbone of our economy and the engine of growth and new jobs for the future. Today, there are more than 1 million more small businesses than there were in 1979.

Small business remains at the heart of our agenda, where it has always been. While the Labour party was opposing enterprise—or, as now, simply talking about it—we have, year after year, brought in measures to help small business. Through changes to PAYE, national insurance, income and corporation taxes, VAT, accounting and auditing requirements; and with loan guarantees, venture capital trusts and investment schemes and a host of other measures, we have shown our commitment to small business and we will continue to do so.

We have invited small firms representative bodies to organise a series of conferences to involve small businesses more directly in generating future policies to help them. We are participating fully in that programme, which will culminate in a national conference to be held in London next March.

We have established a new team of small firms Ministers across Whitehall. They are responsible for ensuring that the interests of the sector are taken into account in the development of all aspects of Government policy. The Budget contained a wide range of measures further to boost small businesses and enterprise. It cut taxes on profits. The reduction in the small companies rate of corporation tax will help 300,000 small companies, while the cut in the basic rate of income tax will reduce the tax burden on a very large number of unincorporated businesses.

The Budget helped small firms with the cost of business rates following revaluation. More than 800,000 smaller properties will benefit from the maximum real increase being cut from 7½ per cent. to 5 per cent. It cut the qualifying age for capital gains tax retirement relief, thereby encouraging and rewarding entrepreneurship, and

[Mr. Lang]

significantly extended the threshold before which assets will be liable for inheritance tax. It simplified the tax system and raised the VAT threshold.

However, it is not just through the taxation system that we are helping small business. We are also putting in place the most extensive and effective infrastructure to assist small business that the country has ever had. Business Link is a central element in our strategy to help small firms. It is reaching out to companies with a will to grow by providing long-term support tailored to the needs of individual firms. For the first time, local firms have a simple route to a comprehensive range of high-quality, integrated business support services in areas such as export planning, finance, design, innovation and modern technology.

More than 70 per cent. of the Business Link network is already in place, and by next April we expect some 250 outlets to be open, covering the whole of England. Scotland and Wales are developing similar networks known as Scottish Business Shops and Business Connect Wales.

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): The President of the Board of Trade has been talking at some length about all the help that the Government are giving small business. Does he include in that the proposal to introduce substantial penalties on employers who employ illegal entrants? Will not the inevitable consequence of that measure be that many small business people, fearful of such penalties, will refuse to employ anyone who comes from abroad, particularly anyone from an ethnic minority?

Mr. Lang: I can assure the hon. Gentleman that, as with all the other measures that the Government introduce, the particular circumstances of small businesses will be taken into account.

Business has already given Business Link an overwhelming thumbs up. More than 4,000 businesses a week are using the network, and 95 per cent. of customers surveyed have expressed satisfaction with the service. The Budget provided funding to enable the Business Link network to be completed. The Budget has also allowed me to increase the funding for its services so that it can meet the demand from business for integrated, world-class business support services.

Bad regulation bears down disproportionately on small firms. Business men and women must be free to concentrate on creating wealth rather than filling in forms. We have sought out unnecessary regulations which raise prices, destroy jobs and stifle innovation and choice. Business has been brisk. We have found more than 1,000 such regulations and we shall have amended or repealed more than half of them by the end of the year, but we are by no means content to rest there. We are determined to continue to look positively at deregulation, particularly where regulation impinges on small business.

We shall continue to oppose the imposition of new burdens on small business. The policies of the Labour party—the national minimum wage, the social chapter and its payroll tax—would place intolerable new burdens on small business. It is clear that the needs of small business are the last thing on Labour's mind.

Deregulation and our policies to encourage enterprise have been essential elements of our long-term agenda to transform the competitiveness of the British economy. The Government's privatisation programme is also a part of that agenda. Privatisation and liberalisation have revitalised huge swathes of the economy that lay moribund under state ownership. The success of our policies is reflected by the increasing number of countries of all political persuasions which are now following our lead. It is only in the British Labour party that abject short-termism and socialist dogma still prevail.

What is the Labour party's response to the growing success story? Its response is to seek revenge in the form of a windfall tax. At the time of the utilities' privatisation, the Labour party claimed that they were doomed to failure. Now that they have achieved greater efficiencies and success than Labour thought possible, Labour will penalise them with a windfall tax—which would be unfair, capricious and penalise success. It would also be retrospective.

Retrospective taxation destroys incentives to improve performance and make profits. If there are no profits, there are no funds for investment. If there is no investment, the quality of services in the utilities will be under threat and consumers will end up facing price increases rather than continuing to enjoy the downward trend in prices. Consumers would suffer as the quality of services fell and their cost rose.

Mr. Michael Clapham (Barnsley, West and Penistone): The Secretary of State mentioned that the utilities had forced down prices. Is he aware that the price of electricity to large users has not changed at all? Can he tell us what he intends to do about that, as it clearly affects British competitiveness?

Mr. Lang: I shall provide figures on prices in a moment. For the moment, let me continue on the topic of the windfall tax to which the Labour party is so committed. Indeed, it is one of the few identifiable commitments that we have managed to get out of the Labour party.

The Labour party implies that the windfall tax is a free tax and that no one will get hurt. There is no such thing as a free tax. I have already mentioned the cost to consumers of the tax, but it would also be a betrayal of all the investors in the privatised companies, because they would have to pay for it. It would be a tax on millions of small individual investors. It would be a tax on the pension funds and the life assurance companies on which individuals rely for their future security. They are the people who would be betrayed by the Labour party, and all because Labour needs to find money to finance its desires for higher spending. A windfall tax has nothing whatever to do with fairness.

A windfall tax is by definition a one-off tax. It cannot be used for recurring spending programmes, yet the Labour party plans to spend the proceeds of the tax not only year after year, but on 10 separate policy commitments. The Labour party's sums simply do not add up.

Let us examine the successes of the privatised industries, which Labour policies would put at risk. The regulatory system has turned the past profits of the utilities into price cuts for consumers. Telecommunications prices are down more than 35 per cent. in real terms since privatisation. With liberalisation and growing competition, customers can expect to continue to benefit from lower prices. Domestic gas

prices, excluding VAT, are down more than 23 per cent., and industrial gas prices are down 40 per cent. since privatisation. The deregulation of the gas market, which comes on stream next year, will mean that customers can expect prices to fall further still. Domestic electricity is down by 7 per cent. Next year, through tighter new price controls, the flotation of the National Grid and the phasing out of the nuclear levy, customers can expect, on average, about £90 off their bills.

Our telecommunications, electricity and gas prices for industry are among the lowest in Europe, and they are helping industry in this country to win. The privatised companies are delivering not only lower prices but better services. More than 95 per cent. of British Telecom's telephone boxes now work, and there are 50 per cent. more of them. Before privatisation, 250,000 people were waiting to have a telephone installed; now there are no waiting lists. Utilities now guarantee standards of service, and their guarantees are backed up by compensation. They have codes of practice on the services that they deliver to elderly and disabled customers.

The taxpayer has also enjoyed benefits from privatisation. Under the Labour party, nationalised industries cost taxpayers £50 million a week, which was more than £120 a year for every household in the country. Today, the privatised utilities contribute £55 million a week to the Exchequer.

Mr. Paddy Tipping (Sherwood): The President of the Board of Trade has not mentioned the privatised water companies. What would he say to Severn Trent Water which, the day before the Budget, announced an increase in profits of 75 per cent. to £160 million, but offered its customers a rebate of only £4 a year? That is not value for money for the customer.

Mr. Lang: The hon. Gentleman seems to overlook the fact that the water industry has for a long time needed increased capital investment. Like all publicly owned utilities and nationalised industries, it has been starved of resources over the years. It is now in a position to raise the necessary money through the private sector and in the market. Yorkshire Water plans to invest no less than £2.5 billion over the next 10 years. Such an upgrading of the system could not have been contemplated under the previous arrangements, but can be now.

The privatised utilities have benefited not only consumers, shareholders and the Exchequer, but the economy. The privatised industries are investing in modern infrastructure that will benefit Britain for decades to come, and they have had an unparalleled record on investment since privatisation. More than £25 billion has been invested by BT on modernising the network and installing new technologies, and more than £4.5 billion was invested in telecommunications last year. Fifteen billion pounds has been invested in water to date, which answers more specifically the question asked by the hon. Member for Sherwood (Mr. Tipping). Our water companies are now delivering some of the cleanest water in Europe. By comparison, under the Labour Government, capital investment fell in electricity, gas, telecommunications and water.

Against that background, it can be said with certainty that independent regulation of the utilities. operating at arm's length from the Government and with competition introduced wherever possible, has worked well. It provides incentives for companies to improve their performance and mechanisms to ensure that customers benefit from the improvements. The regulators have also required the utility companies to meet demanding new standards of service. As a result, customers have benefited in respect of price and quality of service.

There is never a shortage of ideas for changes to the regulatory system. Where those changes would help the regulators with their job and improve public understanding of what is being done, the regulators themselves are quick to respond.

The regulators have wide powers under existing legislation to introduce changes to regulation, but they are all putting increasing emphasis on consultation before taking major decisions. They actively encourage public debate through consultation papers, explanatory reports and discussion at conferences and other open occasions. The wider involvement of interested parties raises the quality and integrity of decision making as the regime develops.

Some of the regulators have appointed, or are considering the appointment of, groups of advisers to help with specific issues or for continuing advice. That is a sign of a flexible and responsive regulatory system. In addition, as competition develops—for example, in the telecommunications market—the regulator seeks to remove detailed interventionist rules. That will allow companies to respond more flexibly and innovatively to customer needs and market developments.

The current structure is highly adaptable, so there is at present no case for fundamental change. As I said, the regulatory system is in an evolutionary phase. The process will no doubt continue, and rightly so. The Government will certainly continue to keep the system under review to ensure that it reflects the developing market.

As the system evolves, however, it will build on a record of solid achievement. Independent regulators and increasingly tight price formulae, with an incentive element built in, have been delivering impressive results to customers and developing impressive utility companies at the same time, but competition rather than regulation is the key to even greater improvements.

There is no doubt that there is scope for more competition and, therefore, more consumer choice, especially in the energy and water sectors. Competition between suppliers is already a fact of life in telecommunications and for medium and larger users of electricity and gas. It has produced clear benefits, which are important for the international competitiveness of British industry.

We are determined to press ahead with the further opening up of the markets. The first phase of the introduction of competition to the domestic gas market will take place next year, with full competition in 1998. The electricity industry is also preparing for full competition in 1998. Also in 1998, all users of electricity and gas will have the opportunity to benefit from competitive choice—on top of the large reductions in energy prices which they have already experienced or which are in the pipeline.

There is also scope for extending competition in the supply of water and waste water services, in the first instance for larger users. Consequently the Government are working on proposals with the Director General of Water Services and will publish a consultation paper early

[Mr. Lang]

next year. This all shows that, as a result of the Government's policies, we have a dynamic evolving utilities sector which is increasingly delivering, at lower cost than before, the services that customers want.

We have not restricted our efforts to deregulate and increase competition to the private sector.

Mr. Tim Smith (Beaconsfield): Is my right hon. Friend aware that his announcement that electricity customers are likely to benefit from reductions of, on average, up to £90 in their bills next year is extremely welcome? What effect does he expect that and, in particular, the £50 National Grid rebate, to have on the retail prices index?

Mr. Lang: I can, with confidence, say that it will drive the RPI downwards. It is more difficult to calculate the precise effect that it will have on the RPI. In the long term, the price reductions that have been coming through in all the utilities that I have mentioned will undoubtedly be of great benefit in reducing the cost of living.

The public sector has also been opened up to the rigours of the marketplace through the private finance initiative. The PFI brings together the public and private sectors to the advantage of both. It brings the enterprise and discipline of the private sector into areas which have, until recently, been regarded as the domain of the public sector. The state cannot and should not try to do everything. We need to find new, innovative and more efficient ways of delivering public services and major capital investments. The PFI enables the Government to move away from being the provider of services to being an intelligent purchaser of services for the taxpayer.

The PFI will generate increased investment in infrastructure and public services. The Government are on course to let contracts worth £14 billion over the next three years—£5 billion this year alone. Substantial progress has already been made across a range of Government activities. For example, a deal was signed earlier this year with GEC Alsthom to supply a new train service for the Northern line. The first tranche of contracts for design-build-finance-operate road projects is due to be signed shortly. A further £500 million-worth of privately financed road schemes was announced by my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor on Tuesday. The net result will be the better and more efficient delivery of services.

Sir Michael Grylls (North-West Surrey): I am listening carefully to what my right hon. Friend is saying about the PFI, which is a marvellous innovation that should be useful. To help it work more efficiently and speedily, will my right hon. Friend consider bringing in outside business men and women to advise Government Departments as they negotiate contracts? Experience seems to show that, generally, civil servants are not very good at negotiating. If people were brought in from the private sector, the PFI might get going much faster.

Mr. Lang: My hon. Friend makes a positive suggestion and I am glad that my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor is sitting on the Front Bench to hear it. We share the objective of wanting to ensure as substantial and effective a take-up of existing PFI opportunities as possible.

As for the issues that we are considering in the Budget debate, we listen and wait in vain for any sign of the Labour party's policies. The Labour party does not have a view on any issue that arises in the debate. It has no view on taxation; it has no view on the level of interest rates; it has no view on inflation.

Perhaps the right hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) will enlighten us all today. We know that, in general terms, the Labour party wants to raise spending and introduce more policies that would cost money but, although it generally wants lower taxes, it abstains on my right hon. and learned Friend's Budget when it comes to resolving the issue. What a wonderful posture of high-mindedness and principle the Labour party adopts to seek to persuade the electorate that it represents their interests.

We know that the Labour party wants to raise spending, but we know that it is not prepared to face up to the issues of funding; we know that it wants to reduce taxes, but when we introduce proposals to reduce taxes across the board it abstains. Its sole interest is in party political advantage instead of the national interest. Why else would it take every opportunity to talk down the country? I should like to offer it a few facts that will help it to stand up for the country for a change.

Our gross domestic product per head is 10 per cent. ahead of that of Europe as a whole. During the past 15 years, our growth has been faster than the average growth of the European Union. Our living standards have risen by 40 per cent. since 1979, whereas they rose by only 1 per cent. under the Labour Government. This year's Budget will help further to increase that figure of 40 per cent. With the fastest productivity growth rate, we have closed three quarters of the gap in manufacturing productivity with France and Germany since 1979—a gap that widened under the Labour Government.

Since 1979, total investment and total investment in the business sector have risen faster than in France, Germany or Italy. The 1980s were the first decade since the second world war in which our economy grew faster than those of Germany and France. The UK now has a higher proportion of its population of working age in work than any other major European Union country.

Those are some signs of the progress that has been made in recent years under this Government. We have achieved success through the huge structural changes that we have made to our economy—making it more competitive and freeing up enterprise. Britain is now well placed to build on the significant progress that has been achieved.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor has delivered a good Budget for business. He has delivered a Budget that furthers the competitive gains that we have made during the past 16 years. He has delivered a Budget that reinforces the Government's commitment to permanently low inflation and sustained economic growth. He has delivered a Budget that reduces taxes and provides incentives for saving.

The Budget provides support to small firms, both through taxation and through resources for practical assistance. It reflects the long-term economic strategy of

the Government: low inflation; incentives for enterprise; firm control of public expenditure; and a climate for sustained growth. I commend it to the House.

6.6 pm

Mrs. Margaret Beckett (Derby, South): Every Member of Parliament now knows that this is a dishonest Budget. We do not need a sophisticated analysis of the detail to show us that—we have a simple parliamentary litmus test. There have been six statements in two days and two Budget debates that have barely started before 6 pm. If the Government were really so proud of the Budget, they would not be trying so hard to hide it.

What we needed on Tuesday was a Budget for Britain, a Budget to secure our country's future, a Budget to promote and sustain investment in that future. What we received was, unfortunately, what we feared: a Budget, the main—probably sole—purpose of which was to secure the Conservative party's future. The Budget reinforced our criticism of the Government's lamentable record on investment.

The Budget reveals that the Conservative party is beginning to resemble a clapped-out old car. Its steering has gone and it can only lurch to the right, the tax has run out and it has been burning oil, North sea oil, for years—£128 billion worth of oil, to be exact. It is no wonder that the Tories cannot flog the old banger to the people of Britain. We can imagine the advertisement in the paper: "16 years old; one not-too-careful lady owner; split down the middle; none of the seats is safe."

The Budget shows, yet again, a Government praising themselves for their aspirations and ignoring their record. How do we judge the worth of those aspirations? First, in the light of the Government's past record and secondly, in the light of their present intentions as revealed in the Budget. The Chancellor told us several times in his speech that he wanted to make Britain the enterprise centre of Europe. This week, the Government's efforts to promote enterprise, of which the Secretary of State has just been bragging, have produced some interesting effects. I think that we would all agree that it takes enterprise and flair to run out of water in Yorkshire. It takes unbelievable acumen to be involved in a business that supplies only one product, to fail to provide that product and still to increase profits by 50 per cent. Is that what the Government mean by "the enterprise economy"?

That is not, of course, the only example of the Government's record on enterprise. The National Engineering Laboratory was recently privatised. What did the sale raise to help fund the Government's programme? It appears to have raised less than nothing—to be precise, minus £1.5 million. Far from raising money from that sale, the Government appear to have paid someone to take the NEL away.

Another money loser, as well as a vote loser, is the privatisation of Railtrack. It now appears that Railtrack, with assets estimated at £6 billion, might be sold for as little as £1.5 billion—£1 billion less than was anticipated—in the rush to get it on to the stock exchange by April 1996, a rush that almost certainly has far more to do with the need for it to contribute to the Government's accounts than with sound business management of the sale.

A recent analysis of Railtrack's accounts by the *Independent* suggests that the company may have set aside more than £1 billion from its investment budget to repay debt and boost the balance sheet before privatisation—yet more evidence of the Government's failure on investment, to put alongside the use of £1 billion of public money to meet the costs of privatisation, money which could have been used for investment.

Then there is the privatisation of the nuclear power stations. Some disquiet has already been expressed about the general safety aspects and implications of that privatisation, and about whether the timetable might be somewhat tight, being driven by the Government's need for funds rather than the public interest. Now, that already tight timetable is rumoured to have been further curtailed because Railtrack's privatisation will not raise the sums anticipated, thus creating fresh doubts about safety.

That is probably also the privatisation that most evidently blows out of the water the Government's claim to be, and to be uniquely, the party that understands about how business should work, because that is the privatisation in which, most evidently, the Government are selling the assets and keeping the liabilities. It also blows out of the water their claim to be good stewards on behalf of the British people, because those are liabilities that, through their electricity bills, people have already paid to cover. Thanks to the Government's business acumen, we shall end up paying, not once, not even twice, but three times.

Before the original privatisation, the Central Electricity Generating Board held assets that more than offset its liabilities.

Mr. Michael Stern (Bristol, North-West): Will the right hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Beckett: Not at the moment.

However, when those assets were sold, the money was used to contribute to tax cuts and Nuclear Electric was left with £10 billion of unsecured liabilities. The non-fossil fuel levy was invented entirely—

Mr. Stern: Will the right hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Beckett: Not at the moment. I am right in the middle of an argument. I know that the hon. Gentleman would not wish to interrupt it. The non-fossil fuel levy was invented entirely to cover those liabilities, again at the electricity customer's expense. It was in effect another tax. Nuclear Electric chose to invest much of the income from that tax, saying that it needed to ensure that it had future cash flow and assets to cover those liabilities. Those assets are now, in turn, to be sold again and the cash again used as a contribution to, and justification for, tax cuts, leaving the Magnox company once more with the unsecured liabilities.

Customers will have paid three times: first, through the earlier price levels to build up CEGB assets, secondly, through the non-fossil fuel levy used to rebuild them after privatisation and thirdly, to cover the liabilities that the Government said that those assets were twice supposed to meet.

Mr. Stern: The right hon. Lady has summarised the letter that many of us received from power unions to good effect. May I remind her, however, that when the Select Committee on Energy reported on exactly the matters to

[Mr. Stern]

which she now refers, it pointed out clearly and with factual backing that it was not the case that the CEGB had provided for those liabilities, and that it was because the CEGB had not even calculated, let alone provided for, those liabilities that the nuclear power stations could not be included in the privatisation?

Mrs. Beckett: I understand that the Select Committee continues to examine those matters. I take the hon. Gentleman's point when he says that he would argue that the assets of the CEGB would not wholly have covered those liabilities, although I believe that, as it is so difficult to calculate, it is hard to say whether that is wholly true. However, that does not alter at all—as I believe that the hon. Gentleman conceded—my basic argument that the CEGB did have assets that would have contributed towards meeting those liabilities, and those assets, like the ones that replaced them, have been destroyed by the Government, leaving the liabilities in place. I repeat the main point of those observations, which is that that is a clear sign of what we should think of the Government's business acumen.

However, the Government's appalling record in protecting and advancing the interests of the people is, in its own way, wonderfully consistent. Alone among the G7 countries, alone in Europe, the Conservatives formed the Government who had the windfall benefits of North sea oil—benefits that they used to cover the consequences and costs of their failure and incompetence.

I listened today to the President of the Board of Trade going on about the Government's investment record, as Conservatives so often do—usually not very accurately, but never mind—and comparing it with the investment record of the last Labour Government, which was, of course, hit by a fourfold or fivefold increase in the price of oil, something that the present Government have not yet sustained. What I never hear the Government mention, and what the President of the Board of Trade slid over today, is the fact that the Conservatives have had benefits worth £128 billion at today's prices from the North sea alone. That is the equivalent of about £22 million a day for every single day of the 16 years that the Conservatives have been in office.

In addition, the Conservatives have had, and squandered, the proceeds of privatisation—what the late Harold Macmillan called "selling the family silver"—£80 billion in today's prices. That is the equivalent of a further £13 million a day for every single day of the 16 years that they have been in office. The Conservatives have had £35 million a day for every day that they have been in power for 16 years; £35 million a day that no British Government will ever have again because they have squandered it; £35 million a day that they could have invested in Britain's future if, for 16 years, they had not put the future of the Conservative party first.

That process of squeezing public assets and squeezing the public's purse goes on. I was very interested in the observations that my hon. Friend the Member for Neath (Mr. Hain) made about the attack on the Post Office. He drew attention to the fact that the Treasury will double the amount of cash that it will take from the Post Office—an additional £400 million during the next three years—making a total of £1 billion during that time.

The President of the Board of Trade implied that that was not especially unexpected; at least he disputed with my hon. Friend the Member for Neath the statement of the then President of the Board of Trade, the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine), on 11 May 1995. I just happen to have a copy of statement about my person. The then Secretary of State said:

> "I am prepared to agree that in future we shall aim to set the EFL at about half the Post Office's forecast post-tax profit. I hope to make progress in that direction this autumn."—[*Official Report*, 11 May 1995; Vol. 259, c. 885.]

Mr. Lang: Hope.

Mrs. Beckett: The Secretary of State draws to my attention the word "hope"—and no doubt also the word "aim". I believe that it is clear to all of us that words in the mouth of Ministers in the present Government mean nothing, and that is one of many examples—as is the word "promise".

However, one thing that is also clear is that that further impost on the Post Office, taking as much from it in the next three years as the Government have taken in the past 10, will have two effects. First, it makes an early increase in postal charges almost inevitable—a Tory stamp tax on the ordinary people and the businesses of the country. Secondly, it means that much-needed investment in the Post Office will have to be shelved. It also probably renders the Post Office open to competition from elsewhere in the European Union.

Most commentators say that this year's was a neutral Budget. Some give the Chancellor a feeble cheer for not going more blatantly for cosmetic tax cuts, but it was a cheer that he did not deserve. We know that, on the latest Red Book forecasts, the total tax burden as a proportion of gross domestic product continues to be planned to increase until the end of the century. We all know that in April next year a typical family will continue to pay £670 a year more in tax than it did when the Conservatives were re-elected in 1992 on a platform that promised overall tax cuts. They did not aim, they did not hope, they promised tax cuts, and then delivered 21 tax increases, equivalent, as the Chancellor has acknowledged, to 7p in the pound on the basic rate of tax.

It is forecast that the public sector borrowing requirement, the deficit in the Government's finances, will be down to about £22 billion next year. Last year, the Chancellor said that it would be below that by now. Growth was forecast to reach 2.75 per cent. this year and 3 per cent. next year. Last year, the Chancellor promised that it would be higher than that by now. Meanwhile, back in the real world, year-on-year growth is running at around a meagre 2 per cent. Last year, the Chancellor forecast investment growth at 5.75 per cent.; now he says that it will be 1 per cent. Growth is down on his forecast, and so is investment. What is up on his forecast? Inflation, the trade deficit, the balance of payments deficit and the deficit in public finances—the public sector borrowing requirement. That is all part of the Government's record.

What are the Government's present intentions? Before the Budget, the CBI said that we needed a Budget for investment—a Budget to promote investment in industry, and to sustain investment in education and training. It also

said that what we did not need was a Budget in which cuts in income tax were offered at the expense of investment in infrastructure.

Mr. Tim Smith: The CBI welcomed the Budget.

Mrs. Beckett: The hon. Gentleman says—from a sedentary position, no doubt exercising due caution—that the CBI welcomed the Budget. Indeed, the CBI put out a very balanced press release. I think the Secretary of State said that it had given the Budget a warm welcome; that is going a bit over the top, although it does use the words "we welcome". It also says:

"Public borrowing is higher than we had hoped for . . . We will need to see the details to assess this"—

the public capital expenditure cut, that is—

"in full."

The CBI also says:

"it is vital that the resources available for . . . transport . . . education and training and export support are at least maintained . . . the Private Finance Initiative is coming on stream too slowly to make up for the cuts in public capital spending in the Government's present plans."

I would not call that a warm welcome.

The Minister for Trade (Mr. Anthony Nelson): What are the Opposition's proposals?

Mrs. Beckett: I would be grateful if the Minister for Trade would be quiet. He knows perfectly well what our proposals are; in fact, the Secretary of State spent some time attacking them in his speech.

Mr. Lang: The right hon. Lady has missed out one or two points in the CBI's press release. It welcomed

"the fact that the Government has broadly stuck to the prudent economic line"

that it had recommended. It was

"pleased that the Chancellor appears to have limited tax cuts to reductions in spending and resisted the temptation to go for excessive tax cuts."

As for public borrowing, the CBI was

"satisfied that it still appears to be on a downward path."

It welcomed

"the priority the Chancellor gave to education spending".

In the tax reductions, it was

"pleased to see some specific measures such as help given to small businesses".

As for personal taxation, it stated:

"we welcome the raising of thresholds and the broadening of the 20 per cent. band."

I think that that is a pretty warm welcome.

Mrs. Beckett: The Secretary of State is unduly defensive—perhaps revealingly defensive. I made the very point that this was a balanced press release that welcomed many elements in the Budget; I then drew attention to the reservations expressed by the CBI. The right hon. Gentleman knows perfectly well which are the most important points. I am dealing with the measures that the CBI called for—and the right hon. Gentleman is well aware that it was given none of those measures.

Last year, bodies such as the CBI, the chambers of commerce and the Engineering Employers Federation called on the Chancellor for significant capital allowances to stimulate investment in new plant and machinery. This year, those bodies called on him again for such capital investment. They got zilch. The Secretary of State was too busy telling the CBI that it was its duty to come to the rescue of the Conservative party—to remember whose side it was on, as he so gracefully put it—to worry about helping it to come to the rescue of a faltering economy.

Both the Chancellor and the President of the Board of Trade are fond of quoting figures to the effect that investment has increased substantially over the past year; but that one-year increase is quoted to disguise how low is the level to which investment has been flattened under the present Government. In fact, total investment in 1994 was more than 10 per cent. below its level in 1989, before the recession.

The share of the economy taken by investment has fallen for six years in a row. The average level of investment between 1979 and 1993 as a share of the economy has been the lowest in all the 18 countries of the G7 and the European Community. As the Bank of England pointed out this summer, investment is 20 per cent. below the level that it reached in previous recoveries. I refer to investment in general, to support for investment of the kind sought by the CBI and to investment in education. The Budget told us that funding for education would be as much as local authorities are spending this year, and that there would be cuts in funding for further and higher education and training, including funds for training and education councils.

Nor have the Government protected investment in infrastructure, as the CBI requested. They have savagely cut their own investment, public sector capital spending, with cuts amounting to £3.9 billion by 1997-98. With typical sleight of hand, they have implied that the private finance initiative will fill the gap. It has not so far, and unfortunately it probably will not do so in the future. The Government have already cut their own investment by about £2 billion, and over the same period the private finance initiative has raised only about £500 million. Already, we have a net reduction of £1.5 billion in investment in infrastructure.

Mr. Nigel Forman (Carshalton and Wallington): It seems a long time ago, but I seem to remember that the right hon. Lady was a Minister in the last Labour Government. I believe that she was there at the time when the Labour Government cut various forms of public sector capital expenditure by more than any other post-war Government. Does she repent?

Mrs. Beckett: The hon. Gentleman was clearly not awake when I gave the figures for the investment funds that have been available to the present Government. Yes, I do regret the fact that the last Labour Government could not proceed with all their capital spending programmes—although what the Government say about that, like so much of what they say, is often completely untrue. The Secretary of State said, for example, that investment in water had been cut. That is not true. The plans that we hoped to implement were not entirely fulfilled, but investment was not cut; indeed, it rose under the last Labour Government. I suggest that the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Forman) check his facts.

Let me repeat a point that I am happy to repeat—a point that I intend to repeat at every opportunity that I get between now and the next general election. As the Secretary of State did, and as they all do, the hon. Member

[Mrs. Beckett]

for Carshalton and Wallington compared the record of the last Labour Government, who were hit by an oil price increase—*[Interruption.]* As recently as Tuesday, the Chancellor said that the reason why inflation had gone up a bit this year was an increase in commodity prices. If that excuse is valid for the Chancellor, it must have some relevance to what happened to the last Labour Government. What we never had, and what no Government will ever have again—thanks to the profligacy of the present Government—is £35 million a day of investment to put into the economy.

Mr. Richard Spring (Bury St. Edmunds): Will the right hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Beckett: No.

To compare the investment record of the last Labour Government with that of the present Government—even truthfully—is ridiculous. It is not comparing like with like.

Mr. David Congdon (Croydon, North-East): Will the right hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Beckett: I should like to make progress. I shall give way later if I have time.

What the Government intend is all too clear. I was not able to trace the quotation before today's debate, but I think that I am right in saying that they have implied that the private finance initiative was first introduced to promote the programme of capital investment. It would be used to supplement and extend that programme; the Government denied that it would be used to replace it, and to make up for cuts in Government capital investment. Not only has the latter happened; it has been explicitly advocated—in the Red Book, and in the Chancellor's speech on Tuesday—that the PFI should replace, rather than supplement, public capital investment. That, too, is something that business and industry have sought to avoid.

The Government claim—as they have today—that economic success is already ours, boasting about our trade performance under them. Indeed, that performance has been record-breaking. In 1983, we saw the breaking of an outstanding historical record, with the appearance of the first trade deficit in manufactured goods since the industrial revolution—a record that the Government have managed to maintain every year since then. The trade figures for October reflect another record-breaking Government economic performance—a £1.2 billion non-EC trade deficit. That is the worst figure since the series began.

The balance of UK visible trade in 1994 was a deficit of £10.5 billion, and the balance of trade in manufactured goods showed a deficit of £7.5 billion. We currently have a trading deficit with France, Germany, Italy, Sweden, Denmark and Finland. Incidentally, under the last Labour Government we had an average £4 billion surplus on trade in manufactured goods.

It is hard to see how all that leads the Government to claim that they are making Britain the enterprise centre of Europe. We are down to 18th in the world prosperity league, behind our main European competitors; we are bottom of the league in growth and investment since 1979 among the G7, and 20th out of 24 OECD countries in job creation. It all flies in the face of what the Government say about our economic record, and what they say about jobs—such as the Secretary of State's comment that job insecurity is a state of mind, and that the reality is different. As we pointed out a few days ago, more than 8.5 million people or 26 per cent. of the work force have directly experienced unemployment since the last general election.

Today, we have issued a regional breakdown of those figures that shows that the highest level of unemployment for men was in Greater London at 41 per cent., followed by the northern region at 37 per cent., and then the north-west. Even the best figure, for the south-east excluding London, is 27 per cent.—more than one in four. That is a truly shocking statistic.

The denial of the existence of job insecurity, like the Government's record on tax and public spending and like the Budget, is further evidence of what people are now seeing with greater clarity than ever before. The Government's record is one of dishonesty and sleight of hand. We can see that in the way that they give a little with one hand, but take much more with the other—7p up and 1p down. We can see that in the Government's policies on investment and industry and commerce. We can also see that in what the Government have said about small businesses.

(The Chancellor of the Exchequer) Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The right hon. Lady has returned to the question of taxation and public spending and she has taken the subject rather broadly. Can she give an example of a tax proposal that I have made which the Opposition intend to vote against? Is there an area of public expenditure that the right hon. Lady proposes to increase? If so, will she identify it and say by how much?

Mrs. Beckett: My hon. Friend the Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith) may be in a position at the end of the Budget debate to say how we shall vote on the different resolutions. I have not studied them myself. We shall vote against the overall impact of the Budget. *[Interruption.]* The Chancellor knows that decisions have to be taken on individual resolutions. *[Interruption.]* Does the Chancellor want to hear the answer to the question? We do not intend to vote against the cut of 1p in the rate of income tax, because we think that the public have suffered enough thanks to the Government's incompetence and deceit. We intend, however, to vote against the Budget overall.

The Chancellor asked me to identify an area of public spending that should be increased and say whether I would make a commitment to that increase. No, I will not. The Chancellor must know—he always says so himself—that such decisions can be made only in the full knowledge of the facts. The Opposition are able to judge the facts only through the prism of what the Chancellor chooses to tell us. We would be unwise to take his word for anything, as the President of the Board of Trade has demonstrated today by telling us that what his predecessor as President of the Board of Trade said in May and June was absolutely meaningless. That does not encourage anyone to rely on what a Minister says.

Mr. Spring: Answer the question.

Mrs. Beckett: I have already answered the question. The hon. Gentleman is too busy heckling to listen.

The Chancellor raised the VAT threshold for small businesses by only £1,000, less than half the rise necessary to keep pace with inflation. He did not mention that that rise means that 14,000 more small businesses will be drawn into the VAT net over the next three years. He also reduced employers' national insurance contributions by 0.2 per cent., saying that that would

"make it cheaper for businesses to create new jobs."—[*Official Report*, 28 November 1995; Vol. 267, c. 1064.]

However, the savings are so small that only a firm that employs more than 500 people will be able to employ a single extra person. The measure, therefore, does not do anything for small businesses and that is particularly sad because both sides of the House agree that small and medium-sized businesses have the most potential for job creation.

Although the capping of business rate increases for small businesses at 5 per cent. is welcome, the increases are still above the rate of inflation. As always, the best advice for small business people as for everybody else is to read the small print—the Government have a record of giving with one hand and taking back with the other.

The central boast of the Budget is that the Government will make us the enterprise centre of Europe—by cutting investment in infrastructure, and cutting investment in people. That is enough to make a cat laugh, but it will make anybody who cares about our future cry. The Government have betrayed the trust of the British people, robbed them of their inheritance, and jeopardised their future. History will not forgive them, and nor will the people whom they have betrayed.

6.35 pm

Sir Terence Higgins (Worthing): No Budget debate would be complete without reference to Iain Macleod's most famous dictum that Budgets that are well received on the day often look different on Second Reading of the Finance Bill; conversely, those that are not well received look rather good by Second Reading. My right hon. and learned Friend's Budget may well be a classic in the second category.

I confess that I was astonished by some of the headlines about the Budget. The Budget is complex and involves many measures, so I think that the press simply did not realise what much of the Budget was about. I feel that the Budget was excellent and well balanced.

The Chancellor was severely limited in what he was able to do. The move towards the 20 per cent. rate of income tax is very important and was approached in three separate ways: by widening the band far more than necessary to keep pace with inflation; by reducing the basic rate—1p off was quite enough, and I have not received a single letter suggesting 2p off; and by the important reduction of the rate of tax to 20 per cent. for people with savings income. That is particularly important for pensioners.

If the Chancellor had gone further, the reaction in the City would have been such that he would not have been able to hold out any prospect of a cut in interest rates, which is likely to be more important to the recovery than anything that appears in the Budget. Despite the stringent attitude that he has taken on public expenditure, a further cut would have had damaging effects. In particular, if the road building programme had been chopped any more, programmes that have already advanced past the public inquiry stage would have been cut, with the consequent waste of nugatory public expenditure. That would be absurd.

The schools programme has provoked great concern in Sussex. My hon. Friend the Member for Lewes (Mr. Rathbone) referred to it earlier. I have had many letters about schools expenditure in West Sussex, rather overlooking the fact that the allocation of resources is for the county council to decide. The Chancellor said:

"The Budget allows for spending on schools to rise next year. We have already increased spending per pupil by some 50 per cent. in real terms since 1979. We devote a higher proportion of our public spending to education than Japan, Germany or France."

He continued, in a crucial passage:

"The plans that I am publishing today allow for an increase in spending on schools of £878 million. Within that, over £770 million will be channelled through the local authority settlement."—[*Official Report*, 28 November 1995; Vol. 267, c. 1058-59.]

Parents will rightly expect local authorities to carry that funding through to school budgets. They should ask their local authorities how the extra money for schools will be spent on their children. West Sussex county council, which is Liberal controlled, has been diverting money from education to its particular hobby horses and has then asked people to write to me to ask why education spending has been cut.

The expenditure side of the Budget is thus well balanced and it should be welcomed by the whole House.

When the Leader of the Opposition spoke after the Budget statement, his catch phrase was that the Government were giving with one hand and taking with the other—by contrast with the Labour party, which would take with one hand and give with the other. However, it would be a very strange Budget that took with one hand and did not give anything, or vice versa. Why the Opposition have latched on to that extraordinary catch phrase is mystifying.

I was intrigued by the emphasis that the Leader of the Opposition put on the fact that Conservatives are now writing to him. I had an extraordinary experience on my interview night the Friday before last when a constituent told me, "I wrote to the Prime Minister and got a reply from the Leader of the Opposition." I looked into the matter and that is what happened. I am still trying to get the letter back from the files of the Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that, in so as far as the Leader of the Opposition had a catch phrase, it was, "7p up and 1p down"? Will he comment on that?

Sir Terence Higgins: The Leader of the Opposition should look at the entire period of Conservative government and, in particular, at what has happened to the real incomes and take-home pay of various individuals in different categories. One has to look at the Government's performance and, in terms of raising living standards—allowing for tax changes, inflation and everything else—it has been a remarkably good record. If I may say so, the catch phrase that has been bandied about is rather silly.

Let me refer also to the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown). The gimmick of a 10p tax band is totally divorced from the width of the band. Would it

[Sir Terence Higgins]

apply to the first £1 of income or the first £60,000? The right hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) is muttering to herself. Perhaps she can tell me how wide the band is. Without that information, it is a totally meaningless statement. It does not mean anything to promise a 10p band of income tax at the starting rate. In any case, that is not an efficient way of reducing tax. My right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor has done more to help people at the bottom end of the scale by raising the basic allowance.

I happened to catch the tail end of the Budget broadcast by the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East last night. He stressed the importance of honesty in tax policies. He floated a remark about cutting VAT on fuel, but made no reference to the fact that under European legislation, the most he could cut VAT is from 8 per cent. to 5 per cent. His so-called honest broadcast gave the impression that there would be a massive cut or probably the abolition of VAT on fuel, so that did not seem very honest.

Mr. Stuart Bell (Middlesbrough): We are interested in the speech of the right hon. Gentleman as he is a former Chairman of the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee. However, my hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) said not that he would reduce VAT from 8 per cent. to zero, but that he wished to reduce VAT on fuel from 8 per cent. to 5 per cent.

Sir Terence Higgins: Quite so. If that is what the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East said, I accept it as I heard only the end of the broadcast. If that is so, I apologise.

Having said that, I believe that the basic arrangements that were made for pensioners and those on social security benefit when we put VAT on fuel were beneficial. Unless the hon. Gentleman wishes to go further than he went last night and promises to reduce the rate of VAT on fuel and retain the compensation that the Conservative Government gave to those on low incomes and pensioners, his proposals were not entirely clear.

I now come to that old-fashioned expression, the Budget judgment, which has not been dealt with adequately. The PSBR has declined rather more slowly than we had hoped, because there has been some slow-down in the economy and consequentially, revenues have not risen as fast as they might have done and unemployment has not fallen as fast as we had hoped. That being so, the action that my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor has taken in regard to the PSBR is not inappropriate at this stage in the economic cycle. The rate of growth in the economy was lower than we had expected, so there is a case for running a level of PSBR that stimulates the economy. Therefore, I view the present level of the PSBR with relative equanimity. Inflation is clearly well under control and it is important to strike the right balance between controlling inflation and economic growth. Again, my right hon. and learned Friend got that pretty well right.

I return to my earlier point about the rate of interest. Had my right hon. and learned Friend increased interest rates, as the Governor of the Bank of England appeared to advocate some while ago, the PSBR would have been larger, so my right hon. and learned Friend was right to resist that and to emphasise the rate of interest as well as fiscal policy.

We have to put the Budget in a European context. In respect of the PSBR, I am worried about the enormous pressure to meet the convergence criteria under the Maastricht treaty. There are some real problems as they do not take into account the stage of the economic cycle in any particular country and it seems dangerous to say that it is suddenly all right at any particular moment. If the criteria are to mean anything at all, they have to be at a sustainable level, when the PSBR is consistent with moving a further stage towards economic and monetary union.

Mr. Stern: Does my right hon. Friend agree that another difficulty is that the Maastricht criteria for borrowing take no account whatever of the national assets against which the borrowing is undertaken, so in comparing borrowing rates in different countries, they totally ignore the capacity to borrow?

Sir Terence Higgins: Yes, indeed. It may well be that borrowing is an appropriate response at certain stages in the economic cycle, depending on the level of capital expenditure on which the Opposition are so keen.

The general pressure now being exerted in Britain and throughout Europe is extremely dangerous because it may well have a recessionary effect. Again, one has to balance the difference between the size of the deficits and the state of the cycle. I view with relative equanimity the action that my right hon. and learned Friend has taken. Of course, he is right to seek to reduce the public sector deficit. That must be appropriate, but perhaps the sense of urgency in some quarters has been somewhat overdone.

Overall, this is a well-balanced Budget, which should result in greater appreciation as the weeks go by and we debate the Finance Bill. It is a particularly good Budget from my constituency point of view. It is a good Budget for pensioners, for Worthing, for the economy and for Britain.

6.47 pm

Mr. Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): I shall give just a few reflections. I concede in a fairly broad-brush way on the Budget, and I hope that I follow in the spirit of the right hon. Member for Worthing (Sir T. Higgins), who is a distinguished former Treasury Minister and who gave a balanced view of the Budget speech.

Clearly, all Budgets are not simply exercises in economics, otherwise we would have simply a conclave of learned professors who would give us of their views. Different Budgets have different admixtures of economics and politics. I suspect that the fear of this year's Budget was that, as we approached a general election season, politics would be even more paramount than they are in most Budgets. This year's Budget has to be viewed more than most in the context of its timing, the state of the country and the state of the Government.

The Budget speech, which now seems so long ago, met with rather different receptions on both sides of the House. I concede straight away that the dominant response among the Opposition, including myself, was relief because we have a keen appreciation of the Chancellor's political skills and, right until the end, we assumed that something dramatic would be pulled out of the hat, which might rescue the fortunes of his party and begin to restore a feel-good factor, even at this relatively late stage.

Our relief was expressed by, "Is that all?" There was certainly a feeling of relief on the Opposition Benches. We have, of course, respect for the Chancellor of the Exchequer as a political animal. We recognise also that he is a moderate man in a party that is becoming increasingly immoderate. The Conservative party is becoming increasingly hostile to Europe. We know that the right hon. and learned Gentleman has great experience and relative wisdom and seeks to avoid the essays in populism that the Home Secretary is wont to take.

I suspect that there was disappointment on the Government Benches. There was probably a feeling of great gloom. Drowning men and women were hoping that a lifebelt would be thrown to them. At the end of the Chancellor's statement, they realised that it would not be forthcoming.

In reality, we were presented with a relatively prudent Budget. Perhaps that was necessarily so. However great the temptation to be reckless, the Chancellor was mightily boxed in by economic realities. He was, for example, boxed in by the less buoyant revenues that he had not anticipated. He was boxed in also because the public sector borrowing requirement was greater than had been forecast and anticipated. His room for manoeuvre was far less than he would have wished at this stage of the political cycle.

It is only fair to say that there were a number of positive elements in the Budget. For example, it was relatively green in that it was to some extent environmentally friendly. Some of the key concerns of the average citizen were at least recognised, if not addressed. I am thinking of the priorities of public expenditure, including education, to which the right hon. Member for Worthing referred. On the basis of, "Now you see it, now you don't," I suspect that much of the so-called increased expenditure on education will evaporate rather rapidly when the figures are examined in detail.

We know that there is a crisis within the national health service. Only about 10 days ago the local newspaper in my constituency, which is not a traditional Labour party supporter, carried a headline to the effect that there is such a crisis. The article set out a series of major failures in health provision. The people know that and they recognise it. We know, of course, that there are some objective factors and increased pressures, which we all face. Many of the problems, however, result from the Government's ideological frolics.

Most Members recognise that law and order comes high on our constituents' agenda. We ignore the issue at our peril. It is suggested that an additional 5,000 police officers will be made available. That increase is only to be welcomed. Training will take some time, however, and there will be no immediate effect. There will be no political effect, apart from the declaratory effect, before the next election. There will be no fifth cavalry appearance out of the sunset to help the Government.

The Budget statement contained the recognition at last that something had to be done about the costs incurred by those who move into long-stay residential homes. Most of our people recognise that there is gross unfairness in the system. The Government's recognition of the problem must be welcomed.

Unfortunately, there were several regressive elements in the Budget. I have in mind the overall impact on the richest 10 per cent. of the population and on the poorest 10 per cent., and the punishing of victims in our society—for example, the swipe at single mothers and the reduction in housing benefit payments for those under 25 years of age. It is clear that the Government are labouring under a misapprehension. It seems that they think that youngsters leave their homes because they want to or because there are bosoms of families to which they can return if housing benefit is reduced.

The reality is that we live in an increasingly fragmented society. Much social distress will be caused by the reduction in housing benefit for the under-25s. I do not make the dramatic claim that we shall see a great expansion of cardboard cities. It is true, however, that young people at a vulnerable age, suffering from a lack of job opportunities, will find it increasingly difficult to find the few jobs that are available if they do not have steady addresses. The Government's action is deplorable. They may try to justify it according to their preconceptions, but their action does not tally with social and economic realities. I hope that they will reflect on the way in which the vulnerable are being penalised.

There are evasions within the Budget. It is clear that council tax will increase. The Government will seek to throw the blame for policy failures on local councils. After the previous round of local elections, councils are under the control of the Labour party or Liberal party, or in some instances there is mixed control that has resulted in Lib-Lab coalitions.

The electorate will not fall for the blame that the Government will throw on councils. The Government may wish to make local councils unpopular by causing them to increase council tax in the next settlement. That is the assumption in Wales, but there is hardly a Conservative councillor left in Wales. A few years ago, Cardiff city council had a Conservative majority. It now has only one Conservative councillor. Swansea has only one Conservative councillor, as has Newport. If, as is assumed, council tax had to be increased by about 11 per cent., it would be easy, with an unsophisticated electorate, to point the finger of blame at the councils. The Government will not succeed in that approach, however hard they try.

The Budget contains wrong priorities. I shall not repeat what I said yesterday about the World Service. It is a unique service. Its capital budget has been reduced by 20 per cent. It is clear that the Government have not appreciated the value of the service. Not too many years ago, I was sitting on a one-to-one basis with the President of a major African country. He told me that he listened to the World Service for his news. He relied on the service for that information. So many opinion formers, people whom we need to address and cultivate, rely on the quality of the service. The Government's cutting of capital provision is bound to have an adverse effect on quality of service at a time of much greater competition.

The Government say that there will be a 20 per cent. reduction in funding, but that that may be compensated by the private finance initiative. They say that the private sector may be able to move in to fill the gap that has been left by the withdrawal of public expenditure. That is no more than a hope. It may happen or it may not. Everything depends on the private sector's response.

That same hope is found in a number of other areas, such as the NHS and the assumption that the private sector will be prepared to make up the shortfall in the public provision of capital for the NHS. That may or may not be so, but it savours of a sleight of hand.

[Mr. Donald Anderson]

The inheritance tax measure is another wrong priority. It may be that the threshold should have gone up marginally, but for it to go up by almost £50,000 is excessive, particularly when something in respect of VAT on fuel would have been a proper priority. Even a reduction from 8 per cent. to 5 per cent., which is permissible, would have relieved poverty, targeting those who most need the reduction.

Sir Terence Higgins: That is the point that I was making. For pensioners and people in need, the amount of compensation in many cases, and perhaps even overall, has more than compensated for the tax.

Mr. Anderson: Of course, there is a compensation scheme for certain elements, but there are those at the margins whom, in other contexts, the right hon. Gentleman and his colleagues would seek to support, who will lose out as a result of the failure to reduce the current 8 per cent. to 5 per cent.

I shall not go over the missed opportunity on the windfall tax. But the way in which the leaders of the privatised utilities, doing largely the same jobs as they did before, imagine that their saleability, their market worth, in the private sector has been so mightily enhanced, must be an embarrassment to the Government. It is an affront to the great mass of reasonable people in Britain, and the Government are, in essence, doing nothing about it.

I end on this note. Historically, the Budget will be seen largely as a non-event. The Conservative party is really two parties. It is a highly divided party. The Government have been drifting ever since they were forced out of the exchange rate mechanism. We recall the bitter speech of the then retiring Chancellor, in which he talked of a Government in office but not in power. The Government have been in office, enjoying the fruits of office and exulting in the trappings of office, since that time, but they are not in power because of those divisions. The resulting drift is bad for the country. We saw that in the Queen's Speech in 1994. Once Post Office privatisation was taken out of the equation we, as legislators, had perhaps the easiest year in my memory in the House.

This Queen's Speech, apart from the scattering of populist elements, such as the asylum Bill, is, relatively, a non-event. I can think of no historical precedent save the staleness of 1819, when Shelley, in his poem about the state of the nation, wrote about

"An old, mad, blind, despised, and dying king".

That is the only precedent for a Government who have run out of steam, who are tired, who have no vision, who are drifting and who should go.

7.2 pm

Sir John Cope (Northavon): It would be nice at this stage of the Budget debate to be able to compare and contrast the proposals of my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer with the Opposition's proposals. Unfortunately, we cannot do that, because there is none, apart from the windfall tax which, as far as I could gather from the speech of the hon. Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson), was somehow a response to executive share options, and so on, in the privatised utilities, which seemed rather surprising.

I welcome the Budget although, like my right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing (Sir T. Higgins), I was rather surprised by the press reaction to it. I read in the paper that Tory Members of Parliament were disappointed and thought that the Chancellor of the Exchequer should have gone further. In many conversations with colleagues around the House since the Budget, I have not found that to be the case. It was a steady Budget and right for the economy, and will help the country to continue the steady expansion that we are enjoying.

I welcome the Budget particularly from the point of view of small businesses. They are, as my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade said, crucial to the country's economy. They are the dynamic sector of the economy, they fill niches all over the marketplace, they are generally very flexible and they are, crucially, where jobs come from these days.

There are some specific measures in the Budget for small businesses, to which my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade referred, which I welcome—for example, additional relief for business rates. The right hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) seemed rather to dismiss that, but it is worth £300 million over three years and so should not be dismissed. There were also retirement relief and inheritance tax measures and another small lift in the VAT threshold.

I would like to see the VAT threshold higher. I am glad to say that when I was in the Treasury the threshold was considerably increased by a large jump. We are inhibited in the amount by which we can increase it further as a result of our agreements in the European Community, but that is desirable.

The most important thing for small businesses is not so much the specific measures, important as they are, but the overall effect of the Budget. Small businesses need an increase in demand, in consumers ready to spend money in order to increase their turnovers. The Budget will help with that to some extent by encouraging growth.

But the Budget also looks as though it will mean lower interest rates. I gather that at least three building societies have lowered their interest rates and more are likely to follow. That too is important.

Crucially for small businesses, my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor also outlined in his Budget speech several measures aimed at simplification and deregulation. They are part of an important series of initiatives to which my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade referred. I know well from my experience in government how difficult simplification of the tax system and deregulation are in practice. But they are of fundamental importance and so worth the great effort that is required.

Every business has to deal not only with the Inland Revenue and Customs and Excise, which we are mainly discussing in the Budget debate, but with a series of different Government and local government departments and agencies. I counted a total of 23 regulatory agencies covering one small ordinary business, not at all in a specialist line.

The Inland Revenue and Customs and Excise are only two of those, although a business often, indeed usually, has to deal with more than one part of, for example, the Inland Revenue. It has to deal with PAYE for its employees, and with corporation tax and the calculation of profits, and so on, which involves another part of the Inland Revenue. In effect, the Inland Revenue is two bodies.

Therefore, one of the most valuable sentences in the Budget speech occurs, appropriately enough, in column 1066. My right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor said:

"The Inland Revenue will shortly be publishing a report on tax simplification."

That was not news; it is under an obligation to do so next month, as we know from the last Finance Act. My right hon. and learned Friend added:

"We shall propose that the Revenue tax code is to be rewritten in plain English".

When I was responsible for Customs and Excise, I am glad to say that it won some plain English awards for some of its leaflets, which was very good. We also started a drive to make VAT more taxpayer friendly—if that is not an impossible task. My right hon. and learned Friend went on to say:

"We in the House will need to look at our procedures, to see how that tax rewrite can be sensibly handled."—[*Official Report*, 28 November 1995; Vol. 267, c. 1066.]

In that sentence I saw a reflection of the work that has been done by the tax law review committee of the Institute for Fiscal Studies, which published an interim report a few days ago. It is a most interesting report and it deserves the closest study. It reinforces strongly the complex web that constitutes our tax legislation now; I admit at once to having contributed to that as a Treasury Minister, with some of the longest Finance Bills that there have been. But I also know how difficult it is for the professions—let alone the small business man trying to understand what is required of him—to deal with the tax legislation. The report makes it clear how difficult the problem is, both in what it says and in the solutions that it proposes, but nevertheless that only increases its importance in my view.

The passage on parliamentary handling of such changes is of interest to us, but particularly to me because I am now on the Procedure Committee. The simplification that is required is partly of language, but it cannot be done without at least some changes to the substance of the legislation itself, and so our consolidation Bill procedures cannot be used as they are now in the Standing Orders of the House. In any case, of course, they were not designed for that purpose and would not really be appropriate. The volume of tax legislation is now so huge that to rewrite it would require a mammoth Finance Bill or, more realistically, a set of them. We need to think carefully about the parliamentary angle and desirable changes in the tax law before we get much further. The IFS report discusses it all and is most valuable, but it is important to keep up the momentum, so I welcome very much column 1066 of the Budget speech.

I wish to discuss another matter that is related in a sense. One way in which my right hon. and learned Friend might have gone—and was urged to go by many people—was down the road of reintroducing investment allowances. There was a lot of prompting for him to do that, from many sources—indeed, I passed on some of it to Treasury Ministers myself—but I believe that it would be a retrograde step and would not help investment. Investment allowances are a political flag to wave, a way to say that something is being done about investment without having a significant effect on investment itself, and with the great drawback of adding further complications to the tax system, which is something that I wish to avoid.

My generation of accountants was brought up on very elaborate capital allowances, which altered almost every year as Chancellors of the Exchequer—of all parties—tried to encourage investment in particular assets. Over the years, we had initial allowances, investment allowances, free depreciation, investment grants and so on, all coming in and out of operation in different years. They varied between different assets: industrial buildings, plant and machinery, motor cars, ships with refrigeration equipment, ships without, all that sort of thing. Drawing offices counted as industrial buildings provided that they were attached to a factory, but not if they were not. Retail premises or showrooms were not allowable as an industrial building unless they were under 10 per cent. of the square footage. The rules always varied, not only from year to year but from place to place, as Chancellors tried to help the areas of high unemployment.

All that caused a great deal of activity for junior accountancy clerks like me, but I do not believe that it made a significant difference to the total investment, although it succeeded in moving the investment around the country in some cases. I believe that it also had some unintended side effects, for example, on the sale of agricultural tractors, which, for some years, was enormous and not really justified. The fact is that businesses invest when they can afford to do so, and in projects that they think worth while. I believe that they are the best judges of whether it is better to invest in a new machine, showroom, both, or something else. Interest rates and the examination of what they will be during the life of the asset or investment concerned have a big effect on whether they can afford it, because a lot of investment is done on borrowed money. In that respect, the Budget is helpful from the investment point of view as well as otherwise.

Expectation of demand is the biggest factor in whether the proposed investment is likely to be worth while. That, too, is helped by the Budget. Both factors mean that it is a good Budget for investment, and it is far better than it would have been if we had gone back to the complicated system of investment allowances, which would have been a big step backwards in the simplification of the tax system that I want to see.

Overall, I think that it is a good Budget, which I very much welcome.

7.15 pm

Mr. Nick Harvey (North Devon): If I said that the Budget was a missed opportunity, I would mean something very different from the many Conservative Members who might share those sentiments, judging by the picture of their faces as the Chancellor sat down at the end of his speech. I noted with interest that two Conservative Members declared surprise at the reactions in the newspapers the next morning, but if they had had the advantage of viewing the body language, faces and expressions of hon. Members on the Government Benches as the Chancellor sat down, and had been able to contrast those with the expressions on the faces of hon. Members on the Opposition Benches, they

[Mr. Nick Harvey]

would have understood only too clearly why the editors the following morning also saw it as a missed opportunity for the Conservative party.

But my meaning is rather different. The right hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett), who spoke for the Opposition, rightly and with great precision outlined the vast sums that have been blown by the Government in recent years. In particular, she catalogued the proceeds of the privatisations and added them to the North sea oil revenues, quoting both at current day prices and pointing out that they had not been used in a prudent way or to invest in the longer term. I find it remarkable that the Conservative party, which has often lectured us about the merits of good housekeeping, has found it fit to squander that money, not on capital expenditure, not on investment for the future, but on an orgy of current expenditure, most notably in the consumer boom of the late 1980s and also to fund tax cuts, which time and again have been reversed afterwards by one means or another.

When one looks at the overall state of the nation's finances, as quoted in the back-up figures to the Budget, one can see that public sector borrowing is vastly higher for the current year and for the next than the level that was quoted just a year ago in the Budget. The Government are borrowing more heavily, not to invest in the future, in capital expenditure, but to pay for the tax cut that they have used as a gimmick, which they had hoped would be of some political benefit and a salvation to them.

Another disappointment of the Budget is that some of the areas of expenditure that have been cut—which, perhaps, have not yet been highlighted to the extent that they deserve, but which will emerge over the coming weeks and months—will in some cases prove very damaging. I should like for a few moments to highlight new house building. It can be seen from the Budget that new house building will be cut in the coming year. The Government originally promised that there would be £1.5 billion for new homes next year. That has now been cut to less than £1.1 billion. So the number of new homes that will be started will drop by more than half—from 76,000 to 41,000. When one looks at what the Government's own figures suggest will be the need for new housing during the coming year, one can see that the total number of lettings that housing associations will be able to undertake—both the new build and the other forms of housing that they are able to make available—will be around only half of what the Government acknowledge could be needed in the coming year.

Of course, as well as the impact on housing provision, it is well known to all hon. Members that the number of people out of work in the construction industry remains alarmingly high. It is down somewhat from the high of 500,000, but is still unacceptably high. All those people have to be paid benefits and are not contributing anything back in the way of tax revenue to the Government. That is costing the nation a great deal at a time when there is a need for new housing.

In my region, the south-west, the number of houses that housing associations can start next year will fall from nearly 7,000, as the Government first promised, to about half that figure—3,500. Not only will unemployed construction workers in mine and the neighbouring constituencies not be given the opportunity to get back to work and do something useful, but many of my constituents who are in need of housing will not have that need met. That is not unique to my area or to north Devon. A survey of Members of Parliament showed that housing was singled out as the biggest issue in Members' postbags. Two thirds of Conservative Members and all Labour Members agreed that there was a shortage of available rented accommodation in their constituencies.

A heaven-sent opportunity to deal with that serious problem is being wasted so that money is available for a tax cut in the Budget. That is very nice for those who are in a position to enjoy it, but it is not of much benefit to those on low incomes who do not even pay tax and are without homes. The Budget could have done something concrete to promote house building and tackle that problem.

Much has been said about the private finance initiative. House building is one of the areas in which it has been deemed to be a success. It has been possible for housing associations to attract private funding to match pound for pound the public moneys that they have been putting into new house building. In addition to the £450 million of public funding that will be lost, a further £450 million of private funding, which could have been attracted through the PFI, will also be lost. That is nothing short of a scandal and it is one of the several stories that will emerge after time and after people have had the opportunity to look at the finer print of the Budget and see some of the real damage that is going to be done in many parts of the economy to pay for the 1p tax cut.

This afternoon, there have been discussions about measures to help businesses and small businesses. There have been some in the Budget and it would be churlish not to acknowledge them. None the less it remains a fact that all those referred to are too modest. It is welcome that employers' national insurance is down from 10.2 per cent. to 10 per cent., but this hardly seems to be the occasion to raise the flags and celebrate. It needs to go a good deal further than that.

Further relief against the increases in business rates for small businesses is welcome, but even after that many small businesses in the south-west and elsewhere will find the rate that they are expected to pay cripplingly high and a major problem as they try to steer their way out of the recession. There can be few regions of the country that have suffered quite as badly on the business rate as the south-west.

The fact that small firms will also face a lower corporation tax bill in the coming year is also welcome. While the small increase in the value added tax threshold is welcome, however, many small businesses are desperate for fundamental reform of the VAT system.

I do not pretend for one moment that a magic wand can be waved to put that right automatically, but some acknowledgement by the Government that much further reform of the system is necessary would be welcome.

The right hon. Member for Worthing (Sir T. Higgins) chose to refer to the moneys which, during his speech on Tuesday, the Chancellor led everyone to believe

would be available for education in the coming year. Education should be a top priority for investment because it is unquestionably investment in the future. If we are to tackle the long-term spiral of decline, there can be no better way of setting about that task than bringing about real improvements in our education system and in the facilities in which those working and learning in the system find themselves trying to cope every day.

On hearing the Chancellor's remarks, I like many others genuinely thought that he was making £878 million of new money available to education, of which £770 million would be channelled through the local authorities. Like everyone else, on studying the finer detail of the Budget, I was surprised to find that the central Government settlement to local authorities for the coming year is to increase by a mere 3.3 per cent., which is broadly in line with inflation, and that the money that was supposedly being earmarked for education does not exist.

Local authorities are invited to spend that additional money on education, but are not given the means to do so. They have to make a choice. They either cut other services that they are responsible for providing, which means that they will have to cut road repairs, libraries and personal social services, which are already strained to the limit as they struggle with the task of implementing the community care programme; or, if they cannot find any way of cutting other services, they will have to raise the council tax to pay for the education package.

It is interesting to find in the Red Book that the Government anticipate as part of this Budget that councils will have to increase council tax by three times the rate of inflation. When councils set their budgets next April and May and find themselves driven to do so, one can confidently anticipate the cries from Conservative Members who receive letters from constituents complaining about the rise. They will say, "Look at this. Liberal Democrat and Labour councils are increasing the council tax." They will not be able to point to any Conservative councils doing it because there is none left.

People must understand that that is what the Conservatives have been anticipating from the word go. The whole thing is an elaborate deception. They have given the impression that the money is there, but it is not.

Mr. Stern: The hon. Gentleman claims, with what justification I am not sure—my hon. Friend the Minister will make that clear in her reply—that it is assumed that the council tax will rise by a rate three times higher than inflation. As a citizen of Bristol, I can tell him that if the council tax were to rise by a mere three times the rate of inflation, it would be a blessed relief to the citizens of that city.

Mr. Harvey: I am not sure whether other citizens of the city would, necessarily agree with the hon. Gentleman's blase attitude. I do not think that council tax payers will find it remotely acceptable that they are asked to pay three times the rate of inflation. When they remember that the Chancellor promised this great sum for education, it will be interesting to be able to tell them that the very Budget that included the supposed provision of that extra money had assumed all along that the increase in council tax would have to be three times the rate of inflation and that only by means of such a rise were the Government able to quote that notional figure in the first place.

If the Government had simply said that they were giving local authorities a settlement for next year of 3.3 per cent., which is broadly in line with inflation, there would have been relatively little argument or cause to demur. Of course, there would have been some proper but predictable complaints about higher pupil numbers, the extra tasks that local authorities were being asked to undertake and the fact that they had not been taken into account in a settlement that was only in line with inflation. But, broadly speaking, everybody would have found such a settlement more or less reasonable.

Apparently, however, the Government could not confine themselves to making such a statement. They had to pretend that a vast extra sum was being made available for education, which is not the case. It was an elaborate piece of deception, but I do not believe that they will succeed in pulling the wool over the eyes of council tax payers.

The Government suffered bad bruising last year in the battle over local authority finance, which resulted in many Conservative councillors losing their seats in last May's local elections. Some of those councillors had given many years' good service to their communities and did not deserve to lose their seats, but they were driven into that situation by the cavalier and cack-handed manner in which central Government administer local authority finance.

Exactly the same will happen next May. I predict with confidence that there will be massive casualties on the Conservative side in the local authority elections. And Conservative councillors will know exactly whom to blame—the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Secretary of State for the Environment. They are the people who pulled that ridiculous scam that will fool nobody, and which will not only have a devastating effect on our education services but will result in catastrophe for the Conservatives next May.

One thing above all else distinguishes our party's position from that of the Government: we have said all along that we believe that the equivalent of 1p in the pound in income tax should be spent on education. That is real money—£2 billion, three times the sum the Government pretend they are making available.

Mr. Spring: Does the Liberal Democratic party propose to ring-fence the much vaunted 1p increase in income tax to ensure that the money is spent on education, or will it simply be paid through the block grant to local government?

Mr. Harvey: It is certainly our intention that that money will be an extra grant on top of the block grant that is paid in the normal way, and that it should be available specifically for spending on education.

Polling evidence has found that that was the single most popular policy of any party at the general election. That is why we shall say again to the public next week that we have been consistent, and that we still believe that the equivalent of 1p in the pound on income tax should be spent on education. We do not believe it right or proper at this time for the Government to borrow yet more heavily in order to give out a 1p tax cut.

[Mr. Harvey]

In the Lobby next week we shall have no hesitation in voting against that wholly irresponsible, uncalled for, unwarranted cut in income tax when there is such a demand and such a need for investment in our future, and for making our children's education a top priority. That would avoid the terrible scenes that we saw last winter as well as the situation this year, when most local authorities have had to start the autumn term with higher pupil numbers but, in many cases, with hundreds fewer teachers.

7.32 pm

Mr. Michael Stern (Bristol, North-West): I start, as so many of my hon. Friends have done, by congratulating my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor and his Treasury colleagues on the prudence of the Budget.

The day before the Budget, there was great concern, largely whipped up by the media, that there would be a huge giveaway. Indeed, it was the Conservative supporters to whom I spoke who said that they hoped that the Budget would be not the sort of Budget that they were reading about in the media, but the sort of prudent Budget that they would expect from my right hon. and learned Friend—and that was what they got. Certainly a Budget that matches the necessary tax cuts with equivalent reductions in public spending cannot be described as other than prudent.

My concerns about the Budget go a little further than those of many of my hon. Friends in that, although I accept that it was the right shape, I wonder whether it was prudent enough. When a nation is borrowing more than £1 billion every fortnight to finance public spending, there is a strong argument for saying that further cuts in public spending should have been found, and that the Chancellor should at least have presented more strongly the case that the cuts that had been found should have gone directly into reducing the public sector borrowing requirement.

It is not so long since the years between 1987 and 1991—four years in which the public sector outturn was £3.5 billion, £14.7 billion, £8 billion and £0.6 billion. Having given those figures, I am afraid that I must admit to cheating a little in one respect—they were not public sector borrowing requirements but repayments of public debt.

In those four years, a Conservative Government succeeded in doing what few if any other Governments have succeeded in doing in the past 100 years—they managed public sector finances so as to repay national debt. That not only reduced the burden on future generations in terms of repayment requirements, but reduced annually the burden of interest on future annual current accounts.

I am therefore a little worried that the Chancellor's announced plans for management of the public sector balances over the next few years tend only towards a balance in the medium term. That worries me not only because I am an accountant, and practised full time as one for many years before I entered the House, but because I know that, for any business to attempt to break even, it must aim firmly at making a profit.

If the Chancellor is attempting to reach break-even on the public sector finances by 2000, I should like more strenuous attempts to be made, by reducing public expenditure further, to achieve public sector debt repayment, which the Government achieved in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

The right public sector borrowing requirement at any particular time is a matter over which economists can argue—and frequently do. It cannot be arrived at simply by comparing one country with another. It is not, perhaps, surprising that our achievement last year in terms of public sector net borrowing as a percentage of GDP was considerably worse than Germany's—I suppose that that is what one would have expected—but it was considerably better than that of Italy. That, too, is probably what one would have expected, but I was a little surprised to find that our performance was quite a bit worse than that of France.

Compared with our non-European Union competitors, the situation is a little more worrying. As a percentage of GDP, the general balance of United Kingdom finances was considerably worse than those of both the United States and Japan. Even that is only a guide, because to work out how much a country should borrow in any year, one must take into account the financial position of that country at that particular time and, as I said during the speech by my right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing (Sir T. Higgins), the asset base against which the borrowing has been made.

In the 1980s, it was frequently said—with considerable justification—that Britain's borrowing capacity, and the reason why Britain's currency was so strong during the height of our borrowing in the 1980s as well as when we were repaying the national debt, was the strength of British assets abroad, against which, effectively, the world's financial markets were judging our borrowing. I wonder whether the same would be true today. While our borrowing is coming down—and will continue to come down in the next few years—it is considerably higher than it was in the 1980s. As the mobility of international privately owned assets has become greater and as more and more of the world's economies have become market economies rather than controlled economies, the skip to and fro of assets has become easier.

I suspect that a banker running his eye over the balance sheet of United Kingdom plc would come to two conclusions. First, there is a great danger of the United Kingdom—to use an accounting phrase—over-trading at current levels in relation to its asset base. Secondly, that asset base might in any case have been significantly eroded in Government terms since the 1980s, when it was last measured.

The effect is considerable worry in two respects. First, the current plan is for the PSBR only to reach a balance. In other words, on the declared plans of my right hon. and learned Friend, not 1p of what we are now borrowing is intended to be repaid in the medium term. It is all there as a burden for future generations. Secondly, we have not abolished the world's economic cycles. We all know that what turned our public sector debt repayment of the late 1980s and early 1990s into the PSBR was the world recession, which forced us to increase public spending on cyclical items such as unemployment benefit and income support. The recession resulted in our previously sound public finances falling into the worrying position in which we now find them.

If one talks to those in the business community—they are currently enjoying reasonable growth and have been doing so for the past couple of years—there is little doubt that the next world recession will come. What frightens me is the growing consensus among economists and business men that, as the world's trading nations have increased, the vulnerability of the world economy has also increased. The economic cycles are also speeding up.

Most of the economists and business men who are being asked to put a date on the visible start of the next world recession are plumping for a date around the turn of the century. That, of course, is the period during which—under the Chancellor's present plans—it is intended that British public sector finances will get closer to balance.

My fear is that, as we approach a worse position in the public sector than we had in the 1980s, we shall enter another recession. That recession will cause us to start increasing public sector borrowing again without having had any opportunity to repay what we have borrowed. Inevitably that will have an impact not only on the vulnerability of the British economy to future world cycles, but on the debt burden and interest burden that we are leaving to subsequent generations. In the long run, it will have an impact on the expected life styles and standards of living of the generations for whom we are now providing in our management of the public sector.

The conclusion that I have reached reluctantly—which I have been considering for some time—is that, in our broad pattern of public sector spending, we have in many areas developed champagne tastes on what remains a beer income. In the next few years, we need to start putting before the public the possibility that a number of what appear to be permanent public spending programmes might need to be looked at again.

A banker looking at the British balance sheet—but not taking into account other factors such as social acceptability—would probably advise a reduction in expenditure of about £30 billion on permanent programmes over the lifetime of this business cycle. That is a far larger reduction than has been contemplated either in this Budget or in alternative budgets such as those put forward by the Conservative 2000 Foundation.

Such a measure would involve reducing many programmes which people regard as foundations of the welfare state. It would involve, for example, looking seriously at whether we can continue to pay child benefit above income support levels. It would involve looking seriously—as I believe the Government should—at the range of exemptions from prescription charges and at the level of those charges. It could be possible both to lower the level and to increase the exemptions while saving a considerable sum in public spending. It might even involve—to howls of protest—looking at whether a non-funded basic state retirement pension should be paid to those on upper incomes.

Such a measure would involve looking at the scope of the NHS to see whether it is capable of taking on the demands that are currently made of it, and the demands that will inevitably be made of it in the future in the light of shifting scientific research, the availability of medical treatments and the demands that people inevitably make once they know that such treatments are available. This and many more areas are not currently being looked at.

There is an absence of any realistic alternative from any other party in the House because—let us face it—there is no point in discussing public expenditure reductions with the Opposition because they do not even understand the meaning of the term. I believe that the British nation will, in the next few years, look to the House and the Government to consider matters of this nature. It is not sufficient simply to solve the financial problems of today by pushing them on to future generations.

Clearly it will be necessary to look at this Budget in the context of my right hon. and learned Friend's next Budget which he will deliver, in my view, in November 1996. I believe that it will be necessary to consider what scope there is in the long term for public expenditure reductions, because only if we can begin to educate the British public about the need for public expenditure reductions of the order that I have outlined will we be able to set up for the future a sound public sector financial system that does not leave unacceptable burdens for future generations.

7.48 pm

Mr. Paddy Tipping (Sherwood): I am very pleased to follow the hon. Member for Bristol, North-West (Mr. Stern), and I was struck by his simile "champagne tastes on a beer budget". I hope that he will forgive me if I say to the House that I think a more correct simile from him would have been "caviar on a fish and chip income". The hon. Gentleman will recall the occasion to which I am referring.

My hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson) touched earlier upon one aspect of the Budget that has not been given much attention—the environmental sensitivity, or greenness, of the Budget. I am struck by the Budget proposal to take the income from the landfill tax while reducing national insurance. It is a switch from a tax on labour to a tax on pollution, which is a significant move. I look forward to future Budgets, perhaps introduced by a different Government, that will treat that move as a touchstone because we could do more of this.

The Budget maintains the difference between leaded and unleaded petrol, which is an input tax. I am more interested in output taxes. I am confident that, with increasing technology, we shall soon be able to measure the pollution from vehicles. I want the pollution from vehicles to be taxed as an alternative.

VAT on fuel has been discussed tonight. Hon. Members will remember that, in the discussions and arguments on that subject in the House over recent months, one justification for VAT on fuel was that it drove down consumption and thus helped save the planet. But it does not because VAT on fuel takes no recognisance of the fact that electricity comes from different sources. We should consider that fact as another future Budget measure. I find it amazing that at Drax and Radcliffe power stations, for example, flue gas desulphurisation equipment has been fitted. The cost at Drax was £700 million. The consequence of generating electricity at those retro-fitted plants is that the cost of electricity is slightly higher. Moreover, the added costs at those stations reduce the stations' competitiveness in the pool to such an extent that, at certain times of the year, dirtier polluting stations come on line before them. That

[Mr. Paddy Tipping]

is clearly crazy. A Budget measure that we should strive for in the future is to give a green premium—a credit—for green electricity.

These are challenging and difficult arguments and I look forward to working on them and making environmental taxation a way of enhancing the environment and, as my children would say, saving the planet.

The Budget contained other environmental issues. We have been constantly challenged to say where the Opposition would make savings. Let me give one example. I note that the countryside stewardship scheme, which is designed to protect wildlife and enhance the countryside, is to be transferred to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on 1 April next year. That budget will increase next year by £5 million.

I am a strong supporter of countryside stewardship as it lifts the landscape and protects the countryside, but I am unhappy about one aspect of it: the payment to landowners for allowing public access, which is part of the scheme. I have done some research on this and I acknowledge the work that the Ramblers Association has done. It found that 44 per cent. of the sites that receive public access money already have access or a footpath running through them, so we are paying landowners for something that we already have. Those access payments amount to £6 million over 10 years. The issue should be looked at because we are not receiving value for money from the access element of countryside stewardship.

An example of where more money could be saved is the common agricultural policy. I was disturbed to see that the Budget increases our contribution to the CAP next year by £60 million. Families pay around an additional £20 a week because of CAP contributions, so we should look carefully at that budget head. We should look particularly carefully at the arable areas scheme, which pays grants to farmers for producing certain products, principally cereals. In the last year for which figures are available—1994—English farmers received £1.2 billion. As part of that, they received £189 million for set-aside—effectively doing nothing. Nobody likes set-aside. On pursuing the matter, I found that in 1994 more than 2,000 farmers received payments of more than £75,000 under the arable areas scheme. It is disturbing that such large sums of public money have been paid. We should scrutinise and perhaps cap the amount that individual farmers can receive from the scheme.

I was even more disturbed to find that, in 1994, a small group of farmers received more than £1 million each under the arable areas scheme. I am disturbed that the Government, for reasons of confidentiality, will not say how many farmers received more than £1 million. Nor will they give the top payment made in 1994 under the arable areas scheme. That is big public money, to which poor families in my constituency contribute in terms of higher food costs. They have a right to know who receives that money and how much is received. I invite members of the Treasury Bench to look at the matter.

We should have some return for such payments. We have a right to tell landowners that we want a return for the money that they receive for set aside. We want them to lift the landscape and enhance the environment by creating wildlife habitats, working on hedgerows, planting more trees, creating ponds or putting back the walls that are in disrepair all over the country. If farmers are to receive that kind of money, we have a right to expect a return—a green premium.

I shall now deal with some more familiar themes of the Budget, which other hon. Members have discussed, such as the need to create prosperity and jobs, and reduce unemployment. That is what people in north Nottinghamshire want. They pay for it and they know that they have experienced tax increases. They have had broken promises: there have been 21 tax increases, and a typical family now pays £800 more. Income tax may have gone down by 1p in the pound, but the average family is still £670 worse off under this Budget. People expect and deserve some return.

The Nottinghamshire coalfield has had a tough time and Nottingham miners feel that the Government have betrayed them. I remind the House that, in 1979, 40,000 miners worked in the coal industry in Nottinghamshire whereas today, only some 3,000 work in it. Unemployment is therefore a real problem. In October 1992, the then President of the Board of Trade announced that he would close most of this country's coal industry and unemployment went up in coalfield areas. In small pockets, against the national trend, unemployment is still increasing. In general terms, unemployment is going down.

Since October 1992, unemployment nationally has gone down by 17 per cent. In the Mansfield travel-to-work area, which covers a great deal of the Nottinghamshire coalfield, unemployment has gone down by only 7.1 per cent. That highlights the increasing gap between the affluent and the poor. Certainly that is how it is perceived in the Nottinghamshire coalfield.

I think that people in Nottinghamshire would look askance—in fact, I know it—at the Budget proposal to raise the inheritance tax threshold to £200,000. They know that they could buy a pit house in a place such as Bilsthorpe or Boughton in north Nottinghamshire for £11,000. For those people, £200,000 is beyond the moon. It rings hollow. They are also astonished that the budget for social housing has been cut—and cut severely. The Red Book makes it clear that £500 million has been taken away from housing associations and local authorities this year on top of cuts in the previous two years. For people who live in former National Coal Board houses that now belong to housing associations, there is no prospect of getting a renovation grant through moneys from the Housing Corporation because that was blocked at the time of sale. People live in intolerable circumstances. There is no prospect now of those houses being improved.

To talk about people being allowed to leave £200,000 rings hollow when we consider people who live in a pit house in Bilsthorpe. It rings hollow because the Nottinghamshire coalfield, and coalfield communities across the country, are crying out for investment in education, training, infrastructure and, most of all, in the future.

The Budget cuts investment and capital spending. The people of Nottinghamshire want to see the road to recovery—the road that we want to see is a link between the M1 and the A1 across north Nottinghamshire and, as part of it, the Rainworth bypass.

I am pleased that the Secretary of State for Transport is on the Front Bench. I have noted the cuts that have been made in the trunk road programme. It will not be

long before local transport capital expenditure is announced—before Christmas, I believe. We want that road for recovery. We want the Rainworth bypass; it will open up development land in the area and it has the potential to bring new jobs into the area. Nottinghamshire county council has bid for £10 million over the next two years for that. I hope that that bid will be considered not only in terms of traffic and highways but as a bid for a road that can regenerate part of the Nottinghamshire coalfield.

I hope that the Secretary of State for Transport will come again to the Robin Hood line—he was there recently. The county council is in active discussions about the funding shortfall of phase 2 of the line. There is a gap of £4 million. I hope that some compromise can be reached. About £1 million of that £4 million gap results directly from rail privatisation and the increased charges that Railtrack has made.

We want to go forward and extend the line right through the coalfield to Worksop and Retford. Phase 3 is covered in the council's bid and I hope that it will be considered. I hope that the railway transport element of the Department of Transport's budget will be protected, as it has been so far, and that local authorities will get their fair share, especially in the case of the Robin Hood line.

I also want fair shares for English Partnerships, a body set up to help bring regeneration to the coalfields. I note with some alarm that its budget is being cut. We need to clear up derelict sites. There are pit tips and derelict land all over north Nottinghamshire. We need derelict land grant to bring that land back to life. We need to attract factory units, create new businesses and provide homes for new businesses. I am extremely worried that with the cuts in grant aid to English Partnerships all that will be put at risk.

I also note that the training and enterprise councils are to have their budgets cut by 5 per cent., on top of the drop in coalfield money that came to TECs covering the coalfields. Most of all, people in coalfield communities need skilling and reskilling. They need to be competitive in a changing world and investment in training could be a lifeline for them.

I note, too, that the money available to colleges of further education is to be cut. Such colleges are expected to take more students but at a lower cost. I am disturbed about what is happening at some colleges of further education, not only in Nottinghamshire but across the country. The standards of teaching, of courses and of qualifications are dropping. I suggest that some of these CFEs will drop soon. Some are technically bankrupt. It will not be long before the first CFE goes into receivership. That path will be progressed and enhanced by the Budget cuts in their funding.

The windfall tax has received a good deal of criticism. I was surprised on Monday, the day before the Budget when Severn Trent Water, our local private water company, announced increased profits of 75 per cent. or £160 million. I note, too, that all it did for its customers was offer them a £4 cash-back per year. That does not seem to be a great benefit from privatisation. I would have no hesitation in examining the profits and dividends of companies such as Severn Trent and East Midlands Electricity, looking at what they have put back into their capital plans and making a judgment about a windfall tax. Young people are our future. I believe strongly that we ought to offer young people quality routes to training. Money from a windfall tax should be applied in that way.

I note, too, that the civil service is going to be cut by 12 per cent. I was staggered this week to find that European money that could come to Nottinghamshire coalfield communities is being held up because there are not enough civil servants in the Government office for the east midlands to process the application. We paid that money into Europe and we want it back. The stumbling block appears to be a lack of civil servants locally, in the office in Nottingham, to deal with those claims. It is even more astonishing that the local office should have written to local authorities asking for staff to be lent to the Government office to process the claims. Frankly, it is an insult to people in Nottinghamshire.

It is disturbing that no effort has been made in the Budget to get the construction industry going. I remember the private finance initiative being described as additional to Government capital spending. All that now seems to have gone out of the window. I suspect that it will not be long before national lottery money is used in the same way, as a substitute for Government money.

Local authorities have also faced cuts. I have looked carefully at the settlement announced today. Is it not the case that next year local authorities will receive £6.3 billion for capital projects? That is a cut of £700 million—or 10 per cent.—on this year's sum of £7 billion.

I should draw attention to the problem of crumbling schools in Nottinghamshire. Some of the money that has been cut could be used to renovate and refurbish them. There are £85 million-worth of repairs outstanding in Nottinghamshire's schools. In the Chancellor's own constituency of Rushcliffe, there is £6.7 million-worth of work outstanding. I draw attention to Rushcliffe comprehensive school, which has £1.5 million of outstanding repairs, and to Brookside primary school in East Leake, where £105,000-worth of repairs are outstanding.

I know that the governors of those schools, as well as the teachers and parents, would be delighted to see the Chancellor there. They would argue with him about the consequences of the capital cuts to local authorities. I believe that the cuts are shortsighted. We should be investing in capital projects to create jobs and to put down seedcorn for the future.

I deal briefly with the local government finance settlement that was announced today. I am delighted that the Chancellor gave an exclusive interview yesterday to our local paper, the *Nottingham Evening Post*. He told it that there was a "Cash bonanza for Notts". I think that the Chancellor may play it differently at home from down here in London. Back in Nottinghamshire he has been giving the impression that there is loads of money, boys. The reality, however, is quite different.

If one looks at the financial settlement and focuses especially on education, it is apparent that, this year, local education authorities are spending £797 million more than their standard spending assessment, which is the Government's yardstick. Next year, the pledge of extra money—4.5 per cent. growth in education spending—will bring in £770 million. That promised and lauded extra money does not fill this year's gap.

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The people of Nottinghamshire know those figures only too well. They know that the current year's settlement was tight, as the Secretary of State said. In Nottinghamshire's schools, there are 350 fewer teachers now than there were before the summer holidays. That leads to larger class sizes. In north Nottinghamshire, three out of four primary schools have classes of more than 30 pupils, and I believe that there is worse to come. Despite the settlement and the promised cash bonanza from the Chancellor, I do not think that the gap is going to be cut.

In the current year, Nottinghamshire county council is spending £25.5 million, or 7.5 per cent., more on education than the Government yardstick. At best, the settlement announced today brings an extra £15 million into Nottinghamshire schools. That still leaves a budget gap of £10 million.

I anticipate that there will be further cuts in the number of teachers this year, possibly in the region of 300. I find it very hard to understand that, while the number of teachers is being cut and class sizes are getting larger, we, the council tax payers of Nottinghamshire, are being asked to pay more. I think that 300 teachers' posts may go and class sizes will get larger. For that privilege, I anticipate that the increase in our council tax next year will be about double the rate of inflation. We shall pay more and get less in Nottinghamshire.

I do not think that the Chancellor can hurt the people of Nottinghamshire any more. He should listen to the people he meets and respond to those who have written to him. I expect that he has had 25,000 letters about local authority cuts from his constituents. They want better and I want better.

In the future, I want a Budget that is green and clean. I want a Budget that enhances the environment and lifts the landscape. I want a Budget that puts investment for prosperity at its core—investment in education, training and infrastructure and—most important—a Budget that invests in the future of Nottinghamshire children.

8.16 pm

Mr. James Cran (Beverley): I thoroughly enjoyed the speech made by my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade. Unlike the relatively few contributions of Opposition Members, it was factual. The speech made by the right hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett), who led for the Opposition, did not contain one fact. Of course, she attacked us—I do not complain about that—but it would have been novel to hear just a little about what the Opposition propose to do to make up for what they consider that we have not done.

The right hon. Member for Derby, South also had a rattling good cheek in suggesting that the Government had arranged for so many statements to be made today to reduce the time for debate on the Budget. The irony was that, at that moment, there were hardly any faces to be seen on the Opposition Benches. Had the Government done as she suggested—of course, I do not believe for a minute that they did—then one would have to say, "Thank goodness" because we would have had precious few contributions from Opposition Members.

I was interested to hear what the Liberal Democrat spokesman had to say. He said that, on Budget day, he and his colleagues noticed how glum we—the Conservative Members—were looking. That is odd, because we were looking at them and thinking how glum they were. I think that they realised that there might be a great deal more in the Budget than they were able to take in on the day.

Mr. Spring: Does my hon. Friend recall that the Liberal Democrats looked most glum after the speech made by the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown)?

Mr. Cran: My hon. Friend makes a telling intervention.

I support the Budget. As I look back at various Budgets, but without mentioning one in particular, I would have to admit that I found it less easy to say that I supported some of them, but I certainly support this one. Like many of my colleagues, I have been astonished by the publicity surrounding the Budget, which implies that Conservative Members are opposed to it. That is not the case. If I achieve nothing else, I should like to say that I and many of my colleagues support the Budget. Opposition Members may be worried that it is a two-stage exercise. The Chancellor would not say that—he would say that it is merely the latest Budget, and I understand that. However, I expect it to be a two-stage exercise and I am afraid that Opposition Members will have to wait for another Budget in November 1996. The smiles on the faces of Opposition Members may be fewer then than they appear to be now.

My first reason for being enthusiastic about the Budget is that it is fiscally sound. It introduces tax cuts, but there are also cuts in expenditure. I might have wanted rather more in the way of tax cuts than were introduced and I might have wanted a few more cuts in public expenditure, but that is a matter of judgment. Whatever else might be said, there is no doubt that the Budget has impressed the marketplace. That fact was not taken into account by any of the contributions that I have heard from Opposition Members.

I like the fact that there are no gimmicks in the Budget. What is a gimmick? We can all look up the word in the dictionary, but one gimmick that we kept on hearing about from Opposition spokesmen was kick-starting the housing market. I am delighted that the Chancellor did no such thing. There are low interest rates and price discounting in the housing market, which is enough to get the market moving eventually. I invite all Opposition Members to come up to Beverley, where the housing market is beginning to move. I have the impression that that is happening in other parts of the country—therefore, there is no need for gimmicks.

I am also delighted that the Government have resumed the tax-cutting propensity—that is what Conservative Governments are rightly concerned about in the medium and long term. I am delighted at that resumption because I have always believed, and I expect I always will, that the state—even under prudent Conservative Governments—has spent too much of other people's money. That was brought home to me by the social security budget which, I well remember, stood at £37 billion when I was first elected to Parliament in 1987 and next year will be about £94 billion or £95 billion. Conservative Governments have done much to add to that total, which is why I am supportive of the present Government's efforts to examine critically what the state spends and what the individual spends. I would like that debate to be encouraged among not only

Conservative Members, but Opposition Members. I do not think, however, that it is taking place among Opposition Members.

I like the Budget for another reason which was never mentioned by Opposition spokesmen—it encourages business, industry and the City. Undoubtedly, the reaction to the Budget from business generally has been better than the right hon. Member for Derby, South was prepared to admit. She merely took the tepid view of the Confederation of British Industry—an organisation that I admire less and less, even though I was once employed by it. One has to look less at what the CBI says and more at what individual business men say, which gives a different picture. Business men have given the Budget a much more enthusiastic response and if I have time I shall tell the House what one or two business men have said.

Finally, I am enthusiastic about the Budget because it encourages savers. I am not only a Scotsman but an Aberdonian and we are famous for our capacity to save money, which I do. I am delighted that the Government are now giving the community another impetus to save because the savings ratio of late has not been nearly good enough, although it is improving. Many within the community will wake up to the fact that there have been reductions in tax for those of us who save money in building societies, banks or wherever. Moreover, I note that even my hon. Friends are forecasting cuts in the interest rate. Of course, the business community wants interest rate cuts, but we must remember that what benefits industry does not benefit the saver. I shall, however, leave the Treasury team to deal with that conundrum.

Direct taxation is thankfully resuming its downward trend. The Labour party—not particularly tonight, but on radio, television and in the newspapers—states that it is now the low-tax party. My constituents in Beverley should treat that statement with extreme caution. My neighbour, the deputy leader of the Labour party, the right hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott), said that such promises as the Labour party would make—we do not have the details—would be for one year only. The electors of Beverley and elsewhere had better remember that.

In addition, Opposition Members in private also tell me, "Well, you will see what happens when the boot is on the other foot." We all know what that means: the Opposition will enjoy the ability to take more money out of people's pockets. I warn the taxpayers of this country to look out. The Labour party would introduce more bands for direct tax because that would take out more money from other people's pockets. The upper rate band would undoubtedly be increased to between 50 and 60 per cent., if not more.

The other issue that I never hear mentioned by Opposition Members, except in private, is that of unearned income. I do not have any unearned income; I have had to earn all my capital—a distinction not made by the Opposition. Under a Labour Government, unearned income will undoubtedly be plundered because they will need the cash.

I am pleased about what the Government have done in relation to inheritance tax. I was delighted last June to hear my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister make a commitment to the Conservative party that inheritance tax should be progressively abolished. It is a monstrous tax. I caution Opposition Members to look at how many people in the community have to pay inheritance tax. In some cases, tax has been paid throughout the lifetime of the capital and the Treasury and the Government take the final cut on one's deathbed. That is simply monstrous and I am delighted to hear what my Government intend to do. I welcome the increase of the exempt amount to £200,000 and I look forward to the abolition of the tax.

I have mentioned reducing tax on savings. Clearly, many people have not cottoned on to the fact that they will retain more of the interest than they receive on their accounts. I applaud that measure.

I was pleased that the Budget contained very few references to VAT which, as we know, is an unpopular tax. It is not as bad when it is levied on luxuries—although I never know what a luxury is these days—but it is a different matter when it is levied on essentials. It is, however, far too easy to raise VAT. It encourages spenders in Government. We must have one or two spenders on the Conservative Benches—although not too many—but there are certainly a great many on the Opposition Benches.

I warn the community again. A tax that is too easy to raise encourages spending in Government Departments. I say to my Conservative colleagues that we must be careful and recognise the public resistance to that tax. I am resistant to VAT. I have always bought new cars until now, but I have no intention of doing so in the future, as I am not prepared to pay the valued added tax on a new car. I may even reach the stage of buying second-hand suits, if I have to, to avoid that tax. However, I am idiosyncratic on that subject and I expect that the House will bear with me.

On long-term care, I am delighted that my Government have recognised what were undoubtedly the beginnings of a minor scandal, which occurred as a result of the developments in community care. I am pleased that the first step has been taken. I do not regard the first step as being especially generous, but it is a move in the right direction. I look forward to quick initiatives that will come out of my Government to ensure that we do not have the position that exists in my constituency—the same can be said of others—where people find it necessary to sell houses to pay for the fees for long-term care that they receive alongside some people who did not save, although some people were simply unfortunate and could not save. I fail to understand why I, and many of my constituents, should forgo consumption to pay for that care whereas others do not.

I finish with one or two comments about what the Budget has done for industry. Having been associated with the Confederation of British Industry, I know that industry is the boiler house of wealth creation. Industry and business create wealth. They create the cake and we divide it. Therefore what we should do, which is better done by a Conservative Government, is ensure that we encourage industry, but not with hand-outs. Too often, the Opposition say that industry needs help in the form of a hand-out. Industry wants no such thing. It wants what the present and the preceding Government have done—which is to provide a deregulated background in which it can operate. Usually, business men ask Governments to keep out of their hair. I believe that Conservative Governments have done that, in the case of inflation, and I congratulate my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor on the fact that he continues to bear down on that evil.

[Mr. Cran]

I well remember all the industrialists I used to speak to in the period 1975-79, who repeatedly mentioned the fact that the inflation rate was increasing. It reached about 26 per cent.

Mr. Spring: Twenty-seven per cent.

Mr. Cran: I am corrected, and I am happy to be so. What did that do for the competitiveness of British industry and individual companies? It completely destroyed the former, and it destroyed the prospects of many good companies. Therefore, the Chancellor is absolutely correct to bear down on inflation.

The Chancellor was equally correct not to impose a windfall tax. In that regard, I do not understand why the Opposition do not understand why a windfall tax would not be beneficial to the British economy. It would be beneficial to the extent that a Labour Government would use the proceeds in some way for one year, but what signal does that send out to inward investing companies? I venture to suggest that they would be less interested in coming to the United Kingdom than has heretofore been the case, when I believe—I am open to being corrected—that more than half the inward investment of the European Union has come to the United Kingdom. I am also delighted to notice what my Government have done on uniform business rates.

I have referred to the tepid—it is tepid—judgment of the CBI. I can therefore throw that away. However, I read in the *Financial Times* that the chief executive of Asda Group, Mr. Archie Norman, said:

"We are delighted. It is a bullseye."

That was not mentioned by the right hon. Member for Derby, South, was it? Sir David Simpson, chairman of British Petroleum, said:

"It is good to see that the Government intends to continue reducing its spend as a proportion of GDP and that it has reaffirmed its aim to balance the Budget"—

and so on. He is obviously delighted.

Sir John Banham, a former director-general of the CBI, and chairman of Tarmac, says:

"The Chancellor is on the right track and the measures he has put in place provide the best prospects for the UK building industry."

The right hon. Lady should have balanced her remarks by telling us about that.

What does the City say?

"He's taken the prudent path"

says the head of bond research from Yamaichi international bank. I could go on, but I know that other hon. Members wish to speak. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] I shall therefore bring my remarks to a close—reluctantly, because I should like to say an awful lot more on that subject. However, I hope that my colleagues will allow me to ask one question. After 16 years of Conservative Governments, one would suppose that the United Kingdom was in tatters. Why, therefore, is it the case that the City of London—I just happened to pick up a document at random the other day—appears to go from strength to strength? It should not be so, if the Opposition's comments are justified.

What do I read?

"London is the world's largest international insurance market"—

not the second or third, but the largest—

"with net premium income of £9.9 billion . . . There are over 540 foreign banks in London".

Would they come if the UK was as the Opposition portray it to be? Of course they would not. Moreover,

"The London foreign exchange market is the largest in the world, with a daily turnover of $464 billion—more than the turnover of New York and Tokyo combined."

I know that other hon. Members wish to speak, but they will, I know, allow me to say that London is the world's second largest fund management centre, after Tokyo, with more than $750 billion of institutional equity holdings.

I might go on and on, but I cannot. By public demand—I should say by popular demand of my colleagues—I shall sit down. I simply finish by saying, it is a rattling and a damned good Budget. It has the whole-hearted support of Conservative Members and I fear that the Opposition will live to regret what they said before the Budget. If I remember rightly, they said that it would be a giveaway and would be recognised by the British people as such. It was no such thing; and just wait for the next one.

8.37 pm

Mr. Michael Clapham (Barnsley, West and Penistone): I am pleased to follow the hon. Member for Beverley (Mr. Cran) and I shall discuss some of his arguments later.

I very much enjoyed the contribution of my right hon. Friend the Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) and the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood (Mr. Tipping), who spoke about several issues, and suggested ways in which the green tax might be developed.

In my estimation, the Budget has hit the most vulnerable people the hardest, to achieve a 1p reduction in income tax. It has hit the unemployed, single parents, the under-25s on housing benefit and disabled people on long-term hospital stays—all to achieve a reduction in income tax of only 1p.

The Budget has once again widened social divisions. I wonder where the Prime Minister's stated objective of achieving a classless society has gone. It certainly was not referred to in the Budget.

There is little cheer for little England in the Budget, because the typical family will pay £670 more per year in tax. They certainly will not be cracking open the champagne in Barnsley. My constituency, which comes into Barnsley, has a great deal of unemployment. Calculated on a narrow basis over the travel-to-work area, unemployment in Barnsley is 18.1 per cent. of males. There are pockets in some mining villages where unemployment is much greater. It is as high as 40 per cent. in some mining villages.

The Chancellor talked of an enterprising Budget that would motivate entrepreneurs and the unemployed alike. That theme was echoed by the Secretary of State today, but I do not expect the Budget to make the economy more robust.

One factor overlooked by the Secretary of State when he spoke of the advantages that deregulation was bringing is its potential to act as a drag on the economy. That is particularly true following the abolition of the wages councils. A study carried out recently by the Low Pay Network showed that Barnsley had been severely affected

by that: for instance, 79 per cent. of relevant vacancies advertised in the town's jobcentre offered lower rates of pay than could have been advertised before the abolition of the councils.

The position is similar in a number of northern towns. According to a summary of the survey's findings, 69.2 per cent. of jobs advertised in Rotherham's jobcentre could not have been advertised at the same pay rates if wages councils had been in existence. In Walsall the figure was 66.1 per cent., and it was 60.7 per cent. in Halifax and Wigan. It is clear that a minimum wage should be introduced.

Opposition Members have long advocated such a move. If we are to lift people out of poverty, it is essential to give a greater stimulus to those who are looking for work. A minimum wage would also stimulate industry. It would do two things that Conservative Members never mention when they talk about the minimum wage. First, it would lead to innovative action by employers: that would boost the capital goods market, which in turn would require skilled labour. It would have a ripple effect throughout the economy. Secondly, it would free more labour for education and better training. In my view, a skills shortage is a significant barrier to competition. The availability of higher-level skills would, for example, enable manufacturing industry to use more capital-intensive processes. Taken together, those moves would nudge the United Kingdom's economy towards the higher-value end of the market—and that is where the United Kingdom must be if it is to survive in a ferociously competitive world market.

Low pay has proved to be a drag on the economy in the mining industry, for example. In 1913, before the first world war, we reached the zenith of mining production with 1,197,000 miners, but in Britain only about 13 per cent. of coal was cut by machine. In Germany, almost a third of coal was cut by that process. By the end of the war, two thirds of coal in America was cut by machine; in this country, we had hardly advanced since 1913. That was because of the availability of a glut of cheap labour. It took nationalisation after 1945 to bring technology into the mining industry. Cheap labour can hold back innovation.

Training and education—along with investment, of course—are major ingredients of prosperity, but the Government do not take that too seriously. Since 1979, the United Kingdom has slipped from 13th to 18th position in the world prosperity league table. If that statistic shows anything, it shows the Government's abject failure. It shows that we have not been directing enough money into investment, and that in that way we have allowed many of our industries to lag behind those of our competitors.

It is because education and training are so important that the Chancellor should have introduced a windfall tax. I know that the hon. Member for Beverley is opposed to that, but I believe that, since the privatisation of the utilities, local monopolies in electricity and water have made billions of pounds on the backs of their customers. As my hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood pointed out, Severn Trent admitted yesterday that its profits were up by 75 per cent. on last year. Even Yorkshire Water, whose pipe network is leaking at least a third of water supplies every day, announced that its profits were up by 50 per cent. The Secretary of State said that investment in the water industry was increasing, but over a five-year period it has fallen by £282 million. That is an enormous loss of investment as a result of privatisation.

The Chancellor should have seized the opportunity to use the excessive profits of the utilities to invest in education and training. That would have given young people a chance to acquire the skills that would help them to secure jobs. Is there any better way in which to use those excess profits than to invest them in the nation's future?

No doubt the Chancellor will have had his eye on the proceeds that are likely to result from the sale of the nuclear generating industry next summer. That, too, is a privatisation too far. It is estimated that the price will be about £2.6 billion, which is less than the cost of building the Sizewell pressurised water reactor. The Chancellor talked of competitiveness and competition, but the sale of the nuclear industry will further neither objective. Energy prices are one of the elements that increase competitiveness, but since the privatisation of the electricity industry—contrary to what the Secretary of State told us—the cost to large users has not fallen. In fact, the cost to large users in the United Kingdom is much higher than that in most of our European competitors. It is far in excess of the cost in France, for example.

The creation of the two new nuclear companies will not help competitiveness. Magco will take on the Magnox stations, and will go over to British Nuclear Fuels Ltd., and British Energy will own the five advanced gas-cooled reactors and the pressurised water reactor. Between them, they will supply between 25 per cent. and 29 per cent. of the United Kingdom's electricity needs. As all that is base-load electricity, there is bound to be a stream of revenue following privatisation. After the privatisation of the nuclear generating industry, it is more likely to diversify into gas. Once the gas stations are on stream they will not compete with nuclear capacity, whose base-load electricity is bid into the pool at zero. So the new gas capacity will compete with other gas stations or with coal. It is therefore likely that the coal stations will be pushed off the grid.

Privatising the nuclear industry is folly. It will not help to diversify our fuel mix, and it will not improve our competitiveness. Indeed, prices in the energy market may rise thereafter.

It is accepted even by Conservatives that we invest much less than do our competitors. Japan invests twice as much as we do; America invests £863 per person more; and Switzerland a massive £2,766 more. Conservative Members like to talk about 1979. In 1979, Portugal invested £177 per head less than did the United Kingdom. Now it invests £312 more than we do.

Furthermore, the Budget, besides not increasing investment as required, did not sufficiently encourage investment in the areas that need it. The Government had the opportunity to create an arms diversification agency to harness expertise and capital from the armaments industry as it adapts to civil production. But Conservative Members seem to find that idea anathema.

What is more, this country needs more research and development. We have cut back dramatically our investment in clean coal technology, an area in which we once led the world. The danger is that the same could happen to the nuclear industry after privatisation.

[Mr. Michael Clapham]

Research and development are the seedcorn for the future, and the Chancellor should have provided much more encouragement for them—but chose not to.

Research and development need to be focused on civil, not military production. That would allow spin-offs from civil R and D to the military, instead of the other way round. Germany and Japan have shown what can be achieved when research and development are focused on civil production, with spin-offs for military production.

Overall, the Budget did nothing for unemployment. The Government have put taxes up by 7p and lowered them by 1p, still leaving the typical family paying £670 more in tax. The Chancellor has failed to come up with a Budget for investment, to increase prosperity and to ensure the UK's competitiveness in world markets.

8.53 pm

Mr. Richard Spring (Bury St. Edmunds): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for giving me the chance to say a few words.

I agree with my right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing (Sir T. Higgins) that a Budget that is cheered to the rafters often looks less appetising six months on. The headline in *The Sun* confirmed for me that this Budget will be the opposite sort, in which my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor has introduced some sensible tax cuts, targeting key spending areas and producing a number of important innovations.

Bryan Gould, who has now left us for New Zealand, used to talk about the Labour party's lack of any sort of macro-economic policy in the key areas of interest rates, exchange rates, taxation and monetary policy. He said that Labour had no such policies. It was thoroughly disappointing again this evening to hear the speech of the right hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett), which contained no policies, ideas or opinions: just criticisms. Her performance served to show the vacuum in Labour party policy.

My right hon. and learned Friend sought to deal with many challenges in his Budget. I should like to examine two of them, the first of which is not essentially a party political issue. Ours is an aging population. An ever smaller percentage of the population works to support an ever larger element in retirement. There is no escaping that fact. The implications for fiscal policy and for public borrowing are critical. I am pleased that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security is paring back the increases in the billowing social security budget from 3 per cent. to 1 per cent. a year.

It has become something of a cliché to talk about global markets and communications, but the fact is that Governments' ability to control events outside their borders, if markets do not like the policies that they are pursuing, is strictly limited. We live in a time of open markets and of ferocious attacks on currencies. As an older, mature economy, it is our duty to ensure that we run a low-inflation, low-tax economy if we are to compete with the emerging economies in the far east and elsewhere. We have no option in the matter if we are to face up to the changing demographic balance in this country and in other industrialised nations.

In this respect I welcome the announcements affecting the problem of long-term health care for the elderly. Many elderly people have been very worried about the thresholds, which have now been raised from £3,000 to £10,000 and from £8,000 to £16,000. That represents a serious move on the part of the Government, who, like Governments in all industrialised countries, have had to face up to the problem and to lay the foundations for long-term care provision. That involves creating the right sort of fiscal programme.

The Government and the Chancellor have sought successfully to encourage savings, with the introduction of PEPs and TESSAs and the extraordinary increase in the number of personal pension arrangements that help people sensibly to plan for major demographic change—in this country and across the industrialised world. In that respect this Budget marks a watershed.

Investment is crucial to our survival in this competitive world. There has been a huge improvement in manufacturing productivity and in inward investment to the UK from outside Europe. That has enabled us to compete well by attracting scarce capital. It is creating jobs, new technologies and industries that are extremely beneficial.

Since the end of the second world war, every time there has been economic recovery, we have had a sterling or balance of payments crisis. So many of the nationalised industries that were damp hands on the economy in the 1970s are now leading our export effort and showing the rest of British industry the way forward by creating employment, producing taxes and helping to ensure that our export performance is excellent by the standards of the past 30 or 40 years. It is interesting to see the transformation that has taken place in that respect.

To achieve our aim of being the enterprise centre of Europe, we have to continue to cut tax as a percentage of GDP. I am pleased that Government expenditure as a percentage of GDP is projected to fall to 40 per cent. in 1997-98 and to 38 per cent. two years later. Let us aim for 35 per cent.—the levels that apply in Japan and the United States. If we continue to reduce that percentage, we shall bequeath a vibrant and dynamic environment in which business will prosper.

I very much welcome the private finance initiative, which will address the enormous pressures on the social and transport infrastructure of Britain and all other mature industrialised countries.

I welcome the further expansion of the 20p tax band, which means that 200,000 lower-paid people will be taken out of taxation altogether and one quarter of all taxpayers will now pay only 20p. I applaud the fact that my right hon. and learned Friend set a clear marker to a 20p tax rate. There are no gimmicks; we are on our way to achieve that.

Those policies have produced quite exceptional results in Britain. Unlike the other industrialised countries in Europe where unemployment is growing, in Britain it has fallen by 700,000 in the past three years. In my own constituency, the unemployment rate is now 4.3 per cent, having dropped by 8.4 per cent. in one year and 35 per cent. in three years. That success is reflected in the lives and aspirations of my constituents and I look with pleasure at the effect of Government policy in the part of west Suffolk that I represent.

I should tell my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary that I personally welcome the vehicle tax exemption on 25-year-old cars. I have a 1973 Rover 3.5 litre coupé. The car looks forward to being two or three years older and escaping that taxation.

I thank my right hon. and learned Friend and the other Treasury Ministers for addressing the problem of general betting duty. I have the great pleasure of representing the world's headquarters of racing in Newmarket. The national lottery has had a serious impact on prize money in the racing industry. The cut of 1 per cent. in general betting duty will stimulate the employment gains that are already developing in the industry as a result of the VAT registration concessions given in the Budget three years ago. On behalf of my constituents, as the racing industry is the largest employer in my constituency, I thank the Treasury team for that important concession which will be highly valued in even further reducing the already low rate of unemployment in Bury St. Edmunds.

Finally, my right hon. and learned Friend has produced a coherent, sensible and restrained Budget. In 12 months' time it will be possible further to extend tax cuts to produce a lower rate of inflation in a growing economy. The Budget is a watershed as we have turned the corner from a recessionary era into a period of sustained growth and low inflation. I welcome it and congratulate my right hon. and learned Friend on presenting it so well.

9.3 pm

Mr. David Congdon (Croydon, North-East): It is a pleasure to be able to take up the remarks of my hon. Friend the Member for Bury St. Edmunds (Mr. Spring), who serves with me as a member of the Select Committee on Health. I echo his comments about the growth of the elderly population and the proposals in the Budget, which I welcome, that are designed as a first stage to deal with the difficult problem of providing long-term care for the elderly.

I warmly welcome the Budget as a whole. I think that my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer got it right. Some difficult decisions had to be taken, especially given the state of public finances.

The key to economic success is the achievement of sustainable growth. There is no doubt that in 1994-95 and beyond we have and will achieve that growth. One of the judgments of the Budget is whether we shall continue to achieve sustainable growth. I believe that we shall do so, and I think that most economists would share that judgment.

What do businesses ask of the Government in managing the economy? The answer is that they want stability. They do not want the old days of stop-go, when they boosted their production only to find that it had to come to a halt as the economy went into recession as a result of overheating. Businesses want stability. They want stable inflation, stable growth and stable interest rates so that they can plan sensibly. The Budget is prudent in its judgment on public finances because tax cuts are balanced by reductions in public spending. Surely that is the way in which to proceed.

It is important that tax cuts put money back into the pockets of the public. The cuts will have a significant impact on consumer expenditure. Despite the comments of Opposition Members, the public know better than the Government how to spend their money.

There is a danger that Budgets can be over-hyped. We heard so much nonsense before the Budget about the level of tax cuts that would be achieved. As I have said, my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor got it right with cuts of £3.25 billion, which were balanced by cuts in public spending. More important, does the Budget pave the way for reductions in interest rates, which would be much appreciated by businesses and mortgagees throughout the country? I believe that it does, and I urge my right hon. and learned Friend, in his meetings with Eddie George, to adhere to the tough line that he has adopted and go for interest rate cuts.

It is my view that the Governor of the Bank of England has been wrong about interest rates over the past year. The issue is crucial to understanding why my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor had limited room for manoeuvre this year. I spoke in the Budget debate last year, when none of us knew what growth rate would be achieved in 1994. We now know that we achieved a growth rate of 3.9 per cent. There was concern about whether the economy would overheat and whether inflation would get out of control. We have seen some increases in interest rates. If my right hon. and learned Friend had followed the Governor's lead, we would have higher interest rates.

What have we seen? In the Red Book, growth for 1995 was predicted to be 3.25 per cent. That was only a forecast. In the summer forecast it was scaled down to 3 per cent. It is now forecast to be 2.75 per cent. We know that in the third quarter it was down to 2.1 per cent. In other words, interest rate cuts have had an effect, along with the slow-down in the world economy, on the growth rate of our economy.

What has been the effect of that slow-down? Tax revenue has been reduced significantly. I understand the exact reasons for the reduction in tax revenues. It is a problem that affects other countries. We know for certain, however, that a slow-down in growth will have an impact on tax revenues. We know also that £7.5 billion is an enormous sum. The Government have had to face difficulties with the public sector borrowing requirement, but we have been extremely successful in keeping spending under control. That is a key achievement.

What better position would we have been in if tax revenues had held up? My right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor might have been able to introduce further tax cuts. My message and plea to the Treasury Bench is that we should not be too cautious over the next 12 months. Let us see growth in the real economy. There is little sign of inflation taking off. Wage increases, for about the first time in our history, are below the rate of inflation. That is extremely good news.

At the same time, the slow-down in wage increases has had an effect on growth. In other words, there are some difficult balances. We must ensure that we achieve at least the levels of growth that are predicted in the Red Book. I would hate to have to say next year that we achieved not 3 per cent. but 2.5 per cent. I do not accept the argument that the underlying trend rate of the economy, which some say is 2.75 per cent., while others claim that it is 2.5 per cent., is fixed in stone for ever and a day. It depends on the improvements in productivity that industry is achieving, and there is no doubt that in recent years industry has become much more productive and successful. That should be borne in mind.

[Mr. David Congdon]

The debate has been fascinating. We hear a lot about new Labour and how the party has changed its ways, but listening tonight, particularly to the hon. Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone (Mr. Clapham), I thought that I must be in a time warp. The hon. Gentleman had some quaint ideas about a minimum wage encouraging investment in capital equipment. It might well do. That is not quaint. But it would have a disastrous effect on unemployment.

We also had a revelation that I have heard on previous occasions, again from the hon. Gentleman but also from other hon. Members, about Government directing investment. What a disaster it would be for Britain if the Government were to decide where investment should go. Government would never get it right when it came to deciding in which industries to invest. The only people who can judge where to invest are those in the businesses themselves.

We hear a lot about underinvestment. Investment is up, but the Opposition concentrate on public sector investment, as if that constituted the greater part of investment. I looked in the Red Book earlier to see whether my understanding of investment was correct. In broad terms, investment in Britain is running at about £100 billion a year. Of that, only about 20 per cent. is public investment. The vast bulk of investment is decided by businesses and industries throughout the land. They invest only when there is a stable macro-economic framework and they can see a demand for their product. That is why the Government are so right to have the sound economic policies that they have.

Listening to Opposition Members on public expenditure, I sometimes wonder whether they are being honest with the electorate. Earlier this afternoon we were told that we had squandered our oil revenues and privatisation receipts. But what have they been "squandered" on? They have been spent on essential public services. Since 1979, an extra 70 per cent. has been spent on the health service. Spending on education is up 50 per cent. per pupil. There has been a £70 billion increase in real terms in public expenditure since 1979. I do not recall hearing Labour Members say that we should not put more money into health or education. Therefore, it is dishonest of them to try to pretend that that money has been squandered.

To return to the specifics on public spending in the Budget, I applaud strongly the fact that my right hon. and learned Friend has found room for extra spending on essential services. I am particularly pleased to see the £1.3 billion extra—1.6 per cent.—for health, as well as the £878 million for education. Surely those are the right sort of priorities to have. We should cut out waste and inefficiency and spend money on essential services.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor has the Budget strategy right. It is a prudent Budget. I urge my right hon. and learned Friend to keep an eye on the ball of interest rates in order to ensure that we have the growth that the economy needs in the coming year. We must aim to ensure that we achieve at least the 3 per cent. set out in the Budget statement so that we are on target for the sustainable growth that the country wants and demands.

9.12 pm

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): When my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor sat down on Tuesday, we all heard a somewhat strangled cry of, "Is that all?" It came in jeering tones from the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) and in anguished tones from the Press Gallery. The gentlemen of the press had already written their headlines and articles. Those headlines read, "Panic-stricken Tories wreck Government finances and shatter recovery". They went on to long articles about scorched earth and things of that sort, assuming that the Conservatives would throw in the sponge and give up on the Government.

That just proves that the gentlemen of the press do not understand the Conservative party. Not only do we intend to win, but we want to carry out our patriotic duty and, in so doing, we will regain the support of the public because they will respond with the respect that has led us to victory after victory at the polls.

The appropriate headline for the Budget is, "Boring but responsible". It is clearly tackling the deficit. It is continuing the tight control on inflation. It is tightening up the control on borrowing. Indeed, it is creating the conditions for the interest rate reductions that we want to see. I am frustrated that we have not yet seen them, and that, of course, is because we handed over the decision to the Governor of the Bank of England. I ask my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor to give Eddie George his marching orders and get those interest rates down, because they will accelerate growth and will cut unemployment. Indeed, in my constituency, unemployment is already down to the level of April 1991 and is continuing to drop steadily.

A drop in interest rates would also bring about a recovery in the property market. It would be good for business and for home owners, but not quite so for savers, and that was one of the more significant aspects of the Budget. It did not escape our notice that my right hon. and learned Friend created a 20 per cent. tax band on savings, which would offset the effect on savers of the reduction in interest rates that the economy, home owners and the public wish to see.

The Budget is good for education, good for health and good for the police. This afternoon, we heard that there was an extra 4 per cent. for schools in my constituency. But those very services sowed the seeds of our current conditions, because we have just been through the worst recession since the 1930s, and any financially responsible Government would have responded to a drop in revenue by cutting their expenditure. Yet the Conservative Government continued to increase expenditure on health to the extent that today it is up 70 per cent. in real terms on the figure left behind by the previous Labour Government. We continued the increase in spending on education, which is now up by 50 per cent. We protected the pensioners.

Contrast that with the Labour Government who preceded us. Let us remember the Labour Government in the recession of 1976, when they slashed the hospital building programme. They cut the pay of nurses. They cut the pensioners' Christmas bonus. But even that did not work and they carried the begging bowl of this proud country to the International Monetary Fund to queue up behind the sub-Saharan countries for a loan. We did not have to do that. Why? Because the Conservative Government have a reputation for sound finance. The

trouble is that one does not keep that reputation if one continues to borrow heavily. That is precisely why, during the past three very difficult years, we had to borrow and, above all, taxes had to be increased.

Mr. Harvey: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Arnold: No I will not, because I am short of time and the hon. Gentleman has just walked in.

I shall press on by saying that we have now got through the difficult period. We are now in the great period of getting off the backs of the taxpayers. It is interesting to note where we have done that. We have got off the backs of the less well-off. We have the 1 per cent. cut in the basic rate. The personal allowance is up by £240 and we have the extension of the 20 per cent. band, all of which will help the less well-off into jobs and help them and their families to greater prosperity.

I would argue that that it is not enough. But where are we to make the cuts? We have seen thoughtful proposals from my right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood), with his proposals for £5 billion of cuts, which should be handed back to the public.

The Budget is intellectually honest, but what is not, however, is the approach of the Labour party, particularly the speech of the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) the shadow Chancellor. He was jeering over tax. Would he cut tax more? If so, what would he cut to finance it? He would not answer. His comments about the poor taxpayer of Britain are just like the devil worried about sin. What a nerve. In the debate on Wednesday, he was asked question after question. He did not answer. I asked him how he would finance the cost of his 10 per cent. rate. No answer. My hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, South (Mr. Hawkins) asked him what would be the impact of the social chapter and a statutory minimum wage. No answer. My hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith) then went on to ask him about the 20 per cent. band extension at a cost of £800 million and asked whether the hon. Gentleman would support it. He did not answer then, any more than we will get an answer yes or no from the official Opposition to the Budget.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wyre Forest (Mr. Coombs) then asked the shadow Chancellor what target he had for inflation, referring to the 27 per cent. inflation that the last Labour Government achieved. Again, no answer. This is the person who would run our economy in 18 months' time, if one believed him and some of the pundits.

One of the most interesting parts of the Budget was the private finance initiative. It is thoroughly new and a great departure. Let us remember that this reforming Government progressively introduced local financial management to schools, which progressed to grant-maintained schools, which are very effective in delivering the goods. In the national health service, the Government introduced fundholding practices and NHS trusts, which again are delivering the goods. I find it a matter for great optimism that we Conservatives are still coming up with the new projects.

On the private finance initiative, I will cite the example of the NHS in my constituency. We have been waiting year after year for our brand new general hospital at Darenth park at a cost of £100 million. We have not got it. Why? Because the Chancellor of the Exchequer cannot sign a cheque for £100 million. The Treasury keeps saying, "How about sticking the hospital on a ropey old site?" We combine the ropey old facilities with the phased development of our hospital. Now that the project has been put out to the PFI, what does the private sector opt to do? It says, "We would build it all in one go, on the better site at Darenth park and we can do it on the following financial conditions." The PFI is a major departure and will get the massive new capital projects that we need in the NHS and elsewhere.

I strongly support the Budget. It is a step on the road. At the next Budget, when we have much more scope for tax cuts, let us make it a Budget for the family.

9.20 pm

Mr. Mike O'Brien (North Warwickshire): This has been a good debate—there have been some interesting contributions from both sides of the House—and I welcome the opportunity in this, my first speech from the Opposition Front Bench, to welcome it.

I should declare an interest. I have been the parliamentary adviser to the Police Federation for the past two years. I shall cease to have that role at the end of the month, but it is right that hon. Members should be aware of it.

Perhaps I might begin on a positive note. I have always taken the view that it is not in the interests of an Opposition to criticise and oppose. We should also support and encourage a Government, where that is possible. Mere party political posturing does nothing to enhance the public's view of politicians. I want to make it clear that the Labour party welcomes aspects of this Budget.

The raising of the benefit threshold for pensioners in long-term care is a positive move. The previous levels were low and the increases from £3,000 to £8,000 and £8,000 to £16,000 respectively will spare some pensioners a bill for long-term care, especially since the Government had frozen the thresholds since 1988, thereby making the problem worse.

Nevertheless, £16,000 will not prevent the sale of the matrimonial home. Long-term care is a serious issue with enormous implications, as the hon. Members for Bury St. Edmunds (Mr. Spring) and for Croydon, North-East (Mr. Congdon) said. It is difficult for any Chancellor easily to resolve that issue, but the Government have taken a step forward. I suspect that there will be many further debates on the issue before we get it entirely right.

The Labour party also welcomes the proposals to help and clarify the position on share ownership. We too believe that employees should be encouraged to take a share in their firm. We shall consider with care the proposals that the Chancellor details in the Finance Bill and, if we can, we shall be supportive.

The call for a simpler and more coherent tax regime is also welcome. Indeed, it is something for which Labour has called for a long time. I seem to remember that, in the Standing Committee debate on the Finance Bill last year, our votes, with those of the hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith), pushed through a resolution. Although we must ensure that the detail of the legislation is simplified, we must also ensure that we do not create new loopholes. Nevertheless, the wording of tax law tends

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to be incoherent to the ordinary person at times and it is good to see a real attempt being made to come to grips with the issue.

I was amused by the confession of the right hon. Member for Northavon (Sir J. Cope) that he contributed so much towards the great detail of our tax laws, although I am not sure how advisable it was to confess it to the many small business men in his constituency who no doubt have had great trouble working out their tax bill. I bet that he will get the accountants' vote.

My Scottish colleagues have campaigned long and hard to bring the duty on whisky down, and the 4 per cent. cut in whisky duty will be helpful. The issues of cross-border sales—bootlegging—are complex, as the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee agreed in its recent report. What the Chancellor has done is not a solution to the problem but merely an interim measure and the Treasury must now explore all the options. I hope that the Minister will be able to set out how the Government seek to achieve some of the aims and conclusions identified in the Select Committee's report.

The right hon. Member for Worthing (Sir T. Higgins), as befitted a former and much respected Chairman of the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee, gave a balanced speech. He supported the Budget but conceded that it had not been well received, especially in the press, and hoped that it would be better appreciated in the months to come. He may live in hope—but it will be in vain, I suspect. The right hon. Gentleman was right to draw attention to the slowing of the economy and to say that unemployment had not fallen as much as the Government had hoped. I shall return to the subject of unemployment later.

My hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood (Mr. Tipping) made a valuable contribution. He expressed his concerns about some spending and questioned several spending programmes, especially the countryside stewardship programme and the arable areas scheme for set-aside. He raised the disturbing issue of the Government's refusal to answer questions about the number of farmers who receive more than £1 million, and about what was the highest sum received. I hope that the Economic Secretary to the Treasury will be able to reassure my hon. Friend on those subjects. If she cannot do so today, perhaps after she has had the opportunity to read his speech she will make inquiries about the matters that he raised and deal with them in correspondence.

My hon. Friend also made a strong plea for help in his constituency to deal with transport issues. I was pleased to see that a Minister from the Department of Transport took the trouble to listen to him, so I hope that the Secretary of State for Transport will do something about those problems.

It was interesting that the hon. Member for Beverley (Mr. Cran) described the Confederation of British Industry's response to the Budget as tepid and somewhat dismissive. That is not what the President of the Board of Trade said earlier. I wonder whether the Government are divided not only on Europe, but on the size of the tax cut and on their attitude to the CBI.

My hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone (Mr. Clapham), in a strong speech, described the low wages that were on offer in his constituency as a result of the abolition of the wages councils. He said that the Government had promised much in the way of extra jobs, but that the jobs had not come.

The hon. Member for North Devon (Mr. Harvey) raised a number of issues. He called the Budget a missed opportunity, said that unemployment in the construction industry was especially high, and called for something to be done about that. He also pointed out that the increases in council tax would probably be three times the rate of inflation.

The hon. Member for Bristol, North-West (Mr. Stern) made a learned contribution, and as he is an accountant he used his considerable knowledge of balance sheets. He warned that the Government had champagne tastes but a beer income and called for more stringent cuts than those delivered in the Budget. In defence of the Chancellor, let me say that I fear that the hon. Member for Bristol, North-West sounded like the quiet cold voice of the man from a warm office who makes decisions about people's lives without balancing logic and calculation with the need for humanity.

I shall now consider the Budget as a whole. It was a give with one hand and take with the other, something and nothing, a 7p up, 1p down Budget, and it left the typical British family £670 worse off than when the Tories were returned to office in 1992. It followed news that Britain had fallen from 13th to 18th place in the league of international prosperity since 1979. After the Budget, Britain is 18th and still falling.

The Budget did nothing to tackle unemployment, to deal with job insecurity, or to heal the wounds of a divided society. It did nothing to tackle the fundamental problems of the British economy, such as the failure over 16 years to encourage long-term investment. It did nothing to provide incentives for the people in the one in five non-pensioner households with no wage earner to move from welfare to work.

My hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood also made a strong plea for Britain's young people, one in six of whom are out of work. They are Thatcher's children, and too many of them have been left disillusioned, impoverished and without prospects. What are we here for if not for them? Our young people want jobs, hope and opportunity. They want to make a contribution, but the Chancellor's message to them is that he is restricting the amount of housing benefit for single young people. His hope is poverty, his opportunity is the dole queue and his reward will be the further conviction that the Government do not care for younger people and, perhaps, their future alienation from the political process.

The Chancellor complained that housing benefit should not induce young people to leave their families before they need to. Did it not occur to him that what young people want is jobs, skills and training? If he enabled them to have those things, they would be able to support themselves sooner and would not need to look to their parents or the state to provide financial support.

It is because our young people are important to the nation that Labour made its key spending pledge a new deal for Britain's under-25s. We are not prepared to see a generation of young people abandoned. Already in our inner cities—in Glasgow, Merseyside and inner London—one in three young people are without a job. In London, six out of 10 young black men are jobless. Some

280,000 young people have been unemployed for more than six months while 200,000 young people have never had a job.

Labour proposes to give young people jobs, not schemes. We offer each young person a number of options: an employment option, with a job and a real wage; a voluntary sector option; an option to contribute to our environmental task force; and a full-time education option if the young person lacks basic educational qualifications. To pay for that programme, Labour would impose a windfall tax on the excess profits of the monopoly utilities.

We have seen the size of the profits that those companies are declaring. On Tuesday, Severn Trent admitted that its profits were up by 75 per cent. last year. Yesterday, Yorkshire Water—the company responsible for a third of the country's unplanned and unwarned interruptions in water supplies in the past two years—announced that its profits were up by 50 per cent.

Contrary to what the President of the Board of Trade said at the start of the debate, soaring profits have not encouraged the increased investment needed by those privatised utilities. In the five years since privatisation, capital investment in the water industry has fallen by a total of £282 million. In the same period, profits in the water industry have risen by some £755 million. When it was privatised, the water industry received a £6.5 billion hand-out from the taxpayer in debt write-offs and green dowries. While profits have risen, investment has fallen and, on average, the bills of customers have gone up by 40 per cent. in real terms since privatisation.

Higher water bills are just one example of how families are worse off under the Tories—higher bills, higher charges, higher taxes. That is why a windfall tax would make a contribution to putting Britain's young people back to work. Such a policy would help to reduce benefit bills in the long term and restore hope to our young people.

This Budget was never about Britain or its people, young or otherwise. It was about the Tory party and its divisions. The Chancellor is a one-nation Tory presiding over the fag end of a Government who used to believe in Thatcherite economic policies. As my hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson) said in a good and balanced speech, the Chancellor knows that the public services are overstretched. I do not doubt that he would like to do something about that, but he knows that he must deliver cuts in the basic rate for the right wing of the Tory party, which worries that the Thatcher legacy is going down the tubes.

Trying to balance the two, the right hon. and learned Gentleman ended up with a package with no overall strategic direction on the economy and no sense of vision for society. It was an attempt to shore up the dissipating Tory vote by scattering alternatively small token tax cuts and shifts in thresholds. Conservative Back Benchers hoped that the Chancellor would buy them votes with tax cuts, but even they know that the vote of the British people is not for sale any more.

I must confess that I have a sneaking regard for the Chancellor. I recall attending this place as a student in the early 1970s and watching the right hon. and learned Gentleman cross swords in an education debate with—if I remember rightly—Shirley Williams, and he appeared very able then. When I was elected to this place, the right hon. and learned Gentleman was Home Secretary. I was put on the Home Affairs Select Committee and I had an opportunity to see him in action. When he became Chancellor, it so happened that I was moved to the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee. I always thought that the Chancellor was an able performer, and I told my colleagues in the shadow Treasury team that he would come up with something creative, new, innovative or bold, but he disappointed me—almost as much as he disappointed many Tory Back Benchers.

The story of the Budget was told on the glum faces of Tory Back Benchers who filed out at the end of the Chancellor's speech. They had been led to expect flair and imagination; instead, they got a weary, dead-end, dead-beat, dead-loss Budget.

The hon. Member for Beverley sits there with a grin on his face. He denies that Tory faces were so glum at the end of the Budget statement. I recall their looking glum, but I bet those who did not realise that they had every reason to be glum did so when they read the *Daily Mail* and *The Sun* the next day.

The economic recovery is so precarious that the Chancellor had little room for manoeuvre. He ended up with a combination of 1p off income tax while putting £9.5 billion on borrowing next year. What price this Chancellor as a sound money man now? The public sector borrowing requirement forecast for 1995-96 has been revised upwards from £23.5 billion in the Treasury summer forecast and from £21.5 billion in the last Budget. It is now £6.5 billion higher than expected in 1995-96, at £25 billion. It will be £9.5 billion higher than expected in 1996-97 and £10 billion higher than expected in 1997-98. That is because the economy is in a mess. Throughout the past 16 years, the Conservatives have neglected investment, squandered the proceeds of North sea oil and, in a display of boom-and-bust economics, put us into the two worst recessions since the war. That in turn has damaged industry's ability to respond to recovery.

The Budget forecast for investment growth in 1995 is now just 1 per cent. The recovery, such as we had, is now precarious and in danger. It was based on an export-led drive, fuelled by a 20 per cent. devaluation of the pound following our ignominious withdrawal from the exchange rate mechanism. But there is a limit to how long we can run the economy on devaluing our currency. This Budget has not dealt with some of the long-term problems of the British economy. It has simply put off resolving them until after the next election, when Labour will be there to deal with them.

It is the ordinary families of Britain whom the Government have really let down: the workers on the assembly line or in the office. For them, right-wing economics have too often meant little or no wage increases in the name of competitiveness, job insecurity to make labour flexible, and the fraying of the safety net. Middle and lower-income people spend more hours working and less time with their children, and they bring home an income that is inadequate to meet housing and other costs. In 1992, many of them voted Tory on promises of lower taxes and opportunities to get on in life. They now feel that the Government have failed them and betrayed their values. For them, Tory promises of opportunity have often meant increased opportunity to lose their jobs.

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The failure to reduce unemployment since 1979 has left people paying for big welfare bills of £20 billion, the equivalent of £20 a week for each family. People have seen tax breaks for the very wealthy go unchecked. Their experience of the services that they use, such as schools and hospitals, is of increased commercialisation and financial restraint. They see the immorality of a Government who stand by while a tiny elite prosper and our economic base erodes. They question the fairness of sacrifices made by middle-income families, who must pay higher taxes while, at a time of high dividends, some corporations have paid little tax by taking advantage of tax loopholes that the Government have failed to plug.

The damage done to British families determines Labour's stand on the reduction by 1p of the basic rate of income tax. We cannot vote for it because it does not tackle the fundamental problems of the British economy: lack of investment and lack of jobs. It does nothing to create an incentive to move from welfare to work for the one in five non-pensioner households that have no wage earner. We shall not vote against it because the Tories have damaged British taxpayers enough. They have imposed the biggest tax hike this century—in the year after the 1992 election—beating even Geoffrey Howe's 1981 Budget when personal allowances were not indexed.

Even now, the overall tax burden will be 36.5 per cent. next year, up from 34.75 per cent. in 1992. That is more than when Labour left office. It is forecast to rise each year until the end of the century, reaching 37.5 per cent. by 2000. That is the Tory burden of failure paid by the British people. Labour will not vote to make it worse. Poorly aimed as it is in economic terms, the 1p off the 7p at least gives small relief from the Tory tax rises and broken promises of the past few years.

The Chancellor hoped that his Budget would give the Government the chance to start to build up momentum for the general election. In that judgment he was unsound. He has no clear view of where he is going. He has not addressed the fundamental problems of the economy and he presented no solution to them. The Government are still playing at the game of trying to extend the policies of the 1980s, the me decade, into the latter half of the 1990s. No matter that a crude free market policy and trickle-down economics, which were supposed to lift all the boats, have instead lifted only the yachts and damaged the harbour.

Labour rejects all such economics. We want to move from the me decade policies and make the 1990s the we decade, where the whole country moves forward together. Unless the many prosper, none will really benefit. It is for that reason that the electorate will not be conned by the Tory promises in the Budget or at the next general election. The Government have got it wrong too many times. They have got it wrong this time, too and the electorate know it. That is why, when the time comes to make a decision, they will reject the Government.

9.40 pm

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Mrs. Angela Knight): First, I congratulate all those hon. Members who are still here late on Thursday night when Parliament is not sitting tomorrow. We certainly had some interesting contributions in the debate, some considerably more factual than others. I thank my hon. Friends for their factual contributions.

The Government's overall economic objective is to promote sustained economic growth and higher living standards. This Budget concentrates on securing Britain's healthy, lasting recovery. It reduces unemployment, continues to reduce borrowing, lets people keep more of the money that they earn and spends money on the things that are important to them. It looks particularly to the education of the young, the job prospects of the working population and security and safety in old age. It continues to offer the best prospect that British people have faced for decades, which is to enjoy the benefits of growth. It is a Budget of substance.

My right hon. Friends the Members for Worthing (Sir T. Higgins) and for Northavon (Sir J. Cope) and my hon. Friend the Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold) expressed concern about some of the headlines in the newspapers the day after the Budget. They should not worry about that. Headline writers will always have a field day. They have had one with this Budget, but a headline in the newspaper is like a soundbite from the Leader of the Opposition; it lasts 10 seconds, but for content we have to look elsewhere.

The debate was opened by the right hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett), with what I felt was a snippy little speech. She went through her normal arguments against privatisation. She argued against the £90 electricity rebate that customers will get. She forgot to tell people that when those industries were nationalised, they cost the taxpayers £50 million a week; now, they contribute £55 million a week into the public purse. She forgot to say that when British Steel was nationalised, it was one of the biggest loss makers of all time; now, in private hands, it is profitable and a world leader. She even gave us a harangue against North sea oil. She did not mention the fact that Rolls-Royce in Derby has won a contract for over £1 billion for engines.

The speech of the right hon. Member for Derby, South, I submit, in no way represented the views of industry. Let us look at some of the views of industry. Mr. Archie Norman of Asda said:

"We are delighted. It is a bullseye."

One of the major construction companies said:

"The Chancellor is on the right track and the measures he has put in place provide the best prospects for the UK building industry."

An assistant in a clothing and footwear shop said:

"The Chancellor has listened to the small people . . . it's brilliant news."

The chairman of ICI said:

"I welcome the direction of the Chancellor's policy in reducing public spending and cutting taxes in a fiscally responsible way."

That is what industry said of this Budget. It has given the Budget a very big thumbs-up.

We heard criticism in the Chamber tonight of the private finance initiative. However, Labour seems to have little knowledge of the PFI and does not know what to think about it. The hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Darling) said:

"Labour believes that the initiative has to be given fresh impetus",

but the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) said that the PFI is

"a raft for a sort of ramp for privatising".

The Leader of the Opposition says:

"We would get public and private finance working together in transport, in housing, in health and education",

but the right hon. Member for Derby, South says:

"Market testing represents creeping privatisation. As does the Private Finance Initiative."

Labour is one party with two faces and two voices, and it is facing in different directions at the same time. Before Labour Members say one word more about the private finance initiative, I suggest that they go and look it up, find out what it is and see the projects that have been signed up.

The hon. Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson) made a thoughtful speech. One of his concerns was that council taxes would go up. There was something extraordinary about his argument, because he seemed to forget that he and so many members of his party are in favour of no capping at all on local government. His party's proposal would simply result in people paying far more than they do now for local services.

I enjoyed the speech of my right hon. Friend the Member for Northavon. He is an experienced accountant and we all found very interesting the convolutions that he highlighted. I look forward to his contributions to the report on tax simplification, which I am sure will serve the Government and other accountants well.

The hon. Member for North Devon (Mr. Harvey) made a number of points, and I should like to pick up on two of them. He expressed concern about social housing. I assure him, however, that housing continues to benefit from substantial public capital investment. We are planning to spend more than £1 billion a year through the Housing Corporation and on housing association properties and, indeed, through the private finance initiative, which will bring new opportunities to housing and the construction industry as a whole. The Government have a target of a further 1.5 million home owners in the next 10 years. I hope that he is satisfied by those comments.

The hon. Gentleman's second point related to education. Education is the cornerstone of much of the Budget, and spending on schools is a top priority. The additional cash will be channelled through local authorities. My colleagues and I expect the local authorities to pass the money into the schools.

Having spent some years in local government, I am well aware of the complexity of the formulae that many local authorities use and of how they use that complexity to frighten parents. Many parents have been greatly worried about their schools' budgets. Many local authorities talk about cuts, but to give an example, it works like this: the reality is that it is a cut in a wish list. Thus, Madam Deputy Speaker, if you, for example, wanted a salary increase of £500 and received only £250, you would have a pay increase of £250. A local authority, however, would say that it had a £250 cut. That is the fallacy of the local authorities' argument. That is why their language is so wrong and why parents get so upset. It is why every hon. Member must get all the parents to ask their local authorities how they propose to spend the extra money for schools on their children.

I know that the hon. Member for North Devon at least has a policy. His party has a policy for a 1p increase in taxation for education. However, we have looked at his shadow Budget, which contains about £6 billion of extra expenditure. That is apparently going to be paid for by tax changes—they are not called tax increases—of £1.1 billion. Another item is tax reform to the tune of £900 million. In his shadow Budget, the hon. Gentleman has £6 billion of extra spending, which is to be financed by £2 billion from extra taxes, all brought about by a 1p increase in the basic rate. It is as confusing a mess as I have described it. We therefore have to take what he had to say with a great pinch of salt.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, North-West (Mr. Stern) spoke about the PSBR and made a number of detailed and complex points. Would he care to come and talk them over with me at a later date rather than in the Chamber tonight? I understand only too well his concerns about the need to reduce the borrowing requirement, and I agree that we should pull it back as fast as possible. He should not compare us too harshly with many of our European competitors, as we are the only country that has dealt with the pension problem properly. The finances of Germany and France show that if they do nothing about their pension schemes, their national debts will be about doubled. He should not have too many fears, as we are taking the right and prudent steps.

I apologise to the hon. Member for Sherwood (Mr. Tipping)—I nearly called him my hon. Friend, as more often than our respective Front-Bench teams would like, we agree with each other on our local radio station—for not being present when he made his speech. I understand that he talked at some length about green issues. The Budget contains a 15 per cent. reduction on duty on road fuel gases. I hope that that will at least go some way to meeting his concerns about green issues.

The hon. Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone (Mr. Clapham) spoke about unemployment. I looked at the figures for his constituency, where unemployment has fallen by 11 per cent. compared with this time last year and by more than 20 per cent. compared with the end of 1992. I am sure that he, too, welcomes the general fall in unemployment in this country and the fact that the number of people in employment is now higher than it was in 1979.

In an enthusiastic speech, my hon. Friend the Member for Beverley (Mr. Cran) touched on many important points, of which the housing market was one. I am grateful for his comments. Average mortgage repayments are now about £180 a month. I do not think that many people would be able to rent a similar property at that price. My hon. Friend also mentioned the considerable need to look at long-term care issues. I hope that he feels that the changes that we have introduced in the Budget relating to the increase in disregards, the assistance for elderly people in general and, specifically, the tax relief on care insurance will go a long way to meeting not just his concerns, but those of prudent, elderly savers.

I understand that my hon. Friend the Member for Bury St. Edmunds (Mr. Spring) is the owner of a vintage car, a betting man and no doubt likes a glass of whisky. I am therefore not too surprised that he had so much praise for the Budget. He rightly said that we are in a global economy, and he strongly supported Britain's aim to be the enterprise centre of Europe—a point also raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, North-East (Mr. Congdon). He also mentioned lower interest rates—his views will probably have been heard by my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor. But if my right hon.

[Mrs. Angela Knight]

and learned Friend missed them, I shall pass them on to him later—I am sure that they will also be passed on to the Governor of the Bank of England.

Low inflation and sound public finances are not an optional extra; they are necessary for a successful, expanding economy. Low inflation is essential because when inflation was high, it was the saver's enemy, the silent thief who stole the value of the pension. High inflation closed factories and took away jobs. That is why we have the 2.5 per cent. target. Underlying inflation has not been so low for so long since I was 11 years old. Compare that with 20 years ago, when inflation was running at 26 per cent. and it wiped out my grandfather's pension. That is why it is essential that inflation is low, and that is why it is one of our overriding aims.

We have a strong economy. Exports are good, business investment has picked up, consumers' expenditure is on a steady upward trend and unemployment has decreased by more than 700,000. No wonder Opposition Members always appear so unhappy.

In its recent report, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development praised the British economy. It spoke about the importance of the British economy and its strength. I compare that report with the so-called world prosperity league table that Opposition Members have been running round with. I can presume only that the reason why they go round with that bit of paper is that it is a fig leaf to cover the bareness of their economic policies.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: They do not have one.

Mrs. Knight: We are the party which did a competitiveness audit, not last week or last month, but some time ago. We are the ones who have put in place measures such as those in the Budget, to ensure that our companies can compete better, that we get people back into work and that more people enjoy the fruits of their labour. However, when one considers the league table that the Labour party has been running round with, it is evident that it is one small corner of a much larger picture.

I return to the OECD report. It says that the UK's economic performance in 1994 was impressive. It says that our economy has been made more flexible and competitive and less inflation prone. It goes on to say that monetary policy is working well. It says that economic prospects are good.

If we are to continue discussing league tables, let us draw attention to the following facts. We are at the top of the G7 growth league table. We are at the top of the EU job creation league table. We are at the top of the European productivity league table. We are at the top of the European league table for exports. We are at the top of the European employment league table. That is where we are. When will the Labour party stop running the country down?

It is always interesting to note that, whenever we ask the Labour party what its policies are, we get no answers. My hon. Friend the Member for Gravesham reminded us of some of the questions that we asked yesterday and to which there was no reply.

Let us have another go now. When will Labour Members give us their inflation target? When will they decide what they will support in the Budget? When will they decide whether they support a 20p tax on savings? When will they finally confess that adoption of the minimum wage and the social chapter would destroy jobs and investment?

The Opposition are sitting tight today, exactly as they have sat day after day when we have asked them questions. Either they do not reply because they do not know, or they do not reply because they will not reply.

In a letter that the shadow Chief Secretary to the Treasury, the hon. Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith), sent to his colleagues, which was reported in the newspapers today, he told them that they must not imply that they will

"manipulate public spending rules to smuggle through extra spending".

The hon. Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) said:

"Gordon can say anything he likes if he thinks it is going to win the Election . . . when Labour is in power"

it

"will be looking for other priorities"

apart

"from tax cuts."

There we have it. Labour smuggles through public expenditure, but does not tell anyone about it. In reality, Labour Back Benchers know what they want, and that is more spending, which means more taxation.

While the hon. Member for North Warwickshire (Mr. O'Brien) was studying for his law degree and lecturing in universities, I was working in industry. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] I worked in industry throughout the 1970s and 1980s, and during the 1970s Britain had a record that reads as follows. British industry was underinvested; we had an appalling strike record; we sold goods that no one wanted to buy at prices that rose weekly; the British Leyland work force was not buying the cars that it was making; inflation was rampant; in exports, we were losing our share of the world market. That was Labour's record. I say, "Never again!"

Interestingly, at that time when everything was wrong with the British economy, the political platitudes from the Labour party were exactly the same as they are today. That is the reality: it is an empty shell. As for the "7p up, 1p down" slogan, what nonsense! Not prepared to make difficult decisions—

It being Ten o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.

Debate to be resumed on Monday 4 December.

PETITION

Joyriders

10 pm

Mr. Peter Mandelson (Hartlepool): I beg leave to present a petition signed by 25,000 of my constituents, requesting urgent action to curb the crime of taking and using cars without the owners' consent, which has resulted in injury and death in our town. It states that the petitioners are

"outraged by the death of Neil Wright caused by joyriders and youths who take vehicles without the owners' consent."

They feel that tougher penalties must be introduced

"to prevent further death and tragedy."

The law in general must be reassessed. I hope that urgent consideration will be given to the petition.

To lie upon the Table.

Police (Information Technology)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Burns.]*

10.1 pm

Mr. Walter Sweeney (Vale of Glamorgan): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak about this subject.

Since 1979, the Conservative Government have increased the number of police by 13,000, and have substantially improved police pay, conditions and equipment. Despite that, crime has risen—seemingly inexorably—for most of that time. The public say, "We want to see more police on the beat." Despite the best efforts of my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary, that is still the cry today.

I warmly welcome the Government's commitment to providing a further 5,000 police officers over the next three years. That will help to sustain the reduction in crime that has taken place over the past two years. We shall never be able to afford a police constable on every street corner, but the more that our police are visible to the public, the more the criminal will be deterred by the prospect of being caught and the more the public will be reassured.

In an age when criminals are equipped with fast stolen cars and mobile telephones, the police must spend much of their time in cars so that they can respond quickly. Each time that an arrest is made, the suspect must be taken to the police station and must then be laboriously processed in accordance with the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984, which takes at least one extra officer off patrol or the beat for a long time. It is vital to the efficiency of the police that we make full use of information technology to improve detection and the rate of conviction and to reduce the amount of time spent on administration. That will reassure the public, deter the criminal and help to prevent crime.

Of course, the Government and the police are to be congratulated on many new initiatives. The first national computerised DNA data-base went live in Birmingham on 10 April this year, and represents a huge step forward. Phoenix, the criminal justice records service, will enable the police to enter directly on the police national computer the criminal record information that is currently provided on paper forms. The new Holmes system for the administration of major crime investigations should be available next year, and various other exciting information technology applications are undergoing trials in various police forces.

Less successful has been the attempt to achieve a national computerised fingerprint service. I shall not detail the problems that have arisen, particularly as litigation is still in progress, but it is important for those problems to be overcome so that a truly effective, easily accessible national fingerprint service can be provided for every police force.

The introduction of closed circuit television in many areas has been a great step forward, and I welcome the Government's commitment to increasing the number of CCTV schemes. In my constituency, the town of Barry benefits from a CCTV system, covering much of Holton road and Broad street. The system was purchased by

[Mr. Walter Sweeney]

Vale of Glamorgan borough council with the help of a grant from the Welsh Office. It is operated by civilians at the civic offices.

Ideally, such systems should be bought and operated by police forces, not local authorities. That would have two advantages. First, the public would be reassured that there would be no abuse of their civil liberties. I understand that in the recent well-publicised case of a CCTV video being marketed and then withdrawn from sale the material used was from a private system operating in a shop, not from a public system. Still, it is important that the doubts of people who are genuinely concerned about an invasion of civil liberties be allayed. I therefore believe that CCTV should be under the exclusive control of the police, who must be responsible for storing and eventually erasing the tapes.

The second advantage of the police controlling the cameras would be ensuring minimum delay and avoiding any breakdown of communications in transmitting information from the person viewing the screen to the police officers required to attend the scene. Police officers, police cars and police stations need to be equipped with the latest technology.

Last year in the United States of America I was lucky enough to go out on patrol with a police officer in Seattle. His on-board computer system was linked to a national database covering all 51 states. He could instantly call up full details of a suspect vehicle, including where and when purchased, whether subject to hire purchase—and if so, how much—and who the registered owner was. That information made it easy to check whether the driver was the registered owner or was driving with his consent. The police officer could also call up details of any previous convictions of the registered owner and information about whether he was in breach of bail in any of the 51 states.

In our own comparatively small country our police patrol drivers should be given similar ready access to information. Furthermore, improved personal and vehicle radios should be introduced as standard equipment, with encryption systems in control rooms and individual sets so that criminals cannot listen in to police messages.

The equipment for processing suspects at most of our police stations is poor. At present, when a suspect is interviewed and charged, much valuable police time is wasted. In my experience as duty solicitor at Barry police station before I was elected to this House, I saw experienced police officers typing out charge sheets with two fingers on ancient manual typewriters. I understand that the system has slightly improved since my day, with word processors now in operation.

What is really needed is a national computer network. Standard software should be stipulated by the Home Office to enable an officer to retrieve a particular section of the Theft Act and then simply type in the relevant details, before producing a perfect and legible charge sheet every time. That would not only save the officer time; it would reduce subsequent problems and delays in amending charges. Information such as charge sheets, lists of previous convictions and advance disclosure could be transmitted to the court, the Crown Prosecution Service, the defence solicitors and the probation service—as necessary—electronically and at the touch of a button, thereby avoiding delays and reducing the need for court adjournments.

A great deal of time is currently spent by police officers and typists transcribing the relevant sections of recorded interviews. Entire interviews could be transcribed automatically using voice recognition systems, and then checked for accuracy against the tape. That would stop disputes about whether all the relevant sections of a tape had been transcribed; and it would usually avoid the need to bring tapes to court.

Computerised charge sheets and transcription facilities would help to put the interviewing officer back on the beat or on motorised patrol more quickly. The Home Office should also liaise with the Lord Chancellor's Department to ensure that court lists, warrants, witness summonses and production orders relating to prisoners are electronically transmitted and accessible to all who need them. The days of a prisoner not being produced at court at the right time because a production order has gone astray, or of a prisoner being bailed when he is already in breach of bail at another court, should be over.

My last and most important point is that the Home Office should take action to ensure that all police forces adopt the same computer system for the retrieval of central criminal records and the collection of local data. I am a strong supporter of local police forces rather than a national police force. However, it is plain crazy to allow forces to operate different computer systems which may be incompatible with those of neighbouring forces. In a huge murder hunt such as that for the Yorkshire Ripper, data collected in crimes in one area should be equally accessible by all police forces in case a pattern emerges that hastens the apprehension of the criminal.

Thanks to improved roads and cars, the criminal is more mobile than ever before. Much has been done to meet the increased threat. On 1 November last year, my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary launched the first national blueprint for police use of computer technology, which stressed that police forces must act in partnership with each other and with other parts of the criminal justice system when using and buying new technology. That was certainly a big step in the right direction, but I would like the Home Secretary to go further.

The Home Office needs to consult all police forces, evaluate all the available equipment, commission new equipment where necessary and then initiate a central, standardised purchasing policy for all the equipment that I have mentioned. That would be expensive initially, but would save many hours of police and civilian time thereafter. It would lead to much greater efficiency and enable the police to spend more time out catching criminals, deterring crime and reassuring the public.

A central equipment purchasing policy operated by the Home Office would achieve economies through bulk purchase discounts and would guarantee compatibility between police forces. The pressure on local police budgets is such that only a central purchasing policy can ensure that all our police officers have the equipment they need to preserve the peace and maintain the reputation of the British bobby as the best in the world.

10.11 pm

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. David Maclean): I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Vale of Glamorgan (Mr. Sweeney) for initiating tonight's debate on police information technology. He has long had an interest in this important subject. I am grateful also to my hon. Friend the Member for City of Chester (Mr. Brandreth), who has been present throughout the debate. I know that he is also keen on this particular subject, hence his presence here tonight.

Immense opportunities are offered by technology in the ever more sophisticated fight against crime. The Government are committed to ensuring that the right technology is available to the police where and when it is needed. All forms of technology are being brought to bear in the constant fight against crime, and one area in which British technology is showing the way is the application of DNA techniques to crime detection.

The national DNA database went live in April 1995. The database is revolutionary. It is the first of its kind anywhere in the world and relies on leading-edge technology and up-to-date DNA techniques. I am delighted to announce that more than 100 hits have been made in the early months of operation, matching DNA profiles from individuals to profiles from traces left at scenes of crime, and profiles from traces left at one scene with those from another. The number of samples sent in by the police and the high number of profile matches already achieved bode well for the continuing success of the database.

Rapid access to information is the life-blood of operational policing and one of the key challenges facing the police service is how to take full advantage of the information technology revolution. The police are not newcomers to information technology. This year, the police national computer marks 21 years of service to the police community, and never has it been more relied on or more frequently used than it is now. In 1994, more than 47 million transactions were processed and 98 per cent. of customers considered the service to be either good or very good. However, the pace of change is quickening, and, even in the past year, several important milestones have been achieved.

Police effectiveness depends on the accuracy of the information that is available and also on how quickly it can be obtained and subsequently updated. To this end, Phoenix, a new database on the police national computer, became operational in May 1995. It allows the police to enter and retrieve records of arrests and convictions for all reportable offences directly rather than having to rely on the microfiche collection held at the national identification service. Phoenix will eventually be linked directly to the courts, the Crown Prosecution Service and the rest of the criminal justice service. That will ensure that records of convictions are promptly updated and that the judiciary has immediate access to the information on previous convictions which it requires for sentencing purposes.

The extremely complex task of transferring the microfiche records held by the NIS to Phoenix is now under way, and when complete it will form the kernel of a database of immense operational value to the police. I was delighted that we were able to invite forces to begin to enter records of cautions on to the system from 1 November. Until now, records of cautions have mainly been kept only by the force which issued them. In future they will also be available nationally.

We have a substantial programme of enhancements for Phoenix, which has been agreed with the police service. The first and most important of the enhancements will be QUEST, a database analysis facility that will allow investigators to search the collection for all offenders meeting particular descriptions. It will be a real advance in the investigation of serious crime.

Within a few more years, Phoenix will be linked to NAFIS, the national automated fingerprint identification system, which will provide the forces of England and Wales with a world-class system for the identification of offenders. NAFIS will incorporate the national fingerprint collection of over 5 million records, including those from cautioned offenders. It will be rolled out to the national identification service and eight pilot forces from the middle of 1997 and will achieve national coverage, replacing all existing fingerprint matching systems, by the year 2001. NAFIS will be a distributed system that will use police national network services for data communications. Common data and system services will be co-located with the police national computer.

What is the police national network? It is already in place as the communications backbone for the new developments to which I have referred. It provides a telephone network in addition to a data packet service and is tailored, as is Phoenix, to the needs of the police and to those of the wider criminal justice community. Provided by Mercury, the PNN is an excellent example of the way in which co-operation between the public and private sectors can work to the benefit of all.

Improved radio communications are a must for busy operational offices. The public safety radio communications project has been created to replace existing police service radio systems with the latest state-of-the-art digital technology and common European standards. It is envisaged that the systems will use new frequency bands reserved for public safety organisations throughout the European Union. After consultation with the Association of Chief Police Officers, the project will proceed to the next phase and directly involve the private sector via the private finance initiative.

The new systems will offer many advantages. Harmonised European frequencies will substantially reduce continental interference and high-grade encryption will see an end to illegal monitoring of police broadcasts. Mobile data facilities will allow access to remote databases such as criminal records and vehicle information. My hon. Friend the Minister for Vale of Glamorgan will be pleased to know that trials are already taking place in which radios in police vehicles are being linked to the police national computer. These developments will lead to more efficient and effective management of police resources. I know that my hon. Friend the Member for City of Chester will be interested to know that video cameras in police cars could be linked to the police national computer.

In addition to these centrally provided services, a wide range of computing applications are already installed in forces. We must ensure that the overall investment in police information technology, which is running at some £150 million a year, is used as effectively as it possibly can be. In this new technological age, the somewhat

[Mr. David Maclean]

artificial boundary between the centrally provided systems—the PNC, NAFIS and the PNN—and all the local systems will disappear. We now need to think about links between systems as much as the systems themselves if the full benefits are to be realised. That is why, at the end of last year, the Home Secretary launched the first ever national strategy for police information systems—unfortunately nicknamed NATSPIS. This blueprint will ensure the development of cost-effective standard systems which meet the needs of all forces and will communicate with each other whenever necessary. That strategy is fully supported by chief constables and police authorities and is being driven forward by lead forces, which will develop standard systems with support from the centre.

My hon. Friend the Member for Vale of Glamorgan will be pleased to know that work on the top five priority applications—command and control, custody, management information, case preparation and crime reporting—is already under way. The case preparation application to be used by all forces will be linked to case management systems within other criminal justice organisations, such as the courts and the Crown Prosecution Service. Information fields available will include details of the availability of police officers and witnesses. That should help to reduce the number of adjournments and delays caused by the lack of relevant information in the courts. On a wider front, the initiative on co-ordination of computerisation in the criminal justice system—CCCJS—seeks to improve communications throughout the criminal justice system through the use of appropriate technology. Recent pilot projects involve links between the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency, Swansea, and Reading magistrates court and links between the DVLA and Dyfed Powys police for the direct provision of driver information and electronic mail links between various agencies in Suffolk and Hampshire including, on a test basis, solicitors and barristers in private practice.

My hon. Friend mentioned that improved methods for transcribing tape-recorded interviews should be considered. A working party comprising representatives of ACPO, the CPS and the Home Office is currently examining a number of alternative methods of passing details of police interviews to other agencies in the criminal justice system. That will include consideration of the feasibility of voice recognition computer technology. Independent research commissioned by the Home Office has demonstrated that records of taped interviews prepared by trained civilian summarisers cost less, are more accurate, and of a higher overall quality than those prepared by police officers with two fingers and the old Remington, which my hon. Friend mentioned. Following this research, the efficiency scrutiny which was published in July recommended that all forces should prepare and implement a programme to employ civilian summarisers.

I come now to the new police information technology organisation—PITO. There can be no doubt that the strategy heralds a new era in police computing and it demands some business process re-engineering to the way we do business in central Government. That is why we are considering proposals to set up a new police information technology organisation to take over from the current science and technology group in the Home Office. That will be the new centralised purchasing organisation, but the police will be in the driving seat, not the bureaucrats or me.

That new organisation will bring the police into the centre of decision making and allow both local and national developments to be looked at as an integrated whole. We propose to set up PITO next year on an interim basis with its own chief executive and advisory council on which the police service and police authorities will be represented, and then to move it on to a fully independent executive non-departmental public body as soon as we can find time for the necessary legislation. Those changes in strategies and structures will help us to maintain and co-ordinate momentum in a rapidly changing world. Division between police departments, forces and criminal justice agencies have to be transcended. Only if we are all working to a common end will we be able to turn the strategy into a reality.

In addition, as the whole House must agree, to this impressive set of computing and communications developments, other forms of technology are making a huge contribution to police effectiveness and public safety. Nowhere is technology moving faster than in the world of closed circuit television. There cannot be many people who have not noticed the recent spread of those watchful guardians. High streets, shopping centres, industrial estates, schools, villages, community centres and other areas have all benefited from the presence of the cameras. The police have embraced the new technology enthusiastically, sometimes running their own systems, but more often working in partnership with others such as local authorities or town centre management committees. CCTV is overwhelmingly popular, with the operators, the police and the general public.

I have seen the video that was issued earlier this week, "Caught in the Act". I can tell the House that it is of poor quality and hyped up by the producer to try to whet the appetites of a gullible public to buy it. I totally deplore the misuse of any CCTV material for unauthorised purposes, even poor-quality stuff like that, which will strain one's eyes if one tries to watch it. We strongly recommend that every CCTV system should have a code of practice. The bidding guidance for the CCTV competition, which was announced by my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary recently, with £15 million of taxpayers' money to be bid for, makes it clear that each scheme must have a code of practice to guard against unauthorised disclosure of material.

There is no doubt that CCTV helps to prevent crime. It helps the police to detect crime. It assists with the investigation of crime. It gives the police extra, incontrovertible evidence to help prosecute and convict more criminals and—I know that my hon. Friends are particularly concerned about this point—it reduces the fear of crime among the general public. It also has other, less serious social benefits, such as finding lost children, spotting fires in the early stages and identifying people who have been taken ill on the street.

The results speak for themselves. My hon. Friend has already mentioned how the town of Barry benefits from CCTV. There are examples of crime reductions from all over the country. I shall give just a few of the most up-to-date cases. In the four years since the Newcastle scheme has been running, in the city centre there have been 6,200 fewer crimes. There have been 800 arrests due to the cameras, and in only six cases did the suspects plead not guilty. They were still found guilty.

In Swansea, in the year up to August 1994, there were 147 instances of taking from a motor vehicle. After the cameras were installed in December 1994 and up until August 1995, there have been just 10. In Northampton, there has been a 57 per cent. reduction in crime since the cameras were installed. In Berwick-upon-Tweed, a small town with a small-scale, four-camera system, burglary is down 69 per cent., criminal damage is down 41 per cent., and theft is down 24 per cent.

I could go on, but I will not. Everywhere that CCTV has been installed can give similar reports. CCTV works. As John Stevens, the excellent chief constable of Northumbria said recently:

"We are leading the world in CCTV technology and its use. In every case where cameras have been installed, crime has dropped and the number of arrests increased."

We in the Government are doing our bit to help. Last year, we initiated a CCTV challenge competition, which eventually distributed £5 million to help fund 106 additional schemes throughout the country. That levered in £13.8 million of private and local council finance. Now we have announced another competition. This time we are offering a total of £15 million and we hope that we can fund at least 300 schemes.

Individually, each of those systems and services is impressive and offers the police service many benefits, but, taken together, the contribution that the whole portfolio of information technology projects will make to operational policing will be much greater than the sum of its parts. The police service is spending £750 million on IT over the current five-year period. We are committed to helping the service to gain the maximum value from that huge investment, and to ensure that it will play its full part in the vital task of making our communities safer places.

I thank my hon. Friend once again for enabling me to tell the House tonight of the exciting developments that are taking place in the British police service, the finest service in the world.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-nine minutes past Ten o'clock till Monday 4 December, pursuant to Order.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 16 November 1995

NORTHERN IRELAND

Terrorist Suspects (Interviews)

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will amend the terms of reference for the Independent Commissioner for the Holding Centres to permit the deputy commissioner to be present at interviews with terrorist suspects in the police offices. [309]

Sir John Wheeler: Following discussions with the Royal Ulster Constabulary, I have today placed in the Library of the House revised terms of reference for the Independent commissioner for the Holding Centres to permit his deputy to be present at interviews with terrorist suspects in the police offices, subject to certain caveats agreed by both the commissioner and the RUC. The change will come into effect on 1 December 1995.

This change in the role of the deputy commissioner will further assure the public that those persons detained in the holding centres continue to be properly treated in accordance with their legal rights and the standards required by the relevant codes of practice.

TRANSPORT

Channel Tunnel Rail Link

Dame Peggy Fenner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if an addendum to the outline railway safety case for the channel tunnel rail link has been prepared for the additional provisions to the Channel Tunnel Rail Link Bill deposited in the House last week. [4]

Mr. Watts: Union Railways has, in consultation with the Health and Safety Executive, prepared an addendum to the outline railway safety case for the channel tunnel rail link for the additional provisions to the Channel Tunnel Rail Link Bill that were deposited last week. The addendum covers the additional provisions for the Barking extended tunnel; A13 services diversions; Mardyke Park realignment; and the Eurotunnel railway connection. It also covers a prospective additional provision for access arrangements between Northfleet station and the proposed station at Ebbsfleet. That additional provision may be deposited next month. I am arranging for copies of the addendum to be placed in the House Library.

Similar documentation will also be prepared for the additional provisions that I hope will be deposited in Parliament next month. I will ensure that that material is also placed in the House Library.

HEALTH

Medicines Control Agency

Mr. Deva: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the outcome of the review of the Medicines Control Agency; and if will make a statement. [360]

Mr. Sackville: The first evaluation study of the work of the Medicines Control Agency since its establishment as an agency, and the prior options study for its future operation, have recently been completed.

The evaluation study concludes that the MCA has been successful in safeguarding public health through the effective control of the sale and supply of pharmaceuticals in the United Kingdom. While maintaining the high level of public protection required for pharmaceuticals licensed for use in the UK, the MCA has provided a much improved service to the pharmaceutical industry and is now acknowledged as the fastest licensing authority in the world.

The prior options study concluded that abolition, privatisation and the contracting out of the MCA's core function are neither practical nor feasible. It notes, however, that some support functions might beneficially be placed on a contractual basis. It confirms the practical and legal requirement for a UK regulatory authority and proposes that UK Ministers should remain responsible for its core work. The work and the workload of the agency are expected to change over the coming years because of the implications of the new European systems for the regulation of pharmaceuticals. Until the impact of these new systems can be properly assessed, the report confirms that the executive agency model operating as a trading fund continues to represent the best organisational framework for the MCA.

I support the findings of the evaluation study and the prior options study, the results of which will feed into the revision of the agency's framework document which is now in hand.

I have today placed a summary of the reviews' findings in the Library.

ENVIRONMENT

Wildlife Law Enforcement

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to announce the Government's response to the report of the enforcement working group "Wildlife Law Enforcement". [1]

Mr. Clappison: Following our review of secondary wildlife controls last year, the Government gave a commitment to improving the enforcement of domestic wildlife controls. The enforcement working group was set up to look at what practical steps might be taken to achieve this. I welcome the main recommendations in the enforcement working group's report.

We are today launching the next phase of our crackdown on wildlife crime by setting up a new "Partnership for Action Against Wildlife Crime". The first meeting of the partnership's steering group is taking place today. The main task of this new forum will be to provide

a strategic overview of wildlife law enforcement activity in England and Wales, and to improve co-ordination and communication between all the organisations involved. It will be responsible for following up the recommendations in the enforcement working group report, and by providing expertise, experience and advice, should make a valuable contribution to the development of wildlife law enforcement policy.

The police have agreed to continue to chair the group jointly with my Department. The group will also need to respond to other interests and opinions. I have therefore invited the founder members to co-opt other members, including those representing countryside and sporting interests.

One of the main objectives of the group will be to support the network of police wildlife liaison officers, which is the cornerstone of wildlife law enforcement activity. The network has grown steadily since its inception in the early 1980s, with virtually all police forces in the UK now having one or more police wildlife liaison officers. Few of these officers are engaged full time on this work and many are volunteers performing wildlife duties in addition to their many other tasks. It is important for the network to be retained and, where necessary, strengthened.

DNA testing and other forensic techniques have an important part to play in combating wildlife crime. There have recently been a number of successful prosecutions based on DNA blood sampling evidence, and we will continue to promote and support the use of forensic techniques in wildlife cases.

The enforcement working group identified a number of weaknesses in the powers of the police to investigate wildlife offences, and sought tougher and more consistent penalties for wildlife crime. We will seek to identify legal remedies which will command general support within the next 12 months.

I can also make further announcements today about practical actions which I am taking against wildlife crime.

First, we have appointed the Laboratory of the Government Chemist to prepare practical advice for all police and other enforcement authorities about the application of DNA techniques to wildlife crime. This will include sampling kits, and we expect to issue the full package in May next year.

Secondly, over the next three years, we shall be sponsoring further innovative research into DNA and wildlife crime. This will be aimed at projects which can establish tests for further species—such as tigers—or for different materials such as feathers and hair.

Thirdly, my Department is making resources available immediately to finance a practitioners' guide to wildlife law. This is a key recommendation of the enforcement working group, and will be of particular use to the police and other agencies in their fight against wildlife crime.

Those involved in wildlife crime should be in no doubt that we are determined to do everything possible to ensure that they are vigorously pursued and properly punished.

Coastal Policy

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to issue the proposed statement of policy guidelines for the coast. [2]

Mr. Clappison: Reflecting the importance of promoting effective management of the coastal zone, the Department of the Environment is today making available "Policy Guidelines for the Coast", which draws together in concise form a wider range of guidance and other information on coast-related issues in England. I have arranged for copies to be placed in the Libraries of the House, and the guidelines will be extensively distributed to interested organisations and individuals.

Mineral Dredging

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what conclusions he has come to concerning the review of licensing arrangements for mineral dredging in England and Wales; and if he will make a statement. [3]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: My hon. Friend will be pleased to know that we have today published our conclusions on the review. After consideration of all the representations and consultation with other Government Departments, we have decided that the way forward is to introduce statutory procedures to replace the non-statutory "Government View" procedure. The decision follows our conclusions that:

> a statutory system, which will draw on procedures in the town and country planning Acts, should be introduced, with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales as regulatory and enforcement authorities. My right hon. Friend the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food will be consulted in the decision-making process and will have responsibility for overseeing the monitoring of the effects of the dredging activities;
>
> the costs of administering the new statutory procedures should be recovered from dredging application fees;
>
> in general, new dredging permissions should be valid for 15 years with substantive reviews at five-year intervals to determine renewal;
>
> the statutory procedures should subsume sections 18 and 34 consents under the Coast Protection Act 1949; and
>
> all areas of the sea bed below the low-water mark will be covered regardless of ownership.

A summary of the responses to the consultation paper and an outline of the proposed statutory procedures have been placed in the House Library. Until we can introduce proposals for legislation to this House, we propose to introduce similar non-statutory procedures as an interim measure. A further announcement will be made about this.

We will also be preparing and consulting on policy guidance for marine dredging which will set out the environmental criteria appropriate to the marine environment.

Rent Officer Service

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what proposals he has to change the arrangements for the administration of the rent officer service in England. [971]

Mr. Curry: In the light of the scrutiny report published in 1992 and the subsequent work by my Department and by consultants, I have concluded that there is a case for introducing new arrangements for the administration of the rent officer service in England based on a unified national management structure.

Before making a decision, and following the procedure set out in "Continuity and Change", Cm 2627, I propose to undertake a prior options review, in particular to consider and make recommendations on:

(i) whether the functions discharged by rent officers under the Rent Act 1977 and orders made under the Housing Act 1988 should continue to be performed in the public sector;

(ii) the scope for contracting out; and

(iii) subject to the conclusion on (i) and (ii), the strength of the case for changing to unified management structure; and

(iv) subject to (iii), the relative merits of achieving this by establishing a next steps agency within the civil service or an independent public sector body, based either on an existing or a newly created organisation.

The review will be undertaken by my Department in conjunction with the Treasury, the Office of Public Service and the Department of Social Security. There will be an opportunity for interested bodies to submit views.

English Partnerships

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the progress made by English Partnerships in promoting inward investment and in its regeneration role more generally. [972]

Mr. Curry: English Partnerships has played a key role in helping to secure a succession of major inward investment projects during the last 12 months, involving Samsung, Sony, Ford-Jaguar and Siemens. These projects alone will attract over £2 billion of investment into the UK economy and create up to 7,000 jobs. In addition, English Partnerships has been instrumental in other smaller inward investment projects throughout England, which have made positive impacts on local economies and communities.

It is now two years since the Government launched English Partnerships as the main focus of land and building regeneration in England. In July, English Partnerships published its 1994–95 annual report, covering its first full financial year of operations. Copies of the report are available in the Library. It records that English Partnerships successfully implemented a £225 million regeneration programme, attracting some £300 million of private investment, potentially creating over 13,000 jobs and reclaiming 4,200 acres of land.

English Partnerships' concern to secure sustainable economic regeneration has been demonstrated through its commitment to major mixed use development schemes to revitalise urban districts such as Hulme in Manchester and Barking Reach, the first major project in the Thames gateway area.

English Partnerships has also demonstrated a strong commitment to voluntary and community organisations, recognising the importance of their contribution to local regeneration. As well as promoting community involvement in major projects, English Partnerships has established a special fund, the community investment fund, to provide capital funding for smaller community-led projects. It is also continuing for a second year its partnership with the Groundwork Trust to promote smaller reclamation projects which improve the local environment.

PRIME MINISTER

Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting

Mr. Jacques Arnold: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the recent Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting held in New Zealand.

The Prime Minister: With my right hon. and noble Friend the Minister for Overseas Development, I attended the meeting of Commonwealth Heads of Government in New Zealand on 10 to 13 November.

I have placed in the Library of the House the text of the Auckland Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting—CHOGM—communiqué and an action plan for the fulfilment of the Harare declaration. Statements were also issued on Nigeria and disarmament.

Commonwealth Heads of Government warmly welcomed President Mandela, representing South Africa for the first time following the country's transition to a multi-racial democracy; and President Biya, following the recent admission of Cameroon as the 52nd member of the Commonwealth.

The meeting rightly took issue with those members of the Commonwealth, notably Nigeria, which continue to defy the principles of democratic and accountable government agreed at the CHOGM in Harare in 1991. The Commonwealth's widespread and increasing concern about the importance of an early transition to accountable democratic government in Nigeria, and the Nigerian Government's callous execution of Mr. Ken Saro-Wiwa and his eight associates, following a flawed judicial process with no formal right of appeal and no regard for the basic legal rights of defendants, gave the Commonwealth little alternative but to suspend Nigeria. This was essential if the Harare principles were to carry credibility for the future.

How long Nigeria remains suspended depends on its own conduct. If the Nigerian Government show themselves willing to abide by the Harare principles, the Commonwealth will be very ready to support them. Conversely, the meeting agreed that if no democratic progress has been made within a time frame to be stipulated, Nigeria will be expelled from the Commonwealth.

To monitor implementation of the Harare declaration more generally, the meeting decided to establish a standing group of eight Commonwealth Foreign Ministers, in which my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary will participate.

The United Kingdom and other members differed over the resumption of French nuclear testing in the Pacific. I said that I recognised the strong views of countries in the region. But I also stressed my determination to defend strongly the principles and policies of deterrence which have helped to keep the UK peaceful and free for the past half century. The Commonwealth's statement on

disarmament was misrepresentative, and in parts clearly wrong on nuclear weapons testing. I was not therefore prepared to be associated with it. At the same time, I underlined that the UK shared with Commonwealth partners the desire for an early end to testing, in the south Pacific or elsewhere. Hence the UK's commitment to concluding a comprehensive test ban treaty and signing the protocols to the treaty of Rarotonga in the first half of next year.

On Hong Kong, Commonwealth Heads endorsed our view that the rule of law and a high degree of autonomy are important ingredients for Hong Kong's continuing success after 1997.

Commonwealth Heads agreed to accept Mozambique's application to join, which was championed by President Mandela and leaders of other Southern African Commonwealth states, in view of Mozambique's previous links with the Commonwealth. The meeting also agreed that an intergovernmental group should report on criteria for any future applications.

I invited Commonwealth leaders to hold their next meeting in 1997 in Britain. This invitation was warmly accepted.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

National Food Stockpile

Mr. Patrick Thompson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what progress has been made towards liquidation of the national food stockpile; and if he will make a statement. [525]

Mrs. Browning: The national food stockpile originally consisted of flour, biscuits, sugar, fat, yeast, sweets and emergency feeding equipment stored in buffer depots around the country, to provide a reserve to help feed survivors during a recovery period after a nuclear attack. Following a phased reduction of activities after 1991, an announcement was made in March 1993 to liquidate the stockpile. This was possible because an assessment of food supplies in the context of modern distribution and storage practices within the food industry had concluded that there would be ample stocks available to meet any conceivable attack. Remaining foodstuffs have since been disposed of and the last buffer depot has recently been closed.

Written Answers to Questions

Friday 17 November 1995

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Departmental Staff

Mr. Luff: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what was the number of staff in post in central Government Departments at 1 October. [1136]

Mr. Horam: On 1 October 1995 there were 506,300 permanent staff in post in central Government. This represents a decrease of 5 per cent. in the year since 1 October 1994. The number of casual staff fell by 1 per cent. over the year to 19,200.

Estimates have been made, and broken down by Department, for 1 October 1994 and placed with the 1 October 1995 figures in the Library.

TRANSPORT

Transport Research Laboratory

Mr. Fabricant: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what bids he has received in the sale of the Transport Research Laboratory, and if he will make a statement. [1249]

Mr. Norris: Several initial bids were received for the Transport Research Laboratory. Two shortlisted bidders have been invited to submit best and final offers by 21 December. They are a consortium comprising Pell Frischmann Consulting Engineers Ltd., Mouchel Associates Ltd., the Automobile Association, and the Royal Automobile Club, and the Transport Research Foundation, which includes members of TRL's existing management and is bidding to acquire TRL as a non-profit distributing company. The Government will announce their decision on the selected purchaser early in the new year.

Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency

Mr. Gallie: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what DVLA's vehicle excise duty enforcement performance has been since 1993–94, and what revenue has been raised. [1248]

Mr. Norris: The information is as follows:

	1993–94	*1994–95*
Successfully completed cases	455,000	458,000
Revenue raised	£46 million	£46.5 million
Induced relicensing as a result of enforcement action	241,000	255,000
Revenue raised	£19 million	£22 million
Yield to cost ratio	2.56:1	2.66:1

Previously quoted figures on the number of motorists induced to relicense and the revenue raised—345,000/£28 million and 388,000/£33 million for 1993–94 and 1994–95 respectively—were incorrect. This was the result of a programming error.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Daresbury and Rutherford Appleton Laboratories

Mr. Brazier: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement about the forthcoming prior options studies of the Daresbury and Rutherford Appleton laboratories. [1535]

Mr. Lang: The Government announced on 29 September 1995 that all public sector research establishments would be subject to prior options reviews and that a timetable would be made available shortly.

The Council for the Central Laboratory of the Research Councils' Daresbury and Rutherford Appleton laboratories will be reviewed immediately. Other research council research establishments will be reviewed in the course of 1996. It is essential that all the establishments are looked at in this round of reviews, in order to have a comprehensive look at the establishments as a piece.

Bearing in mind the extensive studies carried out prior to establishing CCLRC, the forthcoming review is likely to draw extensively on this material and a particular emphasis of the review will be on the relationship with other public sector research establishments.

I would welcome comments from interested parties. Comments should be sent by 8 January 1996 to:

Jeremy Clark, Office of Science and Technology, Albany House, 94–98 Petty France, London SW1H 9ST.

Accreditation Service

Mr. Ian Bruce: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the total amount of the pre-paid fees liability to be transferred from the National Measurement Accreditation Service to the United Kingdom Accreditation Service. [1252]

Mr. Ian Taylor: The closing accounts have now been completed showing the total liability as £1,119,804. A first payment of £670,000 was made on 2 August and a second payment of £449,804 on 16 November.

Parliamentary approval for this new service will be sought in a winter supplementary estimate for the Department of Trade and Industry's programmes and administration vote, class IV, vote 1. Pending that approval, urgent expenditure of the above amount is being met by repayable advances from the contingencies fund.

National Physical Laboratory

Mr. Jessel: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what financial arrangements have been put in place with

Serco consequent upon the transfer of the National Physical Laboratory to private sector management. [1137]

Mr. Ian Taylor: Payments to Serco will be made for work carried out for DTI customers; there is no separate management fee. However, certain non-recurring costs were taken out during the negotiating process and were paid at the start of the contract. This involved my Department making a payment of £1.55 million to Serco. This arrangement offered significantly better value for money for my Department than the alternative of including these costs in the prices that will be charged to DTI customers.

Approval of this new service will be sought in a winter supplementary estimate for the Department of Trade and Industry's programmes and administration vote (class IV, vote 1). Pending that approval, urgent expenditure of £1.55 million has been met by repayable advances from the contingencies fund.

Gas Industry Licensing Framework

Mr. Coe: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what arrangements have been made for the introduction of the new licensing framework for the gas industry. [1135]

Mr. Lang: The Director General of Gas Supply is setting in motion the necessary arrangements to introduce new licences from the appointed day. This involves urgent expenditure on consultancy, staff and accommodation to meet the requirements of the new gas legislation.

Parliamentary approval to expenditure on this new service has been sought in the winter supplementary estimate for the Office of Gas Supply vote, class IV, vote 10. Urgent expenditure, in advance of that approval and Royal Assent to the Gas Bill, estimated at £875,000 has been met by a repayable advance from the contingencies fund.

British Coal

Mr. Ian Bruce: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what change he has made to British Coal's external financing limit for 1995–96. [1251]

Mr. Lang: British Coal's external financing limit has been adjusted from £35 million to £59 million, to reflect the continuing management by British Coal of various ex-employee liabilities which are not expected to pass to Government until 1997.

Pool Reinsurance Co. Ltd.

Mr. Hargreaves: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will authorise Pool Reinsurance Co. Ltd. to change the arrangements for paying terrorism insurance premiums in 1996. [1250]

Mr. Nelson: I have agreed that premiums in 1996 will be discounted by 20 per cent., provided good claims experience continues.

The provision for paying a deposit premium of 60 per cent. of the discounted annual premium at the beginning of the policy period, with the balance becoming due at the end of the period, will be continued. As at present, the balance will be waived if good claims experience continues. The threshold of the total level of claims notified to Pool Reinsurance Co. Ltd. during the year at which the waiver would be withdrawn will be increased for 1996 from £50 million to £75 million.

The instalment provision and the discount will be withdrawn in respect of subsequent new or renewed policies in the course of the year should losses exceed £75 million.

Arrangements for 1997 will be determined in the light of experience.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 20 November 1995

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

European Movement

Mr. Michael Spicer: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the grants his Department *(a)* has made and *(b)* proposes to make to the European movement in 1995. [78]

Mr. David Davis: No grants have been made to the European movement in 1995, nor are any planned.

EU Council Meeting

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what was the voting record of each member state on items agreed at the meeting of the European Community's Foreign Affairs Council held on 30 October; and if he will make it his practice to include details of all votes, including where there have been no votes, in the future. [442]

Mr. David Davis: No votes were taken at the Foreign Affairs Council of 30 October. A record of votes taken at Foreign Affairs Councils is generally given in the Council secretariat press release which is deposited in the Library of the House as soon as it is available.

GCHQ (Signals Station)

Mr. Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the future of GCHQ composite tracking station at Culmhead. [459]

Mr. Rifkind: On 14 November the director of GCHQ announced that the composite signals organisation station at Culmhead will close in 1999.

Dr. Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much has been spent on re-equipping GCHQ composite tracking station at Culmhead in each of the last five years. [460]

Mr. Rifkind: It is not Government policy publicly to reveal details of expenditure on intelligence beyond that shown in the single intelligence vote. Expenditure by the intelligence services is kept under review by the Committee of Parliamentarians established under the Intelligence Services Act 1994.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Asylum Seekers

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department in what circumstances his Department allows access to confidential information held about asylum seekers to *(a)* the Child Support Agency and *(b)* other Government Departments or agencies. [619]

Mr. Kirkhope: Details of an asylum claim are treated as confidential. The fact that a person is an asylum seeker is, however, disclosed where necessary in order to protect public funds, in particular where entitlement to a benefit or service is conditional on asylum seeker status. Disclosure is regularly made to the Benefits Agency and local authority housing departments for this purpose. Information about an asylum claim is not disclosed to departments or agencies not involved in consideration of the claim, such as the Child Support Agency, otherwise than in exceptional circumstances, for example where the police require it for the purposes of a criminal investigation.

Nigerians

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the number of Nigerian nationals who, over the last five years to date, have been granted *(a)* refugee status and *(b)* exceptional leave to remain by the United Kingdom authorities. [107]

Mr. Kirkhope: In the first 10 months of 1995, two Nigerians were granted asylum and three were refused asylum but granted exceptional leave to remain. Annual information prior to 1995 is published in tables 3.1 and 3.2 of the Home Office Statistical Bulletin "Asylum Statistics United Kingdom 1994", issue 15/95. A copy of this publication is available in the Library.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department following the suspension of Nigeria from the Commonwealth, when he intends to notify the Secretary of State for Social Security that Nigeria is a country undergoing significant upheaval for the purposes of enabling Nigerian nationals, whose application for political asylum in the United Kingdom is pending appeal, to a special adjudicator, to claim benefit; and if he will make a statement. [217]

Mr. Kirkhope: The situation in Nigeria is being closely monitored, but my right hon. and learned Friend does not at present consider that it would justify his issuing such a notification. Under the proposals on which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security has been consulting, benefit entitlement arising from a notification in respect of a country would lapse at the point where an asylum claim was refused and would not continue during any appeal.

Gambling

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to lift the ban covering the use of radio and television by the betting industry for the purpose of advertising its service. [502]

Mr. Kirkhope: Restrictions on the advertising of betting and other forms of commercial gambling in the broadcast and non-broadcast media are under review. There will be full public consultation before any decisions are made.

Mr. McAvoy: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment has been made of the impact of the national lottery on the betting industry; and if he will make a statement. [508]

Mr. Kirkhope: We are monitoring off-course betting turnover in order to assess the impact of the national lottery on the horserace betting levy, and plan to report our findings to Parliament in the spring of 1996.

Criminal Cases Review Commission

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he proposes to set up bodies to investigate miscarriages of justice. [407]

Mr. Kirkhope: Work is already underway to establish the criminal cases review commission created by the Criminal Appeal Act 1995. It is expected to start work in the course of next year.

Doncaster Prison

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will supply to the hon. Member for Don Valley copies of all the annual reports of the prison board of visitors in respect of Doncaster prison. [63]

Miss Widdecombe: The board of visitors appointed to Doncaster prison started its term of office in June 1994 when the prison was first opened. As annual reports are submitted after the end of the year to which the report refers, the board has therefore submitted only one annual report, for 1994. Its annual report for 1995 will not be due until spring 1996.

Boards of visitors annual reports are not published documents. They are made to the Secretary of State who permits the board, if it wishes, to publish its report. In this case, the board has chosen not to publish. Instead it issued a press notice, a copy of which will be sent to the hon. Member.

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he received the first annual report from the chairman of the board of visitors of Doncaster prison; and on what date this will be published by his Department. [403]

Miss Widdecombe: The board of visitors appointed to Doncaster prison started its term of office in June 1994 when the prison was first opened. As annual reports are submitted after the end of the year to which the report refers, the board has therefore submitted only on annual report, for 1994. This was received on 12 June 1995.

Boards of visitors annual reports are not published documents. They are made to he Secretary of State who permits the board, if it wishes, to publish its report. In this case, the board has chosen not to publish. Instead it issued a press notice, a copy of which will be sent to the hon. Member.

Prison Service

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department further to the letters of the director general to the hon. Member for Don Valley dated 24 and 26 October, on what basis Mr. Richard Tilt is authorised to sign himself as Director General of the Prison Service; and if he will make a statement. [53]

Miss Widdecombe: On the basis that, my right hon. and learned Friend, as he told the House on 16 October, has asked Mr. Tilt to take over temporarily as director general until a substantive appointment is made.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the 137 full submissions referred to in the letter of resignation of Mr. Derek Lewis, the former Director General of the Prison Service, which the Prison Service was required to submit to his Department between October 1994 and January 1995, together with the name of the addressees; and if he will make a statement. [56]

Miss Widdecombe: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) on 26 October, *Official Report* column *759*.

DEFENCE

Munitions (Dumping at Sea)

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if his Department will list the weapons material dumped in Hurd Deep in the English channel; [613]

(2) if his Department will give details of the sea dumping disposal programme conducted by his Department in the dumping site 400 miles south-west of Lands End; [614]

(3) what records relating to chemical weapons and munitions dumping operations in Hurd Deep until 1973 and off the continental shelf until January 1993 exist in his Department. [615]

Mr. Soames: No chemical warfare munitions were disposed of at these sites. Details of sea disposals of CW munitions were provided in my previous answer of 20 October 1995, *Official Report*, col *387*. In the immediate post war period approximately 25,000 tons of British and 50,000 tons of captured German conventional munitions were dumped at Hurd Deep but no record of subsequent dumping operations at this site until its use was discontinued in 1973 appear to have survived. Surviving records which have been identified to date show that between 1973 and 1985 up to 2,000 tons of conventional munitions were disposed of annually at the deep water dump site situated approximately 400 miles south west of Lands End, off the continental shelf. From 1985 until October 1992 when the sea dumping of munitions was terminated the annual disposals were as follows, 904 tons; 1,882 tons; 1,565 tons; 3,244 tons; 1,544 tons; 1,775 tons; 1,093 tons and 8,764 tons.

Dr. Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what is his assessment of the legality of the 1976 emergency dump in Beaufort's dyke in relation to the Oslo convention for the prevention of marine pollution by dumping from ships and aircraft; [612]

(2) if he will list the weapons material dumped during the 1976 emergency dump in Beaufort's dyke in the North sea. [611]

Mr. Soames: The emergency MOD disposal in 1976 involved two cases of heavily corroded 40mm shells. The emergency dumping of certain waste materials subject to the provisions of the Oslo convention is permissible if the waste in question cannot be disposed of on land without "unacceptable danger or damage". Given their recorded condition, the disposal of these munition items on land would have constituted such an "unacceptable danger".

Dr. Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans his Department has to monitor the chemical weapons and munitions dumping sites in the sea surrounding the British Isles. [610]

Mr. Soames: My Department has no plans to monitor disused munition dump sites.

Dr. Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the date of the last sea-dumping by his Department of surplus ordnance off the British Isles. [446]

Mr. Soames: My Department ceased all sea-dumping of conventional ammunition and explosive stocks in October 1992 in line with the OSPAR convention which came into force on 1 January 1993.

Ships for Sale

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, if he will list all the *(a)* surface ships and *(b)* submarines currently on the market for sale by his Department. [462]

Mr. Arbuthnot:

(a) Surface ships on the market for sale

Leander Class Frigates

HMS Sirius

HMS Scylla

HMS Hermione

HMS Jupiter

Bird Class Patrol Craft

HMS Redpole

HMS Cygnet

HMS Kingfisher

Ocean Going Tug

RMAS Roysterer

Dog Class Tugs

RMAS Foxhound

RMAS Labrador

Fender Barge

RMAS Pauline Elizabeth

Girl Class Tug

RMAS Daphne

Triton Class Tug

RMAS Nancy

Fleet Tender

RMAS Lydford

Water Carrier

RMAS Waterspout

Various lighters and other small unnamed vessels

(b) Submarines on the market for sale

Upholder Class Submarines

HMS Upholder

HMS Unseen

HMS Unicorn

HMS Ursula

West Freugh Range

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will list the explosions, together with their dates, which have occurred at his Department's West Freugh military range in the last two years; [214]

(2) what activities are carried out at his Department's West Freugh military range; [216]

(3) if an investigation has been carried out into the explosion at his Department's West Freugh military range on 19 October; and if he will make a statement. [215]

Mr. Arbuthnot: These matters are for the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency. I have asked the chief executive, DERA to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from John Chisholm to Dr. David Clark, dated 20 November 1995:

Your three questions regarding activities at the West Freugh range and the recent accidental explosion on 19 October have been passed to me to reply as Chief Executive of the Defence Research and Evaluation Agency (DERA) which includes the West Freugh site as part of the Defence Test and Evaluation Organisation (DTEO) division of the Agency. I am responding to all three questions in this letter.

You asked for details of the activities carried out at the West Freugh site for a list of explosions that had occurred there in the last two years. The DTEO Weapons Range at West Freugh offers the capability to undertake weapon trials on a fully instrumented range with comprehensive customer support facilities. Trials can include both development and in-service activities in the fields of bombing, short range surface-to-air and air-to-surface missile firings, laser gun firings, weapon system designator, and explosive trials. There has been only one unplanned explosion at West Freugh in the last two years, that of 19 October 1995, in which two DERA personnel were injured.

Your third question asked about an inquiry into the incident of 19 October. The Managing Director of DTEO has set up a formal Committee of Inquiry specifically to investigate the incident. This is currently gathering the detailed evidence to establish what happened and is making recommendations accordingly. We are also in touch with the Health and Safety Executive.

Attack Helicopter

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the *(a)* current total estimated cost and in service date and *(b)* original total estimated cost and in service date of the Army's attack helicopter. [458]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The current total estimated cost of the attack helicopter programme is £2.5 billion and, at the same price base, is about £120 million more than the estimated total programme cost when the competitive tendering and assessment phase was approved in 1991. The preferred in service date at that time was December 1997 but the later date of December 1998 was included in the invitation to tender. Following the conclusion of the competition, the in service date is currently estimated as 2000. This remains subject to confirmation in the continuing contract negotiations.

Dr. Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the progress made on the development of the Army's attack helicopter. [445]

Mr. Arbuthnot: I receive regular updates on the progress of major programmes such as the attack helicopter. Following the selection of the WAH64 aircraft to meet the Army's requirement for an attack helicopter, contractual negotiations are continuing with Westland

Helicopters Ltd. Development of the McDonnell Douglas AH64D Longbow Apache for the US Army, on which the United Kingdom's aircraft will be based, has been completed and the production phase has been approved.

Departmental Running Costs

Mr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what percentage saving of total running costs his Department expects to save in the next two financial years. [457]

Mr. Soames: The MOD's operating costs plans are set out in the "Statement on the Defence Estimates 1995", table 13, page 137.

F22 Aircraft

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions his Department has had with representatives from Lockheed Martin concerning the purchase of F22 aircraft. [464]

Mr. Arbuthnot: None.

Dr. Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what consideration he has given to the purchase of American F22 aircraft; and if he will make a statement. [466]

Mr. Arbuthnot: We are not considering the purchase of American F22 aircraft.

Dr. Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the reports received from *(a)* his Departmental staff or *(b)* his independent advisers concerning the purchase leasing of F22 aircraft from America. [465]

Mr. Arbuthnot: My right hon. Friend has received no such reports.

Low Flying

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the number of complaints received from the borders region about tactical low flying sorties over the area over the past five years. [443]

Mr. Soames: The numbers of complaints and inquiries about military low flying received by my Department over the past five years from low flying areas 16 and 20T, which cover the borders area, are as follows:

1991: 291
1992: 486
1993: 583
1994: 599
'1995: 774

'Up to 31 October 1995.

European Court of Justice

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if it is his Department's policy to obey European Court judgments. [456]

Mr. Soames: The United Kingdom courts would give effect to the judgments of the European Court of Justice or the court of first instance as necessary and my Department would, of course, obey them.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Employment Disputes

Mr. Butler: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans he has for taking forward the proposals contained in the Green Paper "Resolving Employment Rights Disputes: Options for Reform" [1275]

Mr. Lang: A large number of responses to the Green Paper was received and the Government have given careful consideration to all views submitted. Most of the Green Paper proposals were widely supported and accordingly the Government have decided to implement them.

The Government continue to believe that employment disputes should, where possible, be resolved in-house through employers' own procedures. However, they recognise the reservations expressed by many responding to the Green Paper that the proposal to require employees to attempt to resolve disputes with their employers before being able to make an application to an industrial tribunal might lead to increased delays and complexity in tribunal procedures, rather than alleviating them. The Government have decided not to take forward this proposal.

The Government also recognise the concerns voiced about the proposals to require chairmen to sit alone, without lay members, in certain cases and have decided not to introduce any such statutory requirement. However, the Government are minded to extend the existing discretion for chairmen to sit alone where they consider this appropriate for certain technical cases, such as the determination of entitlement to redundancy payments.

The Government believe that the remaining proposals will, when implemented, make a significant contribution to easing the burdens facing the industrial tribunals. Some of the proposals will be modified in the light of responses to the Green Paper, and where necessary further informal consultation will be carried out with interested parties. Detailed proposals will be brought forward when a suitable legislative opportunity arises.

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has undertaken a separate review and is considering the implications of the responses for that jurisdiction.

Patents (Genetic Research)

Ms Lynne: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what consideration he has given to the establishment of limits to the patentability of life; what plans he has to exclude human, animal and plant tissue from patentability; and if he will make a statement. [621]

Mr. Ian Taylor: Patents are granted only for inventions which meet the statutory requirements of novelty, inventive step and industrial applicability. A patent would not be granted for any invention, the publication or exploitation of which would generally be expected to encourage offensive, immoral or anti-social behaviour. Apart from the exclusion of plant and animal varieties from patentability, inventions involving human, animal or plant material have to satisfy the same criteria as other inventions. The Government agree with the view of the House of Commons Science and Technology Committee in its recent report on human genetics that

there is a role for patenting in the application of the results of genetic research. We have no plans to change the law in this respect.

Ministerial Travel, London

Mr. MacShane: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) how many times in the last year he has used the London underground while on official business; [361]

(2) how many times in the last year he has used London Transport buses while on official business. [576]

Mr. Lang: None.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Acts of Parliament

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will list the Acts of Parliament and consolidation Acts that affect local government that have been introduced by his Department since January 1994. [26]

Mr. Freeman: No Acts of Parliament or consolidated Acts that affect local government have been introduced by my Department since January 1994.

TREASURY

Correspondence

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when the hon. Member for Walsall, North will receive a reply to his letter of 25 September ref. 0595/43 concerning a constituent. [219]

Mr. Jack: I am considering the hon. Member's letter and hope to reply soon.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Courts (Congestion)

33. **Mr. Mackinlay:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what measures he proposes to alleviate congestion in the courts. [519]

Mr. John M. Taylor: Court sittings in the Crown and county courts are being maintained at a level above that required to deal with incoming work. For example the Crown Court plans to sit 90,000 days this year, the highest on record. As a result, the number of outstanding cases is the lowest in over five years.

Legal Aid

34. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what representations he has received about the grant of legal aid to the seemingly wealthy. [520]

Mr. John M. Taylor: There were 50 responses to the consultation exercise held earlier this year on the grants of legal aid to the apparently wealthy. Since that time there have been 14 inquiries on this issue from Members of Parliament or the public.

35. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what new proposals he has to improve the legal aid system. [521]

Mr. Taylor: The Lord Chancellor published a Green Paper on the future of legal aid in May. Over 180 responses have been received. These are being analysed. A series of meetings are being arranged with some of the major respondents to allow them to expand on their views. The Lord Chancellor intends to make an announcement on the outcome of the consultation process in the new year.

36. **Mr. Steen:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will make a statement as to the level of the legal aid budget in each of the last three years. [522]

Mr. Taylor: Net expenditure on legal aid in each of the last three years was as follows, £1.1 billion, £1.2 billion and £1.3 billion. This represents an increase in expenditure of 19 per cent. over the three-year period.

During the same period the number of people helped rose from 3.3 million to 3.5 million, an increase of 6 per cent.

Civil Justice Review

37. **Mr. Hawkins:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what improvements are planned following the civil justice review. [523]

Mr. John M. Taylor: The Lord Chancellor has welcomed the improvements recommended in Lord Woolf's review of civil justice and implementation of some has already begun. He recently announced his decision to increase the small claims arbitration limit from £1,000 to £3,000.

Trials (Press Coverage)

Mr. Soley: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what consideration he has given to press coverage of trials. [512]

Mr. John M. Taylor: The administration of justice should, so far as possible, be public. Subject to certain statutory safeguards, including the law relating to contempt of court, the coverage of trials is a matter for the press itself.

House Conveyances

Mr. Ian Bruce: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many house conveyances were registered by the Land Registry offices in each of the past five years. [518]

Mr. John M. Taylor: Statistics relating to house conveyances are not separately maintained by the Land Registry. During the five years in question, transfers of all property, including house conveyances, registered by the Land Registry have remained consistent within the range of 1.4 to 1.6 million. Currently, approximately 88 per cent. of transfers relate to residential property.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

Pledging Conference

Ms Glenda Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what pledges the Government re-affirmed on spending for least developed countries at the UN's intergovernmental meeting; and if he will make a statement. [220]

Mr. Hanley: The UN pledging conference for operational activities for development took place in New York on 1 and 2 November. In common with many other donor countries, the United Kingdom made no pledges.

Aid Statistics

Ms Glenda Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what proportion of GNP the United Kingdom has spent in aid to the least developed countries in the last three years for which figures are available; and if he will list the countries. [223]

Mr. Hanley: The information requested is as follows:

PROPORTION OF UNITED KINGDOM GNP SPENT IN OFFICIAL DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE TO LEAST DEVELOPED COUNTRIES (LLDCs)

Percentage of UK GNP to LLDCs[1]

1991: 0.10

1992: 0.10

1993: 0.08

The countries defined as least developed in the period covered were:

Afghanistan
Bangladesh
Benin
Bhutan
Botswana
Burkina Faso
Burma
Burundi
Cambodia
Cape Verde Islands
Central African Republic
Chad
Comoros
Djibouti
Equatorial Guinea
Ethiopia
Gambia
Guinea
Guinea-Bissau
Haiti
Kiribati
Laos
Lesotho
Liberia
Madagascar
Malawi
Maldive Republic
Mali
Mauritania
Mozambique
Nepal
Niger
Rwanda
Sao Tome and Principe
Sierra Leone
Solomon Islands
Somalia
Sudan
Tanzania
Togo
Tuvalu
Uganda
Vanuatu
Western Samoa
Yemen
Zaire
Zambia

Note

[1]Comprises bilateral expenditure and imputed multilateral flows, i.e. making allowances for contributions through multilateral organisations, calculated using the geographical distribution disbursements for the year of reference.

Source

OECD–DAC chairmans report.

Primary Education

Ms Glenda Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to increase his Department's expenditure on primary education programmes. [221]

Mr. Hanley: Individual country aid strategies are agreed with the countries concerned, in accordance with their needs and priorities for United Kingdom assistance. The ODA's policy for support to education, formulated in 1994, lays emphasis on the provision of basic education, which includes primary education.

In the last year, major new projects to support primary education have been agreed with: Malawi, £7.3 million; Pakistan, £7.9 million; and India, £46 million.

Plans are currently being developed for further project support at the primary level in a number of countries. It is not possible to give exact levels of expenditure on primary education prior to their finalisation.

PRIME MINISTER

Gulf War Syndrome

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Prime Minister what consideration he is giving to the recent findings of the Select Committee on Defence in regard to Gulf war syndrome; what action he is taking and if he will make a statement. [110]

The Prime Minister: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence will be considering the points made by the House of Commons Defence Committee very carefully and will reply formally in due course.

French Nuclear Tests

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Prime Minister what percentage of representations he has received on the French nuclear tests have supported the views of the Prime Minister and President Chirac. [349]

The Prime Minister: I have received a substantial number of representations expressing a range of views.

Stonehenge

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Prime Minister who is responsible for co-ordinating Government policy concerning the future of the Stonehenge site. [376]

The Prime Minister: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for National Heritage.

Nigeria

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a full statement of the conclusions reached at the Commonwealth Heads of Government conference regarding the situation of the Ogoni people and the death sentence on Mr. Saro-Wiwa. [985]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold) on 16 November, *Official Report*, columns *6–7*.

Acts of Parliament

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the Acts of Parliament and consolidation Acts that affect local government that have been introduced by his Department since January 1994. [47]

The Prime Minister: For these purposes my Office is part of the Cabinet Office (Office of Public Service). I refer the hon. Member to the reply given today by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster.

Ministerial Transport, London

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Prime Minister how many times in the last year he has used *(a)* London Buses and *(b)* London Underground while on official business. [375]

The Prime Minister: I am not usually able to undertake such journeys.

Duke of Windsor

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Prime Minister what public records are held in respect of communications held between his predecessor and Mr. Mackenzie King, Prime Minister of Canada, about the marriage of the late Duke of Windsor; and if he will make a statement. [288]

The Prime Minister: Communications that concern the marriage of the late Duke of Windsor took place between the then Prime Minister, Mr. Stanley Baldwin, and Mr. Mackenzie King in late 1936. Like all papers relating to the abdication, these are currently closed until 2037 by agreement between the then Prime Minister and Lord Chancellor in 1976. However, as with the generality of papers held for more than 30 years, these papers will be reviewed and, while it is expected that many will continue to to be sensitive for some time to come, it is not ruled out that it may be possible to release them earlier than 2037.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Prime Minister (1) what consideration led to the decision not to release to the Public Record Office certain papers relating to the conduct of the Duke of Windsor during the second world war, as indicated in his answer of 3 November, *Official Report*, column *478*; [342]

(2) if copies of all communications this century between heads of state of other countries and the United Kingdom monarch are *(a)* lodged in the Public Record Office or *(b)* lodged exclusively in the royal archives; and whether all such documents are available for public inspection regardless of where they are lodged. [904]

The Prime Minister: Documents held by Government Departments are released to the Public Record Office after 30 years in accordance with the Public Records Acts 1958 and 1967, unless they meet criteria which allow them, with the Lord Chancellor's approval, to be withheld for longer. These criteria, which apply equally to records relating to the royal family, were recently revised and are set out in the White Paper on open government, Command Paper 2290 published in July 1993. Records withheld for longer than 30 years under the earlier criteria are being re-reviewed in the light of the revised criteria.

Copies of communications belonging to the sovereign are lodged in the royal archives and access is a matter for the Keeper of the Royal Archives.

Royal Family

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Prime Minister to what extent his duty to act as the principal adviser to the Queen extends also to the Prince and Princess of Wales. [434]

The Prime Minister: Ministers may on occasions provide advice to other members of the royal family.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Prime Minister what communications or discussions he has had in the past year with Prime Ministers of those countries where Her Majesty the Queen is also head of state about matters relating to the monarchy. [431]

The Prime Minister: None.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Prime Minister (1) if he will make it his policy to introduce legislation further amending the Regency Act 1937; [433]

(2) if he will make it his policy to introduce legislation to amend the Royal Marriages Act 1772; [432]

(3) if he will make it his policy to introduce legislation to permit *(a)* the monarch and *(b)* heirs to the throne, to contract a morganatic marriage. [287]

The Prime Minister: No.

SCOTLAND

Closed Circuit Television

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to extend the provision of closed circuit television to communities in Scotland on a

similar basis as the scheme presently operated in England; and if local authorities will be limited to asking for closed circuit television in respect of city or town centre locations. [341]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My right hon. Friend announced last month that funding will be made available, starting in 1996–97, to extend the use of closed circuit television in Scottish communities. Details of the scheme will be announced later this year.

Trunk Road Programme

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give a starting date for work on *(a)* the A96 Kintore bypass and *(b)* the Keith, Blackburn and Tipperty bypasses. [340]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My right hon. Friend will make clear his plans for the trunk road programme as soon as possible after the conclusions of this year's public expenditure survey.

HEALTH

NHS Supplies Authority

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects the report of the National Audit Office into the NHS supplies authority to be published. [203]

Mr. Sackville: Publication of this report is a matter for the Comptroller and Auditor-General.

Cervical Smear Tests

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what discussions he has had with the Berkshire family health services authority with respect to the provision of NHS and private cervical smear tests by the Boundary House GP practice in Bracknell, Berkshire; what is his Department's policy on GPs advocating private cervical smear tests which can be provided more frequently than NHS cervical smear tests; and if he will make a statement. [93]

Mr. Sackville: None. Guidelines issued by the Department of Health say that women aged between 20 and 64 years should be invited for cervical screening at least every five years. Berkshire health commission is complying fully with these guidelines by ensuring the Boundary House GP practice provides cervical screening on a five-yearly basis. Where women request more frequent screening, GPs will provide information on where this is available.

Dental Services

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what plans he has to make a statement on the progress of his talks with representatives of the dental profession to discuss the proposals announced in the Government's statement on NHS dentistry of 5 April, *Official Report* columns *1214–15*, and when he will implement them; [94]

(2) if he will estimate the cost of relating payments given to dentists to disease levels in children most in need as announced in the Government's statement on NHS dentistry on 5 April; and how he is planning to meet this expected expenditure; [95]

(3) if he expects to maintain the current levels of gross payment to dentists working in the NHS; and if he will make a statement; [96]

(4) if he will estimate the selected costs and potential savings from the introduction of more rigorous prior approval procedures as announced in the Government's statement of NHS dentistry of 5 April; [97]

(5) if he will estimate the number of patients who will be deregistered as a result of the proposals announced in the Government's statement of NHS dentistry of 5 April; [98]

(6) if he plans to produce criteria to evaluate the effectiveness of any proposals announced in the Government's statement of NHS dentistry of 5 April that are implemented. [100]

Mr. Malone: The reform proposals I announced to the House on 5 April 1995 fall into two parts. For the longer term, the Government intend to introduce a system of local contracts between health authorities and dental practices. This requires primary legislation and would need to be carefully piloted and evaluated.

For the medium term, the Government put forward measures to reform the current system. Discussions with the General Dental Services Committee on the detailed development of these proposals are making progress. We hope to move to implementation of the measures from 1 April 1996.

The issue of relating payments to disease levels is one of those currently under discussion with the profession, as are the proposals for more rigorous prior approval. We would seek to minimise any additional administration costs arising from greater rigour. There is no reason why patients should be deregistered as a consequence of the reforms which are intended to create a secure and stable future for NHS dentistry. The proposals should lead to an increase in the number of children registered.

The level of gross payments to dentists working in the NHS is determined by a number of factors, including the annual recommendation of the Doctors' and Dentists' Review Body.

The measures we hope to introduce in April are developments of the existing remuneration system for dentists rather than a new untried system. Nevertheless, we intend to keep their impact under close review.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what discussions he has had with members of the dental profession concerning the development of the Community Dental Service as announced in the Government's statement on NHS dentistry of 5 April. [99]

Mr. Malone: We are currently discussing this issue with, among others, the joint negotiating forum for community dentistry at the British Dental Association.

Leukaemia

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what plan he has to hold an investigation into the incidence of leukaemia amongst children in the Pembroke

road area of Northampton; and if he has consulted the Northamptonshire health authority about this; [101]

(2) what representations he has received from medical professionals and members of the public with regard to the incidence of leukaemia amongst children in the Pembroke road area of Northampton; [102]

(3) what estimate he can give of the comparative incidence of leukaemia amongst children nationally and in the Pembroke road area of Northampton. [103]

Mr. Sackville: I understand that Northamptonshire health authority has been investigating the situation and expects to publish a progress report shortly. The hon. Member may wish to contact Mr. Simon Schanschieff, chairman of the authority, for details.

Administration Costs

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list for (i) 1985, (ii) 1986, (iii) 1987 and (iv) 1988 expenditure on administration by health authorities. [104]

Mr. Malone: The expenditure on headquarters administration by health authorities in England for 1984–85, 1985–86, 1986–87 and 1987–88 is shown in the table.

£ thousands

	Expenditure
1984–85	416,173
1985–86	402,126
1986–87	434,739
1987–88	492,776

Note:
The figures represent the total revenue expenditure on pay and accommodation cost of staff of all disciplines and their support staff employed at headquarters levels. These figures are not comparable with those for later years as there have been changes in the roles and responsibilities of health authorities, together with changes in accounting policies.
Source:
The annual accounts of district and regional health authorities and the special health authorities for the London postgraduate teaching hospitals.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list for each year since 1985 Department's expenditure on administration costs. [105]

Mr. Sackville: Details of the Department's administration costs are provided in the Department's annual reports for 1992–93 to 1994–95, Cm 1913, 1993–94 to 1995–96, Cm 2212, and 1995–96 to 1997–98, Cm 2812 copies of which are available in the Library. Figures for the years 1986–87 to 1988–89 are an estimated apportionment to the Department of Health prior to the split of the DHSS in 1990–91. Department of Health administration costs are not available prior to 1986–87.

Employment of Children

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on his Department's policy on the protection of child workers. [608]

Mr. Bowis: We have a comprehensive legal system in place to protect the health, welfare and education of children who work. I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave my hon. Friend the Member of Gillingham (Mr. Couchman) on 30 October, *Official Report*, columns *42-43* detailing my recently announced proposals for some minor improvements to that system.

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will estimate the number of children working over 10 hours per week; and if he will make a statement. [609]

Mr. Bowis: Such information as is available centrally was published in the April 1995 edition of the *Employment Gazette*, copies of which are available in the Library.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Liable Relatives

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the number of claims for income support by liable relatives that ceased within four weeks of Department of Social Security action; and what were the annual benefit savings produced in *(a)* historic and *(b)* current prices as a result of these actions in each year since 1989. [624]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: The information is not available in the format requested.

Income Support

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list *(a)* the number of income support claimants with deductions from benefit and *(b)* the average amount of deduction for each category of deduction for (i) 1988 and (ii) the latest date available adopting the figures contained in his Department's annual statistical inquiry. [622]

Mr. Roger Evans: The information is set out in the tables.

Deduction[2]	*Number of claimants*[3]	*Average amount £*
DEDUCTIONS FROM INCOME SUPPORT: 1988[1]		
Electricity	152,000	9.22
Gas	152,000	8.59
Mortgage Interest	7,000	24.20
Service charges for fuel and water included in rent	18,000	4.65
Rent arrears and other housing costs	94,000	2.39
Board and lodging direct	10,000	61.18
Recovery of overpayment	66,000	3.40
Social fund loan recovery	31,000	5.24
Other deductions	6,000	4.56
DEDUCTIONS FROM INCOME SUPPORT: 1994		
Electricity:		
Current charges only	27,000	8.62
Including arrears[4]	44,000	11.99
Gas:		
Current charges only	36,000	7.62
Including arrears[4]	185,000	10.49
Mortgage Interest:		
Current costs only[5]	294,000	32.23
Arrears cases[4]	137,000	52.70

Deduction[2]	Number of claimants[1]	Average amount £
Water and Sewerage:		
Current charges only	22,000	3.41
Including arrears[4]	217,000	5.83
Rent arrears and other housing costs:		
Current charges only	14,000	58.82
Including arrears[4]	151,000	4.90
Community charge higher arrears only	27,000	3.59
Community charge lower arrears only	432,000	2.29
Council tax arrears only	33,000	2.30
Fines recovery	8,000	2.30
Child support	34,000	2.33
Recovery of overpayment	115,000	4.09
Social fund loan recovery	663,000	6.37

Notes:

[1] Figures for 1988 include cases with deductions for current charges plus those with deductions for arrears.

[2] Claimants can have more than one type of deduction.

[3] Figures are rounded to the nearest thousand.

[4] This category includes cases with current cost deductions.

[5] Debt in mortgage interest cases not a prerequisite for deductions to occur.

Source:

"Income Support Statistics Annual Enquiry 1988" and "Quarterly Enquiry November 1994"

Child Support

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what facilities there are for newly separated couples to draw up an amicable and binding child maintenance agreement without the involvement of the Child Support Agency in cases where neither party is a recipient of income support, family credit or disability working allowance. [625]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: All such couples are free to do so.

Ms Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what the level of child support would be in 1995 if it had been uprated in line with prices since 1965. [1058]

Mr. Mitchell: The information is in the table.

	First child £	Second child £	Third child £
Under age 11	9.16	11.98	12.58
Aged 11-15	11.17	13.89	14.60
Aged 16 and over	13.19	15.91	16.61

1. The amounts quoted are those which would have been payable from April 1995. 2. The table shows the combined value of child tax allowance and family allowance and assumes payment of tax at the standard rate.

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on the outcome of the recent examinations of child support systems within the United States of America. [620]

Mr. Mitchell: This is a matter for the United States' federal and state Governments.

Child Support Agency

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many employees of the Child Support Agency have *(a)* been dismissed and *(b)* faced other disciplinary action from each office of the Child Support Agency indicating the month and year that such action was taken for (i) the improper use of confidential information and (ii) other improper behaviour. [623]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: The information requested could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Child Benefit

Ms Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what total gross and net savings in 1995–96 resulted from not uprating child benefit in line with prices since 1979. [444]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: If child benefit had been uprated annually in line with the retail prices index and with the normal rounding to the nearest 5p, the April 1979 rate—£4.00 per week per child—would be £10.85 from April 1995. It is estimated that the total savings in 1995–96 from paying £10.40 for the eldest qualifying child and £8.45 for each other child, instead of £10.85 for every child, are about £900 million. The corresponding net savings, after allowing for normal adjustments to other benefits are around £650 million.

Extra help has been made available to less well-off families since 1988 through the income-related benefits. This will be worth around £1.2 billion in 1995–96. The overall expenditure on families has increased by 121 per cent. in real terms between 1978–79 and 1995–96.

TRANSPORT

Search and Rescue Helicopters

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what new assessment he has made of the safety implications of the changes made in the past year in the helicopter search and rescue service. [355]

Mr. Norris: The only change in search and rescue helicopter provision in the past year has been the withdrawal of the Royal Navy helicopter at Portland and its replacement, on a temporary basis, by a coastguard helicopter. This has no adverse implications for safety. At the same time, we have established an inter-departmental helicopter review group to examine the national requirement for helicopters for search and rescue, and how this might most effectively and efficiently be met, as part of an integrated approach to search and rescue. The group is due to report to Ministers in the new year.

Drowning Incident

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport following the drowning of Pamela Drew on Sunday 5 November at Musselwick, Marloes, Pembrokeshire, if he will list the times *(a)* the coastguard was informed of the emergency, *(b)* Littlehaven lifeboat was informed, *(c)* Chivenor SAR helicopter was informed, *(d)* Littlehaven lifeboat was launched, *(e)* Chivenor SAR helicopter took off, *(f)* Littlehaven lifeboat spotted casualties, *(g)* Littlehaven lifeboat got casualties on board,

(h) of the arrival of Chivenor SAR helicopter over lifeboat, *(i)* casualties were winched on board the helicopter and *(j)* of the arrival of casualties at Withybush hospital, Haverfordwest. [905]

Mr. Norris: I have asked the chief executive of the Coastguard Agency to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from C. J. Harris to Mr. Nick Ainger, dated 20 November 1995:

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the drowning of Pamela Drew on Sunday 5 November at Musselwick, Marloes, Pembrokeshire.

The times given are in Universal Co-ordinated Time (UTC)

(a) 1654

(b) 1656

(c) 1656

(d) 1702

(e) 1703

(f) not recorded

(g) 1724

(h) 1733

(i) 1738

(j) 1745

Abnormal Loads

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what financial arrangements are made when abnormal loads are moved on motorways. [343]

Mr. Watts: The suitability of any route for the movement of an abnormal load has to be notified and cleared by the highways authorities and police forces involved. The vehicle operator or his employer is required to meet the cost of any surveys of structures involved, any strengthening required, and in some cases, for the provision of police escorts.

Bull Bars

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received on the danger of bull bars from *(a)* coroners, *(b)* industry, *(c)* road safety organisations and *(d)* the public. [353]

Mr. Norris: The number of representation the Department has received over the past two years is as follows:

	Coroners	*Industry*	*Road safety organisations*	*Public*
1994	0	0	0	64
1995	0	19	5	364

Acts of Parliament

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the Acts of Parliament including consolidation Acts that affect local government that have been introduced by his Department since January 1994. [36]

Mr. Norris: Schedule 6 to the Channel Tunnel Rail Link Bill, which was introduced by my right hon. Friend's predecessor on 23 November 1994, modifies the functions of planning authorities in relation to development authorised by part I of the Bill.

Consolidation Bills are a responsibility of my right hon. and learned Friends the Lord Chancellor and the Attorney-General.

Ministerial Transport, London

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many times in the last year he has used *(a)* London Buses and *(b)* London Underground while on official business. [414]

Sir George Young: I travel on London Transport buses and on the London Underground both as a constituency MP and in a personal capacity. For short journeys in London, I often walk.

East London Line (Correspondence)

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he will answer the letters from the hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford, of 18 October, 26 October, 30 October and 9 November concerning the closure of the East London Line. [200]

Mr. Norris: I replied to the letters of 18 October, 26 October and 30 October on 13 November. A reply to the hon. Member's letter of 9 November will follow shortly.

Ministerial Travel (British Rail)

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many times in the last year he has used British Rail while on official business. [420]

Sir George Young: I travel regularly to work by British Rail and I have used British Rail in the course of nine official visits since July this year.

Road Traffic (Driving Instruction by Disabled Persons) Act

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport for what reasons the Road Traffic (Driving Instruction by Disabled Persons) Act 1993 has not fully been brought into force; and when he intends to do so. [199]

Mr. Norris: It has not been possible to bring this Act into force because the implementing regulations and related amendments to other regulations have proved more complex than was expected. I am pleased to be able to say that the difficulties have been resolved and we now intend to make the regulations to enable the Act to come into force in the first half of next year.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Set Aside

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what proposals he has to ensure that set-aside land contributes a greater benefit to the environment. [351]

Mr. Baldry: Proposals have recently been agreed that allow land removed from production under agri-environmental and forestry schemes to count against set-aside requirements; this will allow longer term environmental gains.

Fisheries Council

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the outcome of the European Union Fisheries Council, held on 15 November listing all votes, and all decisions which were determined by unanimity or without dissension. [436]

Mr. Baldry: The Fisheries Council which was to have been held on 15 November was cancelled, following successful negotiations at official level on fish guide prices for 1996.

Agriculture Council

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the outcome of the European Union Agriculture Council, held on 13 to 14 November listing all votes, and all decisions which were determined by unanimity or without dissension. [437]

Mr. Baldry: The Agriculture Council meeting scheduled for 13 and 14 November did not take place. It has been re-scheduled for 29 and 30 November. My right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food will report to the House on its outcome in the usual way.

Common Agriculture Policy

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what proposals he has to recoup moneys lost in fraud and mismanagement of the CAP in Britain. [350]

Mr. Baldry: EC finance regulations place an obligation on all member states to recover sums of money lost as a result of irregularities or negligence. The Government take their responsibilities very seriously and every effort is made to effect recovery from CAP beneficiaries where it is established that they are in receipt of money to which they were not entitled.

WALES

Welsh Development Agency

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what consultations he has had with the chairman of the Welsh Development Agency concerning the revenue shortfall in the land and buildings assets sales programme agreed with the agency; and if he will recalculate the grant-in-aid level to take account of the shortfall in *(a)* the remainder of this financial year and *(b)* 1996–97; [1053]

(2) if he will make a statement on the Welsh Development Agency's announcement of a suspension of all expenditure other than direct inward investment programmes for the remainder of the financial year. [1052]

Mr. Hague: I regularly meet the chairman of the Welsh Development Agency to discuss a wide range of issues.

The agency has decided to adjust its programmes in line with its priorities to take account of the lower than anticipated level of receipts this financial year.

Grant-in-aid to the agency for 1995–96 was determined last year along with my Department's commitments to other Welsh programmes. I will be announcing the position on all Welsh programmes for 1996–97 in December.

Fish Passes

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he has had with the chairman of the Wales region of the National Rivers Authority in relation to the provision of effective fish passes for migratory salmonid and other fish on the weirs on the lower reaches of the River Taff. [1051]

Mr. Hague: None. Fish passes at Radyr weir, Blackweir and the design for the Cardiff barrage fish pass have each received my Department's approval.

South East Wales Ambulance Trust

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what consultations he has had with the chairman of the South East Wales ambulance trust concerning incidents in which Mercedes-Benz Wadham Stringer ambulances have rolled over at low speeds and the removal of all such vehicles in the trust fleet from road duty since 8 November pending a determination of the mechanical explanation for the incidents; [1055]

(2) if he will set up an inquiry into the Mercedes-Benz Wadham Stringer ambulance models used by the South East Wales ambulance trust for the past 18 months and removed from the road since the night of Wednesday, 8 November and if he will make a statement. [1054]

Mr. Hague: This is an operational matter for the trust which has already taken action to ensure the safety of the ambulance fleet.

Emergency Admissions

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what action he proposes to ensure that there are no further closures of emergency admissions to hospitals in West Glamorgan; on how many occasions emergency admissions have been closed since July; how many patients have been refused admission; and if he will make a statement. [218]

Mr. Richards: Hospitals in West Glamorgan have closed to medical emergencies on 44 occasions since the beginning of July. However, no patient has been refused treatment.

This is a matter between the West Glamorgan health authority and local trusts. This issue will be discussed between NHS representatives and the Department shortly when it is hoped that an agreement can be reached on an approach to minimise the risk to patient services both over the coming winter and in the longer term.

Students' Living Standards

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will call for a report to be conducted on the living standards of undergraduate students in Wales; and if he will make a statement. [616]

Mr. Hague: No. The Department for Education and Employment has recently commissioned a survey of student income and expenditure to take place in the current academic year. The survey will be based on a representative sample of full-time home students on higher education courses below postgraduate level at publicly funded institutions in the United Kingdom. The report of the survey's findings will be published in due course.

Inward Investment Shares

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what percentage of jobs created by inward investment in the United Kingdom in each of the past three years are now located in Wales. [345]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The forecast job creation in Wales as a percentage of the United Kingdom total from inward investment by overseas owned companies in the past three years continues to be greater than our proportion of the United Kingdom population at about 13 per cent. in 1992–93, and almost 13 per cent. in 1993–94. In 1994–95 the figure was 8 per cent. These percentages are based upon information provided by companies at the time of the decision to invest and take no account of any subsequent decisions.

St. David's Day

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received to make St. David's day a bank holiday in Wales, and what response he has made to them. [354]

Mr. Hague: I have received a number of representations on this matter. In each case I have advised that Government have no plans to designate St. David's day a public holiday in Wales.

Roadside Signs

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make it his policy to allow rural holiday businesses to display small roadside advertising boards where it is safe and useful for the business's economic viability; and if he will make a statement. [617]

Mr. Hague: My Department has circulated proposals for extending the range of businesses eligible to apply for white on brown directional signs to include all establishments which are considered likely to be used by tourists. We are considering comments received and hope to make an announcement soon.

Civil Service Jobs

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what new proposals he has to increase and safeguard the number of civil service jobs in Wales. [352]

Mr. Hague: The number of civil service jobs in Wales, as elsewhere in the United Kingdom, will be those required for the effective and efficient implementation of Government policies and services.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Nursery Voucher Scheme

Ms Hodge: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what mechanism she proposes to claw back standard spending assessment from local authorities to fund the nursery voucher scheme. [1057]

Mr. Robin Squire: The SSA deduction mechanism proposed is cash neutral for all authorities, provided that the schools that they maintain continue to recruit four-year-olds at present levels.

The sum deducted in 1997–98 will be the product of the voucher value and the number of four-year-olds in maintained provision in 1995–96, taking into account termly variations in attendance. This is only part of total LEA expenditure on under-fives; authorities can continue to spend above the voucher value on full or part-time places for four-year-olds, and on three-year-olds, as they judge appropriate.

The views of local government as a whole will be taken into account in the usual way in determining changes to funding methodology in 1997–98.

Drug Education

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what assessment she has made as to which projects on illegal drug education in Britain have resulted in a decrease in drug use. [347]

Mr. Robin Squire: The 16 innovative drug education and prevention projects supported under the Department's grants for education support and training programme in 1995–96 will be independently evaluated. In addition, the Office for Standards in Education is undertaking a specific study of provision for drug education in schools during this academic year. This will take account of existing research findings on effective drug education and will establish evidence on best practice.

Education Council

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what was the voting record of each member state on items agreed at the meeting of the European Community's Education Council held on 23 October; and if she will make it her practice to include details of all votes, including where there have been no votes, in the future. [441]

Mr. Forth: No formal votes were taken at the 23 October Education Council. A record of votes taken at Education Councils is generally given in the Council secretariat press release. I shall arrange for a copy of the press release about the 23 October Council to be deposited in the Library. Press releases relating to future Councils will be deposited as soon as they are available.

School Sports Fields (Sales)

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is the value of land sold by local authorities formerly used as school sports fields. [509]

Mrs. Gillan: The information requested is not held centrally.

ENVIRONMENT

Ministerial Transport

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many times in the last year he has used the London underground while on official business. [574]

Mr. Gummer: None.

Gritting Lorries

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the number of local authority gritting lorries; and if he will make a statement. [1040]

Sir Paul Beresford: This information is not held centrally.

Local Government (Legislation)

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the Acts of Parliament and consolidation Acts that affect local government that have been introduced by his Department since January 1994. [40]

Sir Paul Beresford: The following Acts that affect local government have been introduced by the Department of the Environment since January 1994:

The Environment Act 1995

The Town and County Planning (Costs of Inquiries etc) Act 1995

Local Government Reorganisation

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how much the Isle of Wight council has borrowed from his Department for the costs of setting up the unitary authority; what are the terms of these loans; and when they have to be repaid. [15]

Sir Paul Beresford: The Department does not lend money to authorities. We have introduced a scheme that, through the issue of supplementary credit approvals, allows local authorities to borrow from normal sources—Public Works Loans Board, money markets, for example—to cover one-off transitional costs of local government reorganisation. To date, the Isle of Wight council has been informed that the Department is prepared to issue SCAs to the value of £1.74 million in respect of eligible costs under the transitional costs scheme. Records are not held centrally on the terms and conditions of loans taken out by local authorities.

Land Government Finance

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to report on the progress of the review of the calculation of the area cost adjustment in the standard spending assessment. [19]

Sir Paul Beresford: The local authority associations are co-operating with us in carrying out the review. We and they are identifying the team which will conduct the review. It is our intention to seek a report of the review by June 1996. This would allow discussion and consideration of any possible changes to our current methodology in time for the 1997–98 settlement.

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to change the area cost adjustment element of standard spending assessments; and if he will make a statement. [106]

Mr. Curry: We have no plans to change the present methodology by which we calculate the area cost adjustment until we have a robust system to put in its place.

On 16 October, I proposed to the local authority associations an independent review of the adjustment. The aim is to establish a method of carrying out the adjustment which commands the widest degree of acceptance among authorities in all parts of the country, has a sound conceptual basis and is practical to apply.

The review will be steered by a leading academic together with someone knowledgeable about local government finance, nominated by the local authority associations, and someone familiar with central Government processes, nominated by the Secretary of State. I hope we shall soon be able to announce who those people will be.

Research will be commissioned to assist the review in its work. We shall seek a report from the review in June 1996.

Local Authority Homes (Sales)

Mrs. Maddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his estimate of the total number of local authority homes now sold in the United Kingdom, giving the total amount of money raised since 1983; and if he will make a statement. [453]

Mr. Clappison: In England, about 1.1 million local authority homes were sold for owner-occupation between January 1983 and June 1995. The money raised from those sales, after lending for council house purchase, is estimate to be over £16 billion.

In addition, there were more than 200,000 local authority sales to housing associations and other types of ownership in the same period. Information on the value of these sales before October 1988 is not available, but the net receipts of the 188,000 sales after this date is some £1.6 billion.

For information on sales elsewhere in the United Kingdom, I refer the hon. Member to the Secretaries of State for Wales, for Scotland and for Northern Ireland.

Tenancies (Legislation)

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations his Department has received concerning his proposals to amend legislation

following the consultation in 1994 on access to local authority and housing association tenancies. [357]

Mr. Curry: There has been a steady flow of correspondence about different aspects of the policy since we announced in July 1994 our decision to proceed with legislation.

Unfit Properties

Mrs. Maddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will estimate for each county in the United Kingdom the number of unfit properties, together with the distribution of these properties by tenure; and if he will make a statement. [455]

Mr. Clappison: Local authorities in England are requested to provide information on dwellings in their area which are unfit—that is, fail to meet all the fitness criteria in section 83 of schedule 9 to the 1989 Local Government and Housing Act—in their annual housing investment programme returns. Separate figures are requested for local authority, housing association, other public sector and private sector dwellings. The figures provided are local authorities' own estimates and are not necessarily compiled on a consistent basis.

The reported estimates for 1 April 1994, the latest date for which figures are available, are given in the 1994 "HIP1 All Items Print", a copy of which is in the Library. The print includes county totals where estimates have been provided by all the authorities in the county.

For information for the rest of the United Kingdom I would refer the hon. Member to the Secretaries of State for Scotland, for Wales and for Northern Ireland.

Homelessness

Mrs. Maddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will provide a breakdown of the number of people who were accepted as statutorily homeless in the United Kingdom over the last 16 years by *(a)* sex, *(b)* age group and *(c)* ethnic group; and if he will make a statement. [451]

Mr. Clappison: The information requested is not available.

Refuse (Transport and Disposal)

Mr. Dover: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what legal prohibitions relate to the transport and disposal of refuse from the Isle of Man to the United Kingdom. [1056]

Mr. Clappison: In May 1994, the United Kingdom became a party to the Basel convention on the control of transboundary movements of hazardous wastes and their disposal. The Isle of Man is not yet a party to the convention. Shipments of waste between parties and non-parties to the convention are prohibited, except where covered by a bilateral, multilateral or regional agreement or arrangement complying with article 11 of the convention.

Imports of waste from the Isle of Man into the United Kingdom for disposal are therefore currently prohibited. The British Government and the Government of the Isle of Man are in the process of concluding a bilateral agreement, under article 11 of the convention, which would allow imports into the United Kingdom of specific hazardous wastes for which the Isle of Man lacks suitable disposal facilities.

Waste may also be transported for recovery purposes. The OECD decision concerning the control of transfrontier movements of wastes destined for recovery operations constitutes a multilateral agreement for the purpose of article 11 of the Basel convention. Both the United Kingdom and the Isle of Man are covered by the OECD decision. Shipments of waste for recovery between the Isle of Man and the United Kingdom are therefore allowed, subject to the relevant control regime prescribed in the OECD decision.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to ensure that persons from abroad who are registered with the Home Department as asylum seekers, and who have no entitlement to benefits, will not have access to publicly-funded housing assistance. [1536]

Mr. Curry: Under the Government's proposals for fairer access to local authority and housing association tenancies, persons from abroad who have no entitlement to benefits will be eligible neither for assistance under the homelessness legislation nor to register on a local housing authority waiting list. This includes people who have sought asylum after entry to United Kingdom, and those whose applications for asylum have been refused by the Home Secretary. We intend to bring forward legislation to implement our proposals in the new parliamentary Session.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

National Lottery

13. **Mr. Madden:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what representations she has received about regional disparities in the allocation of funds arising from the national lottery. [494]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The national lottery has captured the imagination of the country. I have received some letters from people who want to help ensure widespread distribution of lottery funding. We are committed to ensuring that the whole country benefits from the great success of the lottery.

15. **Mrs. Clwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what plans she has to ensure a more equitable distribution of national lottery money throughout the United Kingdom. [496]

Mrs. Bottomley: Every region in the United Kingdom has benefited. Over 3,000 awards have been made from the lottery in the first eight months of distribution.

The geographical spread of awards will be kept under review. There should not be envy of the major awards in the hon. Lady's constituency.

18. **Mr. Janner:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will review the arrangements for the national lottery. [499]

Mrs. Bottomley: The national lottery is working extremely well; the number of people playing and the money being raised for the good causes has exceeded everybody's expectations.

The lottery will be kept under review. I recently announced the millennium award scheme which will allow us to invest in people's talent to provide a spring board for the nation's success in the next millennium.

20. **Sir Michael Neubert:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how much revenue the national lottery has generated for good causes. [503]

Mrs. Bottomley: Over £1.2 billion has been raised for the five good causes because the national lottery is successful. No other lottery in the world has raised so much so quickly.

21. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what plans she has for amending legislation to enable national lottery money to be used for other than capital purposes; and if she will make a statement. [504]

Mrs. Bottomley: National lottery funding is already available for other than capital purposes.

The National Charities Board makes revenue grants available to caring charities.

The millennium award scheme will invest in people's talent.

23. **Mr. Alan W. Williams:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what assessment she has made of the benefits to poorer sections of the community of disbursements of proceeds from the national lottery. [506]

Mrs. Bottomley: National lottery proceeds in the areas of the five good causes are being distributed to thousands of projects that are benefiting many poorer sections of the community. They are helping to bring whole communities together, raise morale and enthusiasm and improve the quality and opportunity of people's lives. Capital spending generates jobs.

25. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will make a statement about the first year's operations of the national lottery. [510]

Mrs. Bottomley: The national lottery has been an outstanding success in its first year.

Thirty million people play and enjoy a harmless flutter every week with the result that over £1.2 billion of new money has been raised for the five good causes.

More than £720 million has been awarded to over 3,000 projects throughout the country so far. We are investing unprecedented sums in this country's sport and culture which will benefit people into the next millennium. It will provide a huge boost to regeneration, creating jobs and economic prosperity.

Mr. Ian Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how much money she estimates will be contributed to charities and good causes by the national lottery in a full year. [505]

Mrs. Bottomley: Between £1.4 billion and £1.6 billion will be available for the good causes, including caring charities, in the current financial year.

16. **Mr. Sweeney:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how many good causes have been awarded funds from the national lottery in Wales. [497]

Mrs. Bottomley: Two hundred and fifty national lottery awards, covering all five good causes, and totalling £26,701,388 have been awarded in Wales.

My hon. Friend will be pleased to hear that the Millennium Commission has today made an award in Wales: £146,500 for the church community hall in Sully.

School Children (Arts)

14. **Mr. Mackinlay:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what measures are proposed to ensure that all school children are introduced to a major opera or ballet production during their school years. [495]

Mr. Sproat: All of the opera and ballet companies in receipt of public subsidy are developing extensive education programmes aimed specifically at opening up their work to children at school. As part of an initiative recently announced by my right hon. Friend, I am about to consult widely on ways in which the Government and others can help to make the arts even more accessible.

Opera Subsidies

17. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what is his latest estimate of the subsidy paid out of public funds for each seat at opera performances in England. [498]

Mr. Sproat: The most recent available figures are for 1994–95, when the average subsidy per seat, for those opera companies funded by the Arts Council of England, was £25.57.

Government Art Collection

19. **Mr. Kirkwood:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will estimate the value of works of art added to the Government art collection in lieu of inheritance tax over the past five years. [501]

Mr. Sproat: The Government art collection has not been allocated any works of art accepted in lieu of inheritance tax over the past five years.

BBC Transmitters

24. **Mr. Olner:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what plans she has for the privatisation of BBC transmitters. [507]

Mr. Sproat: We are considering the options for the future of the BBC's transmission services and will announce our decision shortly.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 21 November 1995

PRIME MINISTER

Public Interest Immunity Certificates

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list all those in his Office who have authority to issue public interest immunity certificates; how many have been issued in each of the last five years; and what were the main reasons for them. [1401]

The Prime Minister: A claim to public interest immunity relating to departmental documents or information is normally made by the appropriate departmental Minister. I have not myself, nor have others within my Office or the Cabinet Office, signed public interest certificates in the last five years.

French Nuclear Tests

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Prime Minister what representations he received from the Governments of *(a)* Australia and *(b)* New Zealand prior to the French nuclear tests in the South Pacific regarding opposition to the tests; and if he will publish them. [1537]

The Prime Minister: We have had a number of contacts with the Australian and New Zealand Governments on this issue. These exchanges remain confidential between the Governments concerned.

Engagements

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 21 November 1995. [1480]

The Prime Minister: This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in this House I shall be having further meetings later today.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Opera Hats

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Lord President of the Council if he has any plans to increase the number of opera hats available for hon. Members' use during points of order; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton: I have no such plans, but my hon. Friend may wish to draw the matter to the attention of the Procedure Committee.

Early-day Motions

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Lord President of the Council what plans he has to introduce a parliamentary procedure to enable the Comptroller and Auditor General to respond to early-day motions.

Mr. Newton: I have no such plans.

Short Money

Mr. Gallie: To ask the Lord President of the Council what public funds the Leader of the Opposition receives to run Opposition political affairs.

Mr. Newton: Under paragraph 1 of the resolution of the House of 4 November 1993, financial assistance, known as "Short Money", is available to assist Opposition parties in carrying out their parliamentary business. The maximum amount which is available to the official Opposition for the year beginning 1 April 1995 is £1,408,448.12.

Under paragraph 2 of the resolution, financial assistance is also available towards travelling and associated expenses necessarily incurred by an Opposition party's spokesmen in relation to the party's parliamentary business. The maximum amount which is available to the official Opposition for the year beginning 1 April 1995 is £18,301.

Campbell Soups

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Chairman of the Catering Committee if he will seek to place a ban on the procurement of Campbell Soups products by the Refreshment Department of the House of Commons. [680]

Mr. Colin Shepherd: This is a matter for the director of the catering services. I have asked her to write to the hon. Member.

TREASURY

Grant-maintained Schools (Borrowing)

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if borrowing by grant-maintained schools is to be included in the public sector borrowing requirement. [1484]

Mr. Waldegrave: Grant-maintained schools are not classified as public sector bodies in the Central Statistical Office's national accounts but as private non-profit-making bodies serving persons. Therefore borrowing by grant-maintained schools is not included in the public sector borrowing requirement.

Insurance Policies

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he expects to be able to report on the results of the Inland Revenue's review of the taxation of insurance policies; and if he will make a statement. [90]

Mr. Jack: It would be inappropriate for me to comment on tax matters at this stage of the Budget cycle.

VAT

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the amount per week a married couple with two children on average male earnings is estimated to have paid in VAT, at today's prices, in the year 1978–79; and what he estimates a similar family will pay in *(a)* 1995–96 and *(b)* 1996–97. [86]

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: It is estimated that the average amount of VAT paid by non-retired households with one or more children on average disposable income was £905 in 1979 and £1,495 in 1993, both at 1993 prices. Figures for future years will depend on the purchasing decisions of individuals.

EC Salary Payment Errors

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what material errors were detected in the EC Commission's payments of salaries in the EC's financial year 1994, irrespective of whether these errors were subsequently detected and corrected. [155]

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: A number of errors were identified by the Court of Auditors in its recent annual report—*Official Journal*, 14 November 1995. These errors affected the movement along salary scales of locally employed staff of European Commission delegations. The Commission is taking action to deal with the problem.

Monetary Union

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of the gap between Britain's situation and each of the convergence criteria of the Maastricht treaty *(a)* now, *(b)* by the end of 1996 and *(c)* by the end of 1997. [1100]

Mrs. Angela Knight: We fully expect to meet the convergence criteria by 1997.

Dairy Industry

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people were employed in the dairy industry *(a)* on 31 October 1994 and *(b)* on the last date for which figures are available. [202]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The most reliable information on jobs in the dairy industry is available from the periodic censuses of employment. The census shows that there were 29,800 jobs in the dairy industry in Great Britain at September 1993. Estimates from the smaller labour force survey suggest a small increase between autumn 1994 and spring 1995.

Aviation Fuel

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what rates of duty in pence per litre are charged on aviation gasoline and aviation kerosene in each of the 15 countries within the European Union; and how many litres of each fuel are consumed in the United Kingdom. [1499]

Mr. Heathcoat Amory: Aviation gasoline used by commercial and private aircraft is subject to excise duty at the rate of 18.07p per litre in the UK. No information is available about the rates of duty charged on aviation gasoline in other EU member states.

Aviation kerosene used by commercial aircraft is subject to the nil rate of excise duty in all the European Union member states. Aviation kerosene used by private aircraft is subject to a nil rate of duty in the UK; no information is available about the rates of duty charged in other EU member states on aviation kerosene used by private aircraft.

Some 39,179,000 litres of aviation gasoline and 9,257,964,000 litres of aviation kerosene were delivered for consumption in the UK in 1994.

Pensions

Mr. Matthew Banks: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what action public service pension schemes have taken to ensure that where redress is due under the Securities and Investments Board's pensions review, employees can be reinstated at reasonable cost. [1655]

Mrs. Angela Knight: I am pleased to announce that, on advice from the Government Actuary, the Government have now agreed the charges for reinstating the pensions entitlement of current public service employees who opted out of a public service pension scheme as a result of mis-selling. These charges are paid to the schemes concerned by the individuals or firms responsible for mis-selling.

The charge for buying pension rights in respect of the period since the individual opted out of the public service scheme will be derived from the usual actuarially determined inward transfer value factors. These factors have recently been reviewed by the Government Actuary, and revised downwards.

Where, in addition, a transfer payment was made for earlier pensionable service, the charge for reinstating pension rights for that service will normally take the form of repayment, with appropriate interest, of the outward transfer value—the payment made by the public service pension scheme to the personal pension provider when the individual transferred to the personal pension scheme.

The Government Departments responsible for public service schemes are taking action to bring these changes into effect.

I welcome their action. It is an important step towards ensuring that those who have suffered loss as a result of mis-selling are restored to a financial position equivalent to what it would have been the case if mis-selling had not occurred. This is being done in a way that is fair to other scheme members, ensures that those responsible provide the right redress and is fair to the taxpayer.

I urge all occupational pension schemes in the private sector to follow the example of public service schemes by allowing current employees to rejoin for future service and also to buy back pension rights for previous service at reasonable cost.

Trustee Investments Act 1961

Mr. Matthew Banks: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer at conclusions he has reached following consultation on the proposal to amend the Trustee Investments Act 1961 to increase the proportion of assets that all trusts are allowed to invest in wider range investments; and if he will make a statement. [1781]

Mrs. Angela Knight: In the short term, as proposed in the consultation document, the Treasury will make an order under section 13 of the Trustee Investments Act 1961 to change the split of wider and narrower range investments from 50:50 to 75:25, the maximum allowable under the Act as it now stands. This proportion was introduced for charities earlier this year by the Charities (Trustee Investments Act 1961) Order 1995.

In the longer term, the Government have concluded, in the light of representations from a wide range of interests, most recently the deregulation task force in its first annual report, that a fundamental deregulatory reform of the Trustee Investment Act is now called for. The requirements for division of assets into "narrow" and "broad" investments and for consequent dual accounting are burdensome. The Government will issue by 1 May 1996 a consultation document on options for further deregulatory change, drawing on detailed work to be undertaken by the Law Commission for England and Wales and the Scottish Law Commission in conjunction with the independent trust law committee.

EU Budget Council

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the outcome of the European Union Budget Council, held on 17 November listing all votes and all decisions which were determined by unanimity or without dissension. [435]

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory *[holding answer 20 November 1995]:* I represented the United Kingdom at the Budget Council on 17 November. The Council considered the European Parliament's proposed changes to the draft budget, which the Council established in July—on which I reported in my reply to the hon. Member for Southport (Mr. Banks) on 18 October 1995, *Official Report*, columns 278–80—and it established a Second Reading draft budget for 1996.

The Council's Second Reading draft budget totals 86,288 mecu, £72,578 million, in commitment appropriations and 81,603 mecu, £68,637 million, in payment appropriations. The Second Reading draft budget is 316 mecu, £266 million, in commitments and 589 mecu, £495 million, in payments below the financial perspective ceilings and is within the existing own resources ceiling of 1.20 per cent. The following table compares the outcome of the Budget Council with the proposals in the Commissions's preliminary draft budget and with the proposals in the European Parliament's draft budget, with reference to the financial perspective ceilings:

	Financial perspective expenditure ceilings		*Preliminary draft budget*[3]		*Parliament draft budget*		*Council second reading draft budget*	
	mecu	*£ million*[1]	*mecu*	*£ million*	*mecu*	*£ million*	*mecu*	*£ million*
Commitment appropriations								
Common Agricultural Policy	40,828	34,341	40,828	34,341	40,828	34,341	40,828	34,341
Structural operations	29,131	24,502	29,131	24,502	29,131	24,502	29,131	24,502
Internal policies	5,337	4,489	5,267	4,430	5,324	4,478	5,198	4,372
External action	5,264	4,428	5,157	4,338	5,252	4,417	5,174	4,352
Administrative expenditure	4,191	3,525	4,132	3,475	4,130	3,473	4,104	3,452
Reserves	1,152	969	1,152	969	1,152	969	1,152	969
Compensation	701	590	701	590	701	590	701	590
Total Commitments	86,604	72,844	86,368	72,645	86,517	72,771	86,288	72,578
Total payment appropriations	82,192	69,133	82,015	68,984	81,360	68,884	81,603	68,367

Notes:
[1] Throughout this reply the rate of £1=1.889 ecu has been used (the rate notified in the Official Journal as prevailing on the last working day of last month (31 October).
[2] As amended in Letter of Amendment No. 1 from the figure which appeared in the Commission's Overview of the PDB for 1996 to take account of the higher bid for agriculture under category 1.

The European Parliament will consider the draft budget for 1996 at its plenary session in December. The 1996 Community budget is expected to be adopted by the Parliament on 14 December, to take effect from 1 January 1996.

The Council took no formal votes, the presidency concluding that there was the necessary majority to establish the Second Reading draft budget for 1996.

ECOFIN

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the voting record of each member state on items agreed at the meeting of the European Community's ECOFIN Council held on 23 October; and if he will make it his practice to include details of all votes, including where there have been no votes, in the future. [440]

Mr. Kenneth Clarke *[holding answer 20 November 1995]:* There were no votes taken on items under discussion at the ECOFIN Council on 23 October.

In the future, as is my practice, after each ECOFIN Council I will report the result of votes and will indicate if no votes were taken.

TRANSPORT

Rail Freight

Mr. Chris Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received from organisations seeking changes in the requirements for the award of freight facilities grants to enable intermodal schemes to qualify; and if he will make a statement. [534]

Mr. Watts: In principle intermodal schemes qualify for freight facilities grant.

Mr. Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the period of advance notice required for security reasons to be given by terminal operators for the packing of an intermodal unit to be transported from Britain to France *(a)* by rail and *(b)* by road and ferry. [536]

Mr. Watts: No notice is required for security reasons for rail freight being shipped by security approved freight forwarders. Railfreight Distribution, currently the only company carrying channel tunnel rail freight, require 20 hours' advance notification in respect of non-security-approved forwarders. There are no security related notice requirements in respect of road traffic travelling on the ferries or through the channel tunnel.

Mr. Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the annual budget allocated for the award of rail freight facilities grants and track access grants since 1992 and the number and value of the grants awarded. [535]

Mr. Watts: The annual budget for rail and inland waterway freight facilities grants is a joint one. In 1992–93, this was £6.571 million and in 1993–94 £3.265 million. From April 1994, the budget included the new track access grant and was £13.3 million for 1994–95. It is currently £14.4 million.

Since 1992, eight rail grants have been awarded with a total value of over £14 million. No track access grants have yet been awarded but several applications are currently under consideration.

Mr. Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if he will list the differences in security requirements imposed on the passage of rail freight using the channel tunnel and the Severn tunnel and what are the reasons for these differences; [539]

(2) what assessment he has made of the security risks posed by rail freight passing through *(a)* the channel tunnel and *(b)* the Severn tunnel. [546]

Mr. Watts: My Department regulates the security of the channel tunnel under the Channel Tunnel Security Order 1994. The measures imposed on operators are based on the security threat to the installation, as assessed by the Security Service, and the vulnerability of the system. It is not the practice to reveal details of security requirements.

My Department has no comparable responsibilities in relation to the Severn tunnel.

Mr. Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what response he has made to the representations of the railfreight users group regarding the consultation paper on the security aspects of rail groupage issued by his Department's security division; and if he will make a statement. [537]

Mr. Watts: I have responded to the correspondence that I have received from the Alliance for Channel Tunnel Freight, which incorporates the Rail Freight Group, acknowledging its concerns. I have asked officials to look carefully at the alliance's representations, and I understand a very constructive meeting took place between officials and the alliance on 15 November. Discussions are continuing.

Traffic Wardens

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many local authorities outside London have taken up his Department's offer to take on the responsibility for traffic wardens. [6]

Mr. Norris: We have invited local authorities to apply to take over parking enforcement, which would be decriminalised. Traffic wardens would be replaced by local authority parking attendants. So far, we have received one formal application—from Hampshire county council with regard to Winchester. We have received drafts of two other applications for comment and a number of expressions of interest.

Train Incidents (Reading)

Mr. Heppell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what incidents or accidents have occurred on both the South West Trains and Great Western railway lines in the vicinity of Reading station since July. [896]

Mr. Watts: The following accidents and incidents in the vicinity of Reading station have been reported to the Health and Safety Executive's railway inspectorate since July 1995:

12 July 1995: Reading Depot
A driver sustained a strain to his leg whilst climbing out of his cab.

20 July 1995: Near Reading Station
A track circuit failure caused delay to services.

4 August 1995: Reading Station
A Royal Scotsman charter train was delayed at platform 8 for two hours after smoke was observed coming from a defective coach. A tyre on the coach had shifted due to brake drag.

15 August 1995: Near Reading Station
A track man was struck in the eye by a piece of wire protruding from a bush.

7 September 1995: Near Reading Station
Fourteen sets of points fused, which resulted in platforms 6 and 10 being out of use.

10 September 1995: Reading West Yard
An employee fell over discarded rail chairs, sustaining bruising.

4 October 1995: Reading Depot
An employee fractured his hand after trapping it in a gate.

Rolling Stock

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what levels of investment in new rolling stock the rolling stock companies agreed to undertake with his Department. [48]

Mr. Watts: All three passenger rolling stock leasing companies have confirmed to my right hon. Friend their readiness to invest on commercial terms in response to customers' requirements.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will introduce the right of appeal for railway operators against private monopolies who increase the cost of rolling stock. [1614]

Mr. Watts: I do not recognise the circumstances described by the hon. Member.

Heathrow Airport (Rail Links)

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what further rail links his Department estimates will be built to Heathrow airport; and what assessment he has made of the impact that rail privatisation will have on *(a)* delaying or *(b)* expediting plans. [49]

Mr. Watts: The Heathrow Express rail link, a joint venture between BAA, British Rail and Railtrack, is under construction. Heathrow Express is due to start services in 1998 and will operate a service every quarter of an hour with a journey time from Paddington to Heathrow of 16 minutes.

Rail access to Heathrow airport is being considered within the London airports surface access study, which was set up in April by my right hon. Friend the then Secretary of State and is examining the opportunities for economically beneficial improvements in access to and between London's main airports.

Rail privatisation should encourage rather than delay investment in infrastructure. Privatisation should allow greater use of private sector skills in encouraging investment and will also allow greater access to private sector finance. Railtrack's investment programme will be commercially driven, and will therefore be more directly responsive to the demands of its customers. Both operators and passengers will benefit because Railtrack will have incentives to use investment to increase efficiency.

Locomotives

Mr. Chris Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many British Rail locomotives have been *(a)* scrapped since 1992 and *(b)* offered for sale; and if he will make a statement. [529]

Mr. Watts: The information requested is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Noise Abatement Notices

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport on how many occasions over the past five years British Rail has been successfully prosecuted or served with abatement notices under noise or air pollution regulations. [16]

Mr. Watts: Complete records of the service of abatement notices or of successful prosecutions under noise and air pollution regulations are not held centrally by British Rail. The information available shows that there has been one successful prosecution in the past five years. Abatement notices have been served on at least two occasions.

Public Inquiry (A1)

Mr. William O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the adequacy of the sampling of pollution taken by Mr. A. J. Hickman in the Ferrybridge area as submitted to public inquiry by the Highways Agency in respect of the A1 diversion. [1314]

Mr. Watts: We are satisfied as to the adequacy of the pollution samples taken by Mr. Hickman.

Toll Road Contracts

Ms Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the estimated cost to public funds of the first four shadow toll road contracts over the length of each contract. [1502]

Mr. Watts: Commercial negotiations have not yet concluded, but we expect to benefit from substantial private sector efficiencies.

Energy Efficiency

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what progress has been made towards cutting energy consumption in Government buildings for which he has responsibility in each year since 1990. [1440]

Mr. Norris: My Department has cut energy use cumulatively as follows:

1991–92: –6.9 per cent.

1992–93: –7 per cent.

1993–94: –12.4 per cent.

1994–95: –16.9 per cent.

Transport, London

Mr. Tracey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement about the future of transport in London. [2047]

Sir George Young: The Government will publish a document setting out our transport strategy for London in the new year.

I warmly welcome London Pride's action programme for transport in London. It is an important contribution to the transport debate. I believe London Pride is right to highlight London's excellent international links and the improved quality of public transport. The Government will consider carefully the recommendations made by London Pride in preparing our own strategy document.

Speed Limits (Paddington-Plymouth Line)

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport where are each of the speed restrictions currently in place between Paddington and Plymouth; for how long is each; and what the speed restriction is in each case; and in each case when he expects the track to be repaired so the restriction can be lifted. [1323]

Mr. Watts: Railtrack informs me that there are approximately 16 speed restrictions currently in place between Paddington and Plymouth. Information regarding the precise location, length, and speed limit for each speed restriction is not held centrally and can be obtained only

at disproportionate cost. However, Railtrack confirms that repair time scales are in accordance with both operational requirements and Railtrack's rigorous safety standards.

Scottish Air Traffic Control Centre

Mr. Gallie: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what changes have occurred in respect of the time scales set out in his answer of 13 December 1994, *Official Report*, column *549*, for the implementation of the new Scottish air traffic control centre; and if he will list the parties responsible for achieving the objectives. [1325]

Mr. Norris: Primary responsibility for achieving objectives for the implementation of the new Scottish centre will lie with the successful tenderer for the contract. The National Air Traffic Service will, however, be responsible for the safety and operational aspects of the project.

NATS expects the new Scottish centre to become operational in the winter of 2000–2001.

Mr. Gallie: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when the new en-route air traffic control centre at Swanwick will become operational; and to what extent this is in accordance with the original time scales for the project. [1217]

Mr. Norris: The CAA presented a case for a new air traffic control centre to the Government in 1987. The target date set for the centre to enter operation was the end of 1996.

The Swanwick centre programme has met all its major milestones to date. It is now in its most testing phase, and some software integration problems have been experienced. This is not unusual in a project of this complexity. Currently, the problems are not expected to affect the plan for the new centre to be on line to meet the traffic demands of the summer of 1997.

Air Traffic Control Delays

Mr. Quin: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what information he holds on the amount of additional fuel used by aeroplanes subjected to air traffic control delays above *(a)* Heathrow airport and *(b)* Gatwick airport in each of the past five years. [1205]

Mr. Norris: None.

M66

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if contracts have been let for completion of the M66 motorway; and on what date he intends to announce successful bids. [447]

Mr. Watts *[holding answer 20 November 1995]:* I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. Michael Meacher, dated 21 November 1995:

As you know, the Minister for Railways and Roads, Mr. John Watts, has asked me to reply to your Parliamentary Question asking if contracts have been let for completion of the M66 motorway and on what date he intends to announce successful bids.

As you know, the first two contracts are underway. We have let recently a contract for advance works for the next phase and that work will begin on 27 November. We are currently assessing tenders for that next phase with the aim of starting work next year. You will appreciate that I cannot give a firm date for an announcement until we have finished assessing the tenders. Tenders for the final phase will follow on.

Train Stock

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list, under the titles of each of those leasing companies who own the former British Railways coach stock, the names of the operating companies who currently lease the stock, indicating its nature and approximate quantity for each lessee. [224]

Mr. Watts *[holding answer 20 November 1995]:* At 31 March 1995, the vehicles leased were as follows:

Angel Train Contracts

	Number of Vehicles		
Lessee	*DMU*	*EMU*	*HST*
RR North West	222	77	—
South Wales and West	105	—	—
ScotRail	139	203	—
RR Central	166	—	—
North London	26	—	—
RR North East	148	63	—
Chiltern	75	—	—
Thames	168	—	—
Great Eastern	—	96	—
LTS Rail	—	84	—
WAGN	—	288	—
Network SouthCentral	—	336	—
South Eastern	—	550	—
South West Trains	—	120	—
Merseyside Electrics	204	—	—
Great Western	—	384	—
West Coast	—	31	—
InterCity East Coast	—	97	—
Cross Country Trains	—	19	—

Abbreviations:
DMU = Diesel multiple units/diesel electric multiple units.
EMU = Electric multiple units.
HST = High Speed Train vehicles (InterCity 125).

Eversholt Leasing

	Number of vehicles		
Lessee	*EMU*	*Loco*	*Coaches*
LTS Rail	252	—	—
RR Central	57	—	—
RR North West	12	—	60
WAGN[1]	215	—	—
North London	217	—	—
Great Eastern	480	—	—
ScotRail	129	—	—
South Eastern[1]	452	—	—
South West Trains	444	—	—
Network SouthCentral	184	—	—
Island Line	16	—	—
Cross Country Trains	—	16	227
West Coast	—	22	241
Anglia	—	13	113
Great Western	—	—	13
InterCity East Coast	—	31	320

Note:
[1] Figures for WAGN and South Eastern exclude 164 Class 365/5 vehicles currently on order.
Abbreviations:
EMU = Electric multiple units.
Loco = Locomotives.
Coaches includes driving van trailers and generator vans.

Porterbrook Leasing

Lessee	*Number of vehicles*				
	DMU	*EMU*	*HST*	*Loco*	*Coaches*
RR North East	177	—	—	—	—
South Wales and West	56	—	—	—	—
Cardiff Valleys	62	—	—	—	—
Anglia	25	—	—	—	6
ScotRail	120	—	—	—	83
RR North West	64	51	—	—	—
RR Central	61	66	—	—	—
Cross Country Trains	10	—	217	28	10
South West Trains	66	392	—	—	—
South Eastern	10	424	—	—	—
Network SouthCentral	30	408	—	—	—
Thameslink	—	264	—	—	—
Midland Main Line	—	—	148	—	—
Great Western	—	—	—	4	11
West Coast	—	—	—	50	344
Gatwick Express	—	—	—	14	84
RfD	—	—	—	1	—

Abbreviations:
DMU = Diesel multiple units/diesel electric multiple units.
EMU = Electric multiple units.
HST = High Speed Train vehicles (InterCity 125).
Loco = Locomotives.
Coaches includes driving van trailers and generator vans.

Ferry Disaster, Thailand

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the recent ferry disaster in Thailand and its consequences for future maritime legislation. [344]

Mr. Norris *[holding answer 20 November 1995]:* The Government have made no formal assessment of the accident because it did not involve a UK-flagged ship and did not occur in United Kingdom waters. However, under the international convention for the safety of life at sea, the appropriate responsible administrations are required to investigate casualties where they judge that this may assist in determining what changes in rules are needed, and undertake to supply the International Maritime Organisation with pertinent information. The IMO makes this information available to members.

SCOTLAND

Regional Selective Assistance

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give the outturn expenditure on regional selective assistance in 1994–95: and what was the amount originally budgeted for that purpose. [1328]

Mr. Kynoch: Gross outturn expenditure on regional selective assistance in 1994–95 was £77.128 million; taking into account receipts of £0.866 million, net outturn expenditure was £76,262 million. Planned gross expenditure for that year had been £77 million with planned receipts of £1.3 million, giving planned net expenditure of £75.7 million.

DEFENCE

Low Flying

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the number of booked movements into each low-level operational training area in each year since their establishment. [526]

Mr. Soames: The number of operational low-flying movements authorised into each of the three tactical training areas in each year since their establishment is set out in the following table.

	Northern Scotland	*Central Wales*	*Borders*
1979	664	123	—
1980	626	171	—
1981	601	59	—
1982	236	4	—
1983	1,616	21	285
1984	667	64	276
1985	259	44	173
1986	539	63	598
1987	518	242	626
1988	828	60	1,227
1989	817	89	1,788
1990	1,519	265	4,243
1991	468	90	1,256
1992	979	174	2,067
1993	468	192	2,389
1994	704	89	1,127
1995[1]	285	119	1,144

[1] January–September.

From July 1988 to September 1993 the borders TTA was divided into east and west sectors. Movements for the two sectors were counted separately so that sorties which crossed the border between the two sectors generated additional movements. The figures for the borders TTA from 1988 to 1993 therefore overstate the amount of activity in comparison with other years and TTAs.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the instructions to RAF police conducting covert surveys of low flying include a requirement to record instances of use of reheat by low-flying aircraft. [425]

Mr. Soames: RAF police personnel conducting covert monitoring are required to record the use of reheat by military aircraft flying at low level.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what information he has on *(a)* the nationality and *(b)* the types of the aircraft listed in his evidence to the Defence Committee, HC 314 of Session 1993–94, on operational low-flying movements in 1986 in the "other" category. [430]

Mr. Soames: All operational low flying in the United Kingdom low flying system in 1986 was conducted by UK military aircraft. Thirty-four of the movements listed for 1986 in the "other" category were conducted by F4 Phantom aircraft; the statistical information available does not record aircraft type for the remainder.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which of the aircraft types listed in his evidence to the Defence Committee, HC 314 of Session 1993–94,

on operational low-flying movements were *(a)* equipped and *(b)* authorised to carry out flying in the highlands restricted area. [429]

Mr. Soames: The Tornado GR1 is the only RAF aircraft equipped to fly in the highlands restricted area. Operational low flying is not permitted in the highlands restricted area when it is active.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if operational low-flying movements by aircraft types other than Buccaneer, Harrier, Hercules, Jaguar and Tornado have taken place since 1988. [527]

Mr. Soames: No.

Exercise Air Warrior

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many sorties were flown by Royal Air Force Harriers during their deployment to Nellis Air Force base for the Air Warrior exercise in August 1994. [1312]

Mr. Soames: A total of 202 sorties were flown by RAF Harriers during Exercise Air Warrior.

Italian Tornado

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the cost of support provided by the Royal Air Force to a training detachment of Italian Air Force Tornado aircraft at Goose bay, Canada, in April to May 1995; and what proportion of this amount was recovered from the Italian authorities. [1283]

Mr. Soames: The Royal Air Force incurred total costs of £118.36 for laundry services provided to the Italian Air Force. It was not considered necessary to recover this.

Strike Command

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what means are used to ensure that locations or features selected for inclusion in the Strike Command list of simulated targets for toss or dive attack referred to in his answer of 18 October 1993, *Official Report*, column *54*, have not been included in previous editions of the list. [1107]

Mr. Soames: Simulated targets are included on the Strike Command list on the basis of their current suitability whether or not they have previously been listed.

Acts of Parliament

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the Acts of Parliament and consolidation Acts that affect local government that have been introduced by his Department since January 1994. [37]

Mr. Soames: No such Acts have been introduced by my Department since January 1994.

Exercise Red Flag

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many sorties were flown by each type of Royal Air Force aircraft during Exercise Red Flag 94–2. [1311]

Mr. Soames: A total of 298 Tornado GR1 sorties were flown during this exercise.

Flying Training

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what were the dates of arrival and departure of Royal Air Force aircraft deployed to Goose bay for flying training in the 1994 season; [1277]

(2) what were the dates of arrival and departure of Royal Air Force aircraft deployed to Goose bay for flying training in the 1995 season. [1313]

Mr. Soames: Royal Air Force aircraft were deployed to Goose bay for flying training as follows:

	1994	*1995*
Hercules	13–17 March	23–28 January
Tornado GR1	14 April–27 June 1 August–26 September	6 July–27 September

Operation Deliberate Force

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which RAF aircraft participated in Operation Deliberate Force. [362]

Mr. Soames: Harrier GR7, Jaguar GR1B, Tornado F3, E3D, Tristar K1 and Nimrod.

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many flying hours were involved in Operation Deliberate Force. [363]

Mr. Soames: A total of 902.

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Harrier GR7s took part in Operation Deliberate Force. [367]

Mr. Soames: Twelve.

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what proportion of the bombs dropped during Operation Deliberate Force were dropped by Harrier GR7s in daylight raids; and what proportion were dropped on night missions. [368]

Mr. Soames: All of the bombs dropped by the RAF during Operation Deliberate Force were delivered by Harrier GR7s in daylight missions.

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Jaguars GR1Bs took part in Operation Deliberate Force. [365]

Mr. Soames: Three.

School Places, North Devon

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment his Department made of the extra number of school places needed in North Devon due to the Royal Marines moving from Plymouth to Chivenor; and if he will make a statement about discussions on this matter with Devon county council. [228]

Mr. Soames: The number of service families projected to move into the Chivenor area with children likely to require local schooling was assessed in the feasibility study. Discussions with the North Devon district council and with local headmasters commenced at the earliest stages, and these are continuing. Indications are that the number of children requiring places in local authority

schools will be of the order of 110. It is not possible to be precise since families will exercise free choice over educational provision for their children. Given the departure of a number of RAF families with school-age children, contacts with the relevant authorities in North Devon indicate that there is unlikely to be a need for any net increase in the provision of school places.

Capital Works Costs

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what capital costs have been incurred by his Department since 1990 at *(a)* Seaton barracks and *(b)* Coypool, Plymouth. [229]

Mr. Soames: The sums spent on capital works projects at Seaton barracks and Royal Marine Coypool since the beginning of the financial year 1990–91 are £1.916 million and £1.909 million respectively.

Chivenor

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the projected annual cost of providing transport between Plymouth and Chivenor for marines who have been transferred to Chivenor but are quartered in Plymouth. [230]

Mr. Soames: A temporary bus service is currently in place, primarily for personnel whose families are awaiting a move into family quarters at Royal Marines barracks Chivenor. This interim arrangement is planned to last a matter of months, until the units settle into Chivenor, and it is estimated that it will cost less than £5,000. This sum was included in the investment appraisal attached to the consultation document published in July 1995.

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the consultants appointed to advise his Department abut the transfer of marines from Plymouth to Chivenor; and if he will list their previous experience advising on military matters and the fees paid to them. [231]

Mr. Soames: The feasibility study on the use of Chivenor by units of the Royal Marines Command was headed by DHV Consultants Ltd. of Plymouth, a firm experienced in consultancy work for the Ministry of Defence. Assisting in the overall study were the architects Stride Treglown, mechanical and electrical engineering specialists Torpy and Partners, and quantity surveyors A.L. Currie and Brown, all of Plymouth. The advice given by particular consultants was strictly confined to their areas of expertise as described. Military judgment and views were supplied by members of the Royal Marines Command and other relevant MOD branches. The cost of the option studies carried out was of the order of £130,000, inclusive of VAT.

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about the cost of capital building work carried out at RAF Chivenor since 1987, indicating when the work was carried out; and if he will give an assessment of the cost of additional capital work that will be required to accommodate the Royal Marines. [232]

Mr. Soames: Since 1987, £5,223,000 has been spent on capital works projects at RAF Chivenor. Work was carried out in 1987, 1992, and 1993. As indicated in the published consultative document, the estimated cost of capital works required to adapt existing facilities and provide new buildings at Chivenor to meet the agreed technical statements of requirements for the two units is £19.5 million.

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment his Department has made of the additional cost to be borne by Devon county council for road improvements resulting from the transfer of Royal Marines from Plymouth to Chivenor. [233]

Mr. Soames: The ability of local roads to handle traffic from Royal Marines units moving to Chivenor formed part of the feasibility study which preceded the relocation proposal. Analysis was based on the use which the relevant units made of the roads in the Plymouth area and of the existing use made by civilian vehicles of the roads in North Devon. The North Devon authorities have been carefully consulted throughout. Overall, it was concluded that no road improvements would be needed as a direct result of these units moving to Chivenor.

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the cost of removing essential equipment from RAF Chivenor, following the decision to transfer the RAF; and what the cost will be of reinstating this equipment for use by the marines. [234]

Mr. Soames: The Royal Air Force and Royal Marines have worked closely together on the handover of Chivenor. Beyond such things as catering and domestic equipment, which has been left in place, there is no overlap between the equipment essential to the operation of an RAF unit with 44 jet aircraft and that of two Royal Marine Command units holding a variety of specialist battlefield logistic and engineering equipment. No costs are therefore foreseen.

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many of the Royal Marines transferring from Plymouth to Chivenor will occupy married quarters in North Devon; and how many will remain in the quarters in Plymouth. [235]

Mr. Soames: To minimise family disruption, it is left to individual families to decide whether to move when its service member is posted elsewhere—subject to their current family quarter not being required for higher priority purposes. Nevertheless, indications are that a total of 156 Royal Marine Commando families will have moved to Chivenor by early in the new year.

Ships

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the names and dates of *(a)* the surface vessels and *(b)* the submarines which have been mothballed by his Department in the last five years; and if he will list the last refit date of each of these together with the cost of refit. [1335]

Mr. Arbuthnot: Royal Navy ships are routinely cycled through varying degrees of readiness—for example, when undergoing refit—but only one vessel, HMS Andromeda, has been placed in long term storage during the last five years. Andromeda entered this state in June 1993. Her previous refit took place between August 1990 and December 1991 at a cost of some £27 million. She was formally decommissioned in November 1994.

Army Vehicles

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will make a statement on the decision to purchase ambulances to meet the Army's requirements; [1333]

(2) if he will make a statement concerning the Army's future requirement for ambulances; how many ambulances are required; which companies are tendering for the contract; and what is the value of the contract; [1331]

(3) what assessment he has made of *(a)* ambulances made by Land-Rover and *(b)* ambulances made by Steyr-Daimler Puch. [1332]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The Army's requirement for a medium mobility ambulance to ensure casualty evacuation from forward areas was announced in 1992. It will replace the ageing fleet of battlefield ambulances.

Iveco-Ford, Land-Rover and Steyr-Daimler Puch have submitted competitive tenders to meet the requirement. These are currently being assessed. It would not be appropriate to make any further comments while the assessment is in progress.

Dr. Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when his Department purchased Pinzgauer Steyr-Daimler Puch vehicles to meet the Army's light vehicle truck requirement; how many vehicles were purchased; what was the cost of these vehicles; how the Army's requirement for these vehicles differed from that provided by the RB-44 light vehicle; and if he will make a statement. [1334]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The contract to supply 394 vehicles to meet the Army's requirement for the heavy duty version of the medium-sized utility truck—with a 1.4 tonne payload—was placed with Steyr-Daimler Puch in June 1994, at a cost of some £20 million, inclusive of support costs.

This category of vehicle was a new requirement as a result of the changing role of the armed forces and the increased emphasis on flexibility and mobility, and provides a different capability from the 2-tonne payload RB-44 heavy utility truck.

Royal Naval College, Greenwich

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the organisations and individuals who have submitted expressions of interest in taking a lease on the buildings currently occupied by the Royal Naval college in Greenwich, indicating in each case the nature of the organisation and the uses which it proposes for the buildings. [356]

Mr. Soames *[holding answer 20 November 1995]:* Eight expressions of interest have been lodged in respect of all of the buildings comprising the Royal Naval college, Greenwich, with a further three lodged in respect of parts of the complex. It is my Department's policy not to disclose the identity of sponsors of expressions of interest on the grounds of commercial confidentiality. Sponsors are however free to reveal their own identity. The expression of interest will now be assessed and we will make an announcement in due course.

Ship and Submarine Sales

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the *(a)* surface ships and *(b)* submarines sold by his Department in each of the last five years. [461]

Mr. Arbuthnot *[holding answer 20 November 1995]:* A list of surface ships and submarines sold in each of the last five years is as follows.

(a) Surface ships sold in each of the last five years

Ship name	*Ship type*
1990–91	
HMS Achilles	Leander Class Frigate
HMS Walkerton	Minesweeper
HMS Sandpiper	Bird Class Patrol Vessel
HMS Peterel	Bird Class Patrol Vessel
HMS Cormorant	Spitfire Class Patrol Vessel
HMS Hart	Spitfire Class Patrol Vessel
RMAS Dolwen	Range Vessel
RMAS Bembridge	Fleet Tender
1991–92	
HMS Penelope	Leander Class Frigate
HMS Danae	Leander Class Frigate
HMS Eskimo	Tribal Class Frigate
HMS Attacker	Attacker Class Vessel
HMS Hunter	Attacker Class Vessel
HMS Striker	Attacker Class Vessel
HMS Fencer	Attacker Class Vessel
HMS Chaser	Attacker Class Vessel
HMS Gavington	Minesweeper
HMS Kirkliston	Minesweeper
HMS Upton	Minesweeper
HMS Beaufort	Minesweeper
HMS Hubberston	Minehunter
HMS Kedleston	Minehunter
HMS Custon	Minehunter
HMS Fawn	Coastal Survey Vessel
RFA Tidespring	Fleet Tanker
RMAS Green Rover	Small Fleet Tanker
RMAS Manly	Fleet Tender
RMAS Mentor	Fleet Tender
RMAS Millbrook	Fleet Tender
RMAS Throsk	Armament Carrier
RMAS Waterside	SP Water Carrier
RMAS Goldeneye	Mooring and Salvage
RMAS Mandarin	Mooring and Salvage
RMAS Kinbrace	Mooring and Salvage
RMAS Dorothy	Harbour Tug
RMAS Torrid	Torpedo Recovery
MFV Yarmouth Navigator	Motor Fishing Vessel
1992–93	
HMS Ariadne	Leander Class Frigate
HMS Phoebe	Leander Class Frigate
HMS Brereton	Minesweeper
HMS Wotton	Minesweeper
HMS Endurance	Ice Patrol Ship
RMAS Blue Rover	Fleet Tanker
RMAS Criccieth	Fleet Tender
RMAS Watershed	SP Water Carrier
RMAS Oilfield	SP Oil Carrier
RMAS Oilstone	SP Oil Carrier
RMAS Regent	Replenishment Ship
RMAS Sentinel	Support Vessel
MFV Uriah Heep	Motor Fishing Vessel
RDV Crystal	Research Vessel
1993–94	
HMS Ambuscade	Type 21 Frigate
HMS Amazon	Type 21 Frigate
HMS Arrow	Type 21 Frigate

(a) Surface ships sold in each of the last five years

Ship name	*Ship type*
HMS Alacrity	Type 21 Frigate
HMS Active	Type 21 Frigate
HMS Avenger	Type 21 Frigate
HMS Jersey	Offshore Patrol Vessel
HMS Cleopatra	Leander Class Frigate
HMS Minerva	Leander Class Frigate
HMS Hecate	Hecla Class Survey Ship
HMS Lofoten	Landing Craft
HMS Challenger	Seabed Operations Vessel
RMAS Cartmel	Fleet Tender
RMAS Ettrict	Fleet Tender
RMAS Fotherby	Fleet Tender
RMAS Datchet	Fleet Diving Vessel
RMAS Whitehead	Experiment Trial Vessel
RMAS Pointer	Harbour Tug
RMAS Alsation	Harbour Tug
1994–95	
HMS Andromeda	Leander Class Frigate
HMS Juno	Leander Class Frigate
HMS Argonaut	Leander Class Frigate
HMS Broadsword	Type 22 Frigate
HMS Battleaxe	Type 22 Frigate
HMS Brazen	Type 22 Frigate
HMS Brilliant	Type 22 Frigate
HMS Nurton	Minesweeper
HMS Herford	River Class Minesweeper
HMS Carron	River Class Minesweeper
HMS Waveney	River Class Minesweeper
HMS Dovey	River Class Minesweeper
HMS Helmsdale	River Class Minesweeper
HMS Humber	River Class Minesweeper
HMS Ribble	River Class Minesweeper
RFA Olmeda	Large Fleet Tanker
RMAS Clovelly	Fleet Tender
RMAS Cromarty	Fleet Tender
RMAS Froxfield	Fleet Tender
RMAS Loyal Proctor	Fleet Tender
RMAS Moderator	Fleet Tender
RMAS Volunteer	Fleet Tender
RMAS Beddgelert	Fleet Tender
RMAS Gnat	Fleet Tender
RMAS Cricket	Fleet Tender
RMAS Denmead	Fleet Tender
RMAS Elsing	Fleet Tender
RNXS Glencoe	Fleet Tender
TS Aberdovey	Fleet Tender
TS Abinger	Fleet Tender
RMAS Garganey	Mooring and Salvage
RMAS Corgi	Dog Class Tug
Targe	Target Vessel
Magpie	Target Vessel
Bullseye	Target Vessel
RCL Agheila	Ramped Craft Logistic
RCL Antwerp	Ramped Craft Logistic

Various lighters and other unnamed vessels.

(b) Submarines sold in each of the last 5 years

Ship Name	*Ship Type*
1990–91	
None	—
1991–92	
HMS Odin	Oberin Class Conventional Patrol Submarine
HMS Onslaught	
HMS Onyx	
HMS Otter	
HMS Otus	
HMS Ocelot	

(b) Submarines sold in each of the last 5 years

Ship Name	*Ship Type*
1992–93	
HMS Osiris	Oberon Class Conventional Patrol Submarine
1993–94	
None	—
1994–95	
HMS Orpheus	Oberon Class Conventional Patrol Submarine

HEALTH

Abortions

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to hold centrally information by regional health authorities on the percentage of parents who decline to abort a pregnancy when told that their child may have a birth defect; and if he will make a statement. [61]

Mr. Sackville: There are no such plans.

Prescriptions (Students)

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many claims for free prescriptions have been made by students; and how many have been successful for the latest year for which figures are available. [1059]

Mr. Malone: During 1994–95, around 260,000 national health service low—income scheme claims were made by students, of which around 68 per cent. resulted in entitlement to free prescriptions.

Gulf War Syndrome

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures he proposes to implement the report of the Defence Select Committee regarding Gulf war syndrome; and if he will make a statement. [563]

Mr. Soames: I have been asked to reply.

We will be considering the points made by the Defence Select Committee very carefully and will reply formally in due course.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Child Support Agency

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many liability orders have been placed on members of the armed forces by the Child Support Agency for each month since April 1993. [618]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the chief executive, Miss Ann Chant. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Miss Ann Chant to Ms Liz Lynne, dated 20 November 1995:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about liability orders.

No data on the number of liability orders granted during 1993–94 are available. It is unlikely that there will have been many during this period as few cases would have progressed to this stage from the start of the Agency.

A total of 226 liability orders were granted during 1994–95. From April 1995, a monthly breakdown is available, and this is shown in the table attached.

It is not possible to say how many of these liability orders have been granted against members of the armed forces—or any other employment group—as there is no business need for the Agency to collect this information. However, the vast majority of liability orders are directed towards the self employed, because non-compliant absent parents who are employees would normally be subject to deduction from earnings orders; nearly all members of the armed forces are employees.

Liability orders granted 1995–96—Year to date

Month	*Liability orders granted*
April	63
May	125
June	115
July	108
August	153
September	134
Total	698

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Children's Play

Mr. Booth: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will announce the name of the organisation that will be carrying out work on children's play on behalf of her Department. [1665]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: I am grateful to all those organisations that submitted tenders to carry out work in the areas of information dissemination, playwork education and training and play safety. I have today informed the National Playing Fields Association that, subject to the successful completion of post-tender negotiations, it will carry out all three functions for my Department from 1 January 1996.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Sri Lanka

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations have recently been made to the Government of Sri Lanka. [565]

Mr. Hanley: Our high commissioner in Colombo is in frequent contact with members of the Sri Lankan Government. I refer the hon. Member to a declaration made by the European Union on 15 November. A copy is being placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Mr. Timms: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which areas of Sri Lanka have been defined as safe for *(a)* Sri Lankan nationals and *(b)* others; and when he last reviewed this policy. [13]

Mr. Hanley: Our current travel advice for visitors to Sri Lanka is set out below. It is under constant review and was last updated on 15 November.

Peace talks between the Government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam—LTTE—broke down on 19 April and fighting is on-going in the north and east. Do not visit these areas. On 7 August, a bomb exploded in central Colombo, killing 21 people and injuring over 50. There were further similar incidents in October and November. More can be expected. Curfews may be imposed from time to time. Although foreigners are unlikely to be directly targeted, visitors should exercise extreme caution in public places. The south and centre, including all the main tourist areas and the cultural triangle, remain largely unaffected. Further information may be obtained direct from the British high commission in Colombo: Tel: 437336, Fax 430308.

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the current political, military and refugee situation in Sri Lanka. [567]

Mr. Hanley: We welcome President Kumaratunga's recent statements that the conflict in Sri Lanka can be resolved only through a negotiated settlement. We believe that the Government of Sri Lanka's devolution proposals form a basis for discussion on a settlement acceptable to all Sri Lankans.

We have urged both the Government of Sri Lanka and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam—LTTE—to make every effort to protect the civilian population. We welcome the Government's recent statements concerning the shipment of relief supplies to the north.

Acts of Parliament

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the Acts of Parliament and consolidation Acts that affect local government that have been introduced by his Department since January 1994. [42]

Mr. Hanley: None.

Arms Exports (Iraq)

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs at what dates his Department was informed of contracts relating to *(a)* Project Babylon, *(b)* Baby Babylon and *(c)* Supergun propellant; and what was the response his Department made. [1033]

Mr. Hanley: It has not proved possible, in the time available, to establish the exact dates at which the Foreign and Commonwealth Office was first informed of the contracts relating to the projects which subsequently became known as Project Babylon and Supergun. It is likely that the inquiry currently being conducted by Sir Richard Scott will comment further on these matters. Following the detention, on 10 April 1990 at Teesport by HM Customs, of eight steel tubes destined for Iraq, the FCO liaised with other interested departments and agencies while Her Majesty's Customs continued its inquiries.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what has been the outcome of the investigations into possible offences by United Kingdom based companies or their subsidiaries in connection with the supply of products to the Iraqi plant at Ad Dwar and Salman Pak arising from information

passed to him by UNSCOM; if any of the investigations have indicated that Her Majesty's Government had prior knowledge or approved any of these trades; if all the documents and information in the possession of Her Majesty's Government relating to these matters have been passed to the Scott inquiry; and if he will make a statement. [329]

Mr. David Davis: We are aware neither of offences against UK export control legislation by any British company associated with these sites, nor prior knowledge by the Government of illegal trade. The Scott inquiry has been kept informed of all matters within its remit.

We shall continue to support the UN special commission. Any allegations or evidence of wrong-doing by British companies will be investigated and, if appropriate, will be a matter for the courts.

Dependent Territories

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many former right hon. and hon. Members have been appointed as governors of dependent territories since 1979. [418]

Mr. Hanley: Two

Jonathon Moyle

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what was the outcome of the Chilean authorities' investigation into the death of Jonathon Moyle; and if he will make a statement. [332]

Mr. Hanley: The investigation by the Chilean authorities into the death of Jonathon Moyle is continuing. The Chilean Appeal Court ordered further investigations in October 1993, as did the Chilean Supreme Court in April 1995.

HM coroner for Exeter and east Devon is conducting a separate inquest, which has not yet been finalised.

General Communications Headquarters

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the intended capacity of GCHQ after 1999, on the reasons for the proposed closure of the Culmhead station and on the arrangements for the personnel at present stationed there. [599]

Mr. Rifkind: GCHQ will maintain its capability up to and beyond 1999 but will be able to reduce its staff numbers to about 5,000 by 1999 by moving to more efficient methods of operation. The decision to close the composite signals organisation station at Culmhead was the result of a periodic review of resources and was in response to anticipated changes in requirements and technological advances which will enable GCHQ to become more efficient by consolidating some of its operations. As far as possible the run-down at Culmhead will be achieved through voluntary retirements and redeployments, but some compulsory redundancies appear inevitable. Full support to those affected will be provided by GCHQ's personnel and welfare service and an outplacement scheme.

Monetary Union

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what procedures are necessary for the ratification by *(a)* the United Kingdom and *(b)* other nations of changes made to the convergence criteria of the Maastricht treaty or of new criteria made or added by the 1996 IGC. [1099]

Mr. David Davis: The Government do not expect discussion of the Maastricht convergence criteria to the 1996 intergovernmental conference.

Social Chapter

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what legislation has been agreed by the European Union, arising from the social chapter of the Single European Act treaty or the work programme arising from the social charter agreed in Strasbourg by the European Council in 1989, which by virtue of the protocol on social policy in the treaty on European Union does not apply to the United Kingdom; what articles authorised such legislation; and what proposals in or likely to be in this category of legislation is before either the Council of Ministers or the Council of Permanent Representatives. [1495]

Mr. David Davis: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Minister for Education and Employment today.

Wilton Park

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the outcome of the recent review of the Wilton Park agency. [1897]

Mr. Hanley: A prior options review has been carried out on Wilton Park, which has been an executive agency of the FCO since 1991. The review concludes that Wilton Park conferences organised on behalf of the FCO fulfil a valuable function, and that Wilton Park should continue to operate as a next steps agency. The review also makes recommendations for involving FCO geographical commands and departments more closely in Wilton Park conferences; for improving the marketing of the conferences among potential participants and for the market testing of the commercial—non-conference—operation at Wilton Park. The outcome of the review has been endorsed by Ministers, and action to implement it is in hand. A summary of the review's findings has been deposited in the Library of the House.

Taiwan

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he has reviewed his policy on placing visas for the United Kingdom in Taiwan passports. [1898]

Mr. Hanley: We have compared our practice of issuing visas with a number of other countries which, like us, do not recognise Taiwan. I have agreed, with effect from 1 December, that visas for the UK should be placed in travel documents issued by the Taiwan authorities. We regard such travel documents as no more than confirming

the identity of the holder. Our change in practice does not involve recognition of Taiwan or constitute acceptance by the Government of a Taiwanese nationality.

Nigeria

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the measures being adopted by Her Majesty's Government to persuade the Nigerian authorities to adopt democratic values and to safeguard human rights in Nigeria. [1501]

Mr. Hanley: Details of measures in force since 1993 were set out in a written answer to the hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Mr. Worthington) on 2 December 1993, *Official Report*, column *680*. On 11 November 1995, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister announced a full arms embargo against the Nigerian regime. We are considering further options with our EU partners.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the use of a room in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office on 17 October by the British-Nigerian Chamber of Commerce for a cocktail party; and how many Government officials were present. [1208]

Mr. Hanley: The reception was hosted and paid for by the UK chapter of the British-Nigerian Chamber of Commerce, not the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. Two junior FCO officials, and two from the DTI, attended the reception. No Nigerian ministers were present.

Mr. Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the dates of all official visits of members of the Nigerian military regime to Britain since 18 November 1993. [1210]

Mr. Hanley: Since the European Union suspension of high-level visits to and from Nigeria in November 1993 there have been no official visits by members of the Nigerian Government (Provisional Ruling Council and Federal Executive Council) to Britain.

Mr. Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the dates of all private visits of members of the Nigerian military regime to Britain since 18 November 1993. [1211]

Mr. Hanley: Since the European Union restriction of visas for members of the military and their families in June 1993, exemptions have been made only on rare occasions for pressing medical visits.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

British Overseas Trade Board

Mr. Patrick Thompson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade who will succeed Sir Derek Hornby as chairman of the British Overseas Trade Board. [1977]

Mr. Nelson: I am delighted to announce that Martin Laing CBE, chairman of John Laing PLC, will succeed Sir Derek Hornby as chairman of the British Overseas Trade Board—BOTB. Sir Derek will retire following this afternoon's meeting of the BOTB, after five most distinguished years.

EU Industry Council

Mr. Patrick Thompson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the outcome of the EU Industry Council held in Brussels on 6 and 7 November. [1976]

Mr. Eggar: The Council adopted resolutions on the following issues: the role of small and medium-sized enterprises—SMEs—in the process of technological innovation; the industrial aspects of the information society; and the importance of the competitiveness of the European mechanical engineering industry. The Council also agreed conclusions on the following topics: the links between industrial competitiveness and business services; industrial co-operation with other regions and third countries; the feasibility of a European secondary capital market for SMEs; and the interaction between competition policy and industrial competitiveness. The Council reached political agreement, pending examination of the European Parliament's opinion, on a draft Council decision on an action programme to strengthen EU industrial competitiveness.

The Commission made oral presentations on the work of the Commission research-industry task forces and on a forthcoming communication on the promotion of quality as a factor in improving industrial competitiveness. It presented a communication on the impact of international developments on the EU textile and clothing sector.

Political agreement was reached on the text of a Council regulation implementing OECD rules on aid to shipbuilding, with a qualified majority in favour of extending existing Community rules for up to nine months—that is, 1 October 1996—if the OECD agreement had not come into force by then.

On steel, the Commission made a presentation on the monitoring of article 95 cases. I welcomed the Commission's assurance that there would be no resort to article 95 in the future. I shared the Commission's concern about the expiry of the deadline for the 500,000 tonnes of capacity reductions in Italy. Italy promised to provide a new proposal on how this would be achieved within the following two weeks. There was a brief discussion on the Commission's proposal to amend the environmental provisions of the steel aid code.

The most difficult issue on the agenda was the Irish article 95 request for Council assent to state aid to be made in relation to Irish Steel. We have serious concerns about the principle of further state aid to the steel industry. This request caused particular difficulties for the United Kingdom and Luxembourg, where steel plants compete with Irish Steel and where jobs could consequently be put at risk by the injection of the proposed aid. Some progress was made towards formulating possible conditions which could be attached to any aid, but it did not prove possible to reach agreement at the meeting. It was agreed that further discussions would take place.

Finally, under other business, there was a short discussion on the follow-up to the Molitor report on administrative simplification. There was also a brief exchange of views on the Commission's plans to propose

a strategic environmental assessment directive, which would amend directive 85/337/EEC. I warned that it was essential not to undermine the competitiveness of key industrial sectors through the imposition of excessive regulatory burdens.

No votes were taken at the Council.

Offshore Oil and Gas Licensing

Mr. Brazier: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he will announce the blocks to be offered in the 17th round of offshore oil and gas licensing on the United Kingdom continental shelf. [1552]

Mr. Page: I have decided to offer 275 blocks for licensing in 68 tranches or groups in the 17th offshore licensing round. We are entering real frontier territory with some of the tranches nearly as far west as Rockall. It is a reflection of the potential of the UK continental shelf that after 30 years of exploration, there are still exciting new areas to search.

Tranches vary from two to 13 blocks, depending on perceived prospectivity, location and water depth, and are chosen so that companies can consider all of the different areas available. I am offering blocks in groups because relatively little is known about the areas being offered.

Most of the tranches offered—41—are in the Rockall trough, located east of Rockall and to the south-west of the recent discoveries in the west of Shetland area. The trough is an area where little exploration has taken place but which has considerable potential for significant discoveries.

Tranches are also offered to the south-west of England, to the north of Scotland and of the east coast of England. Some are in areas that have not been explored before or were once considered unprospective. The fact that these blocks are not of interest to the industry shows how new technology and ideas can challenge long-established perceptions.

Since the areas offered are comparatively unknown, companies will have a year in which to prepare their applications. This gives them an opportunity to acquire seismic data during the "weather window" next summer and to process and analyse it before committing themselves. Instead of the usual six years, successful applicants for these tranches will have nine years in which to carry out their agreed work programmes. At this stage, I am asking companies to commit to a programme for the first three years only because of the uncertainties of exploring such new areas.

Companies will be expected to show commitment to the future of the UK continental shelf by coming forward with new ideas, and keeping up the momentum for increasing competitiveness and cutting costs. The objective of the 17th round is to encourage exploration in new areas and so to continue the development of our oil and gas resources into the next century.

Applicants must show awareness of available information on environmental resources in the area for which they are applying. They must assess the potential impact of their proposed work programmes on the environment and identify how any adverse effects can be avoided or minimised.

Conditions to be attached to licences in this round to safeguard the environment have been agreed with the Joint Nature Conservation Committee. Restrictions also cover the interests of other users of the sea such as fishing, defence and transport.

We have conducted a wide-ranging consultation exercise on the 691 blocks which were nominated by the industry in march, involving other Government Departments, local authorities and environmental groups. In all a total of over 70 organisations have provided advice.

The 17th round completes the three-round licensing cycle announced by my right hon. Friend the Minister for Industry and Energy in April 1994. The 15th round awarded blocks in established areas in the central North sea and southern gas basin. The 16th round awards, which I announced during the summer, covered areas to the west of Shetland and around the coast of Britain.

Applications for the 17th round are required by noon on Wednesday 27 November 1996. Licence awards should be announced during the spring of 1997.

I will now publish in the *Official Journal of the European Communities* a formal announcement giving the detailed terms for the 17th round, including the format of applications, the information required with the application and the basis on which awards will be made.

Energy Technology Support Unit

Mr. Frank Cook: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many inquiries the energy technology support unit has received from the general public about renewable energy *(a)* in total since the energy technology support unit was established and *(b)* on average per year. [201]

Mr. Page: The energy technology support unit has received some 70,000 inquiries of all types since 1 April 1989, when the Renewable Energy Enquiries Bureau commissioned a database to record inquiries. Statistics for inquiries before that date are not available.

Since 1 April 1989, inquiries have averaged 12,000 annually across a range of correspondent types, with roughly 18 per cent. of inquiries coming from private individuals, 30 per cent. from commerce and industry and 45 per cent. from education; 7 per cent. were from other inquirers.

As renewable energy has moved to the marketplace, inquiries from companies have increased and, across the last two financial years—1993–94 and 1994–95—have averaged 39 per cent.—over 8,800—of the nearly 23,000 inquiries received.

British Coal Pensions

Mr. Cousins: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what revenues he expects to generate from the disposal of the British Coal pension fund management company and the British coal pension fund venture capital company. [533]

Mr. Page: These are matters for British Coal. I understand that disposal of the British Coal pension fund management company is still being negotiated. I am asking the chairman to write to the hon. Member once the two disposals have been completed.

Aerospace Industry

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many times a month his Department liaises with the Ministry of Defence in respect of support for the aerospace industry. [1009]

Mr. Eggar: My Department has very frequent contact with the Ministry of Defence on a wide range of issues relevant to the aerospace sector including the support which both Departments provide to the industry. The exact number of contacts is not recorded.

Mr. Cunningham: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if it is his Department's policy to maintain the United Kingdom's total capacity in the aerospace industry; and what Government assistance is available to achieve this. [1011]

Mr. Eggar: The United Kingdom aerospace industry is a valuable contributor to the UK economy with a consistent trade surplus since 1980. My Department recognises the importance of the industry and has provided over £1.6 billion in support since 1979 for a number of major civil aerospace projects, mainly in the form of launch aid support. Aerospace benefits from a dedicated DTI budget for research through the civil aircraft research and demonstration programme—CARAD. Assistance for export projects is provided by the Export Credits Guarantee Department. Decisions on capacity are a matter for individual companies; but the DTI works to promote the aerospace industry's competitiveness by supporting the Society of British Aerospace Companies' competitiveness challenge. It also supports the industry in forging international partnerships and pursuing major export opportunities and will continue to stimulate collaboration in technology acquisition through the national strategic technology acquisition plan—NSTAP—and the technology foresight initiatives.

Airbus

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the British share of the Airbus consortium; how many jobs result from that share; and what plans the Government have to increase their share of the consortium. [1013]

Mr. Eggar: British Aerospace has a 20 per cent. share in Airbus Industrie. The Government have no share in the Airbus consortium; questions relating to BAe's share are a matter for the company. Over 25,000 British workers are directly involved in the Airbus programmes.

Mr. Cunningham: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many new jobs the Airbus consortium expects to create by 2010. [1008]

Mr. Eggar: This is a matter for British Aerospace and the other partners in the Airbus consortium.

Mr. Cunningham: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the predicted rise of Airbus' fleet capacity by 2010, expressing the figures in terms of *(a)* real capacity and *(b)* world market share. [1007]

Mr. Eggar: *(a)* Airbus Industrie forecasts a world-wide requirement for about 13,000 new large civil aircraft, valued at about $1,000 billion, by 2014.

(b) Airbus hopes to increase its share of the market over this period from 30 per cent. to 50 per cent.

Bullying

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what proposals he has to combat bullying in the workplace; and if he will make a statement. [1004]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: Employees who are experiencing bullying in the workplace should in the first instance take this up with their employer, making use of any internal grievance procedures. The Health and Safety Executive's recently published booklet, "Stress at Work: A Guide for Employers", provides advice on preventing ill health though stress which may be caused by persistent bullying. Bullying could constitute grounds for a complaint of constructive unfair dismissal to an industrial tribunal and under the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 it is a criminal offence to cause intentional harassment, alarm or distress.

Patent Office

Mr. Ingram: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many staff are currently employed in the Patent Office; and what are the staff projections for each of the next three years. [1199]

Mr. Ian Taylor: At the end of October 973 staff were employed at the Patent Office. Forecasts of staff levels are set out in the 1995 corporate plan, a copy of which is in the Library of the House. Relevant figures are:

1996–97: 920

1997–98: 900

1998–99: 880

A major factor in employment will be the level of demand.

Mr. Ingram: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans he has to privatise the Patent Office, and if he will make a statement. [1201]

Mr. Taylor: I have nothing to add to the statement made by my right hon. Friend the then President of the Board of Trade on 14 December 1994, *Official Report*, columns *657–58*.

Mr. Ingram: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the tender specifications applying to services to be contracted-out from the Patent Office. [1198]

Mr. Taylor: The specification for the London front office and facilities management are now at an advanced stage.

Mr. Ingram: To ask the President of the Board of Trade to what extent patent and trademark work currently undertaken within the Manchester offices of the Patent Office is included in the contracting-out specification which will apply to the marketing and information directorate. [1200]

Mr. Taylor: The Manchester office is not within the scope of any study of the marketing and information directorate. Its future is however under separate review. The legal requirement to maintain an office in Manchester ended with the implementation of the Trade Marks Act 1994.

Assisted Areas Map

Mr. David Porter: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he next expects to review the assisted areas map; if he will accept interim submissions from areas excluded in the last review; and if he will make a statement. [227]

Mr. Eggar: The Government have no plans to review the assisted areas map during this Parliament. The European Commission imposes an overall ceiling on the percentage of working population covered by the assisted areas map. It is not possible to review the status of individual areas outside a full review.

Telephone Ownership

Mr. Harvey: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the number of privately owned telephones by *(a)* region and *(b)* county; and if he will make a statement. [607]

Mr. Ian Taylor *[holding answer 20 November 1995]:* At end March 1994 there were approximately 20.94 million residential exchange lines nationwide. Overall data by region and county are not held. Telephone ownership has risen in the United Kingdom from 78 per cent. per household in 1984 to 91 per cent. today. I share the objective of the Director General of Telecommunications to increase that figure still further.

In rural areas, access will be helped by use of the radio spectrum that was released recently.

Nanotechnology

Mr. Flynn: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what new proposals he has to increase research into and application of nanotechnology. [346]

Mr. Ian Taylor *[holding answer 20 November 1995]:* The Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council manages a programme in nanotechnology which funds a variety of research in universities. The budget for new commitments by the programme was increased to £1 million per annum this year. The Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council funds a research project in nanotechnology but has no plans to increase its activity in this area.

Telephone Disconnections

Mr. Harvey: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the number of telephone connections cut off by British Telecom each year since privatisation; and if he will make a statement. [606]

Mr. Ian Taylor *[holding answer 20 November 1995]:* That is a matter for BT. However, following a request from the Director General of Telecommunications, monthly figures for BT disconnections covering the period July 1994 to September 1995 have been placed in the Oftel library. These show average total disconnections of around 64,000 per month, and average net disconnections of around 26,000 per month—the net average excludes cases where customers were rapidly re-connected after payment of bills. Responsibility for the provision of universal telecoms service falls to the Director General of Telecommunications, who has taken a close interest in all telecoms operators' policies towards disconnection. He is working to develop more innovative approaches to affordable and equitable access to telecommunications, where outright disconnection of service would form a last resort used only in cases of wilful fraud.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Valley Site, Rhydymwyn

Mr. Hanson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will publish and deposit in the Library the Drivers Jonas report of May 1994 on the valley site at Rhydymwyn, Clwyd. [596]

Mr. Boswell: A copy of the environment assessment of May 1994 which was prepared by Dames and Moore but which was commissioned by Drivers Jonas on behalf of the Ministry has been placed in the Library of the House today.

Fish Landings

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make it his policy to restrict fish landings to specified ports and regions for fish to be sold through auction; and if he will make a statement on measures to stop black fish landings. [987]

Mr. Baldry: The fisheries departments devote substantial resources to detecting and preventing illegal landings and appropriate enforcement action is taken where there is evidence of illegal landings occurring. Designated ports and approved auction sales are among the additional control measures which are kept under review.

Fish Quotas

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the species which the Commission is proposing should be subject to quotas under the common fisheries policy. [1003]

Mr. Baldry: The following fish species are subject to quotas under the common fisheries policy:

Anchovy
Anglerfish
Atlantic Salmon
Blue Ling and Ling
Blue Whiting
Capelin
Catfish
Cod
Common Sole
Greenland Halibut
Haddock
Hake

Herring
Horse Mackerel
Mackerel
Megrim
Northern Prawn
Norway Lobster
Norway Pout
Plaice
Polar Cod
Pollack
Redfish
Roundnose Grenadier
Saithe
Sandeel
Sprat
Whiting

Acts of Parliament

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the Acts of Parliament and consolidation Acts that affect local government that have been introduced by his Department since January 1994. [30]

Mr. Boswell: The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has introduced two Acts of Parliament since January 1994.

The Land Drainage Act 1994 amends the Land Drainage Act 1991 in relation to the functions of internal drainage boards and local authorities.

The Agricultural Tenancies Act 1995 does not impose express duties on local government bodies, but any such body acting in the capacity of agricultural landlord or tenant will be subject to the provisions of the Act where applicable.

Chocolate Directive

Mr. Steen: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement as to the effects on the traditional British chocolate bar of the EU chocolate directive; and what is Her Majesty's Government's position on the directive. [1324]

Mr. Browning: The existing EC Cocoa and Chocolate Products Directive, which was agreed in 1973, lays down, amongst other things, compositional standards for chocolate. Under this directive, the United Kingdom may manufacture, and sell as such, chocolate containing vegetable fat other than cocoa butter. The directive also specifies compositional standards for "milk chocolate" manufactured and sold in the United Kingdom and Ireland; this standard is different from that set for milk chocolate manufactured and sold in other member states.

The EC Commission is undertaking a review of this directive but has not yet placed a proposal before the Council.

Our objective is to see that the compositional standards in the new directive fully cover the wide variety of consumer tastes already established within the Community and that the directive ensures free circulation of all traditional styles of chocolate and chocolate products.

Carbaryl

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to revoke the approval for products containing carbaryl. [1218]

Mrs. Browning: As announced on 7 November, the Government have accepted the advice regarding pesticide uses of carbaryl from the Advisory Committee on Pesticides. The ACP concluded that there was no cause for concern about the risk to consumers from the low levels of residues currently found in food. However, the ACP advised that action should be taken to reduce or remove long term exposure for the users of pesticides containing carbaryl.

Accordingly, the Government have revoked all approvals for carbaryl-containing pesticide products intended for non-agricultural, garden or poultry house use. A one year period of grace will be allowed for stocks already in the supply chain to be used up. The remaining professional pesticide uses will be allowed to continue subject to the tightest practicable controls on the method of application and protective equipment and clothing.

The issue of the safety of carbaryl in veterinary products is under active consideration by the Veterinary Products Committee.

WALES

Acts of Parliament

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the Acts of Parliament, including consolidation Acts, that affect local government that have been introduced by his Department since January 1994. [25]

Mr. Hague: Since January 1994, my Department has introduced the Local Government (Wales) Act 1994, which received Royal Assent on 5 July 1994.

Ministerial Transport, London

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many times in the last year he has used *(a)* London Buses and *(b)* London Underground while on official business. [406]

Mr. Hague: None. I travel on London Underground in a personal capacity.

Mid-Wales Airport

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what recent representations he has received regarding the establishment of a Mid-Wales airport and if he will make a statement. [1061]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: There have been no recent representations about the airport. Mid-Wales airport was established some four years ago with the help of funds provided under the rural initiative scheme. ERDF funds were provided later for a taxiway, hardstanding and control room. Montgomeryshire district council made a bid in February for funds under the strategic development scheme for extending the runway but this was later withdrawn.

Nursery Vouchers

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list all the organisations and individuals who have responded to his consultation on nursery vouchers, indicating whether they were for or against his proposals. [1203]

Mr. Richards: A list of organisations is given. Responses were also received from 375 individuals and school governing bodies, including two petitions. All comments are currently being analysed.

RESPONSES TO THE CONSULTATION DOCUMENT "PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION: IMPLEMENTATION OF THE VOUCHER SCHEME"

County Councils:

Dyfed

Gwent

Gwynedd

Mid Glamorgan

Powys

West Glamorgan

Unitary Authorities:

Anglesey County Council (CC)

(County Borough) of Blaenau Gwent

Bridgend County Borough Council (CBC)

Caerphilly CBC

Cardiganshire CC

Denbighshire CC

Flintshire CC

Merthyr Tydfil CBC

Neath & Port Talbot CBC

Newport CBC

Pembrokeshire CC

(County of) Swansea

Wrexham CBC

Town Councils:

Llanwrtyd Wells

Rhayader

Teacher Organisations:

National Association of Headteachers (NAHT)

National Union of Teachers (NUT)

NAS/UWT Wales

Dyfed Parent Teacher Association

Powys Parent Teacher Association

Undeb Cenedlaethol Athrawon Cymru (UCAC)

Miscellaneous Organisations:

Assembly of Welsh Counties

Audit Commission

Children in Wales

Mudiad Ysgolion Meithrin

Pre-school Playgroups Association

The Welsh Language Board

Women's National Commission

Save the Children Fund

Standing Conference of Women's Organisations

Church Bodies:

Monmouth Diocesan Council for Education

The Free Church Federal Council

Emergency Medical Intakes

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what consultations he has had with the chairmen of acute hospitals, trusts and health authorities in relation to the closure of acute hospitals to emergency medical intakes since 1 November; what statistics he has collected on the number of occasions of such intake closures; and if he will make a statement; [1329]

(2) what consultations he has had with chairmen of acute hospitals, trusts and health authorities in Wales in relation to the assessment of the need for emergency medical intake beds, and the availability of such beds since 1 November. [1330]

Mr. Hague: The management of emergency medical intake is primarily an operational issue for health authorities and trusts, on which statistics are not held centrally by my Department. However, to assist with its management, the Welsh Office some months ago commissioned a review of referral practices and I expect the results to be available shortly. In the meantime, discussions between my Department and the NHS are taking place. I expect them to identify action which will address the issue.

Residuary Body for Wales

Sir Wyn Roberts: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to issue additional guidance to the residuary body regarding surplus properties and disputed properties where an activity continues beyond 1 April 1996. [1899]

Mr. Hague: I have today issued, for consultation, revised draft guidance to the residuary body for Wales dealing with property which should be transferred to it. The revised guidance indicates that any property, other than administrative buildings, which is not required by the new authorities for the purpose of carrying out their functions or any property whose future ownership is in dispute should not be transferred to the residuary body where the property is used for an existing activity for the carrying out of which full or part-time staff are wholly employed.

Such properties should normally be transferred to a successor authority or authorities for disposal or resolution of the dispute. In the absence of a local agreement the following will apply: where the property is owned or leased by a non-split district or county it should be transferred to the successor authority; where the property is owned or leased by a split district or county it should be transferred into the joint ownership of the successor authorities.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Mater Hospital

Rev. Ian Paisley: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will outline the subsequent changes to the 1971 deed of arrangement which brought the Mater hospital into the national health service. [68]

Mr. Moss: There has been only one subsequent change to the original deed of arrangement. On 30 August 1984, the Department and the trustees of the Mater infirmorum

hospital signed a "supplemental deed of arrangement", specifically designed to permit them jointly to fund the major scheme of reconstruction and modernisation which was officially opened in 1991,

Rev. Ian Paisley: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the current Roman Catholic Church trustees of the Mater hospital. [66]

Mr. Moss: No. Appointment of Roman Catholic Church trustees for the Mater infirmorum hospital is not a matter for my Department and a list of trustees is not held.

Rev. Ian Paisley: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the remit of the Mater hospital trust board's joint consultative committee with the trustees. [65]

Mr. Moss: Under the terms of the deed of arrangement with the trustees which brought the Mater infirmorum hospital into the Health and Personal Social Services in 1971, the joint consultative committee shall consider any proposals by the body responsible for the management of the hospital relating to:

the appointment of senior medical staff;

the appointment of heads of service departments'

ethical practices, particularly in obstetrics, gynaecology, geriatrics and psychiatry;

the use of endowments and trust funds; and

the use of any part of the hospital as accommodation for a nurses training school.

Rev. Ian Paisley: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if the Mater hospital Church trustees have *(a)* representation on the hospital's trust board and *(b)* consultation rights with hospital's trust board. [67]

Mr. Moss: The trustees of the Mater infirmorum hospital are not represented on its trust board. Under the provisions of article 96 of the Health and Personal Social Services (Northern Ireland) Order 1972, the deed of arrangement between the Department of Health and Social Services and the hospital trustees requires regard to be had in the general administration of the hospital to the preservation of its Roman Catholic character and association. I have already set out areas specifically affected by these consultation rights in the reply I gave the hon. Gentleman earlier today.

Ministerial Transport, London

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many times in the last year he has used *(a)* the London Underground and *(b)* London Buses while on official business. [427]

Sir Patrick Mayhew: None.

Housing Bill

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if it is his policy that Northern Ireland will be included in the forthcoming Housing Bill. [75]

Mr. Moss: The matter is under active consideration. I will write to the hon. Gentleman once a decision has been reached.

Teaching Appointments

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what procedures the education boards in Northern Ireland have to ensure that selectors and applicants for school teaching appointments, and in related advertisements, are aware that discrimination on religious or political grounds is lawful when such appointments are made. [73]

Mr. Ancram: Such procedures are a matter for the education and library boards, and other employing authorities as appropriate.

Funding and Planning Council

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to introduce a funding and planning council for further education in Northern Ireland. [1110]

Mr. Ancram: The Government are considering a range of options for the future planning and funding of further education in Northern Ireland.

Out-of-hours Service (GPs)

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he expects to announce the amount for the development fund for out-of-hours service for general practitioners in Northern Ireland. [467]

Mr. Moss: My officials in the Health and Personal Social Services management executive are meeting the profession's representatives on 23 November to discuss the out-of-hours arrangements in Northern Ireland. The profession will be formally notified of the size of the development fund at that meeting.

Murder Prosecutions

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many persons have been prosecuted for murder in each of the past 10 years; and how many of these persons were prosecuted for murder related to the terrorist campaign. [10]

Sir John Wheeler: The information is as follows:

Number of persons prosecuted for murder 1985–1994

	Terrorist	*Non terrorist*	*Total*
1985	38	1	39
1986	24	1	25
1987	10	9	19
1988	12	5	17
1989	11	4	15
1990	8	1	9
1991	9	2	11
1992	7	7	14
1993	17	1	18
1994	13	4	17

These figures refer to the number of persons prosecuted for murder in separate murder trials. A person facing two counts of murder in the same trial is counted once and a person prosecuted for two murders in separate trials is counted twice.

The statistics in the terrorist murder column refer to prosecutions in non-jury Crown courts.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Deportation

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many people who, when sentenced to prison, were also recommended for deportation at the conclusion of their sentence were detained in prison following the completion of their sentence; and what was the average period of time for which they were so detained for each of the last three years and in the current year to date; [984]

(2) how many people who, when sentenced to prison, were also recommended for deportation at the conclusion of their sentence, are still detained in prison having completed their sentence. [983]

Mr. Kirkhope: The available information is given in the table. The other information requested is not readily available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Persons recommended for deportation by a court detained in prison after completion of a custodial sentence as at 17 November 1995:

	Number
Less than 1 month	2
1 to 2 months	6
2 to 3 months	2
3 to 4 months	1
4 to 5 months	0
6 months to 1 year	2
Over 1 year	1
Total	14

Prison Transfers

Ms Janet Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners were transferred from Styal prison for each month of 1995, indicating the reason for the transfer in each case, and the name of the prison to which the transfer was made. [142]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Ms Janet Anderson, dated 21 November 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the number of prisoners transferred from Styal prison for each month of 1995, the reason for each transfer and the name of the prison to which each transfer was made.

The attached table shows the number of prisoners transferred in each month of 1995 and the destination establishments. Information on the reasons for each transfer is not centrally recorded and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Transfer of Prisoners from HMP Styal in 1995

Destination of Transfer	*January*	*February*	*March*	*April*	*May*
Risley	12	39	14	8	6
Durham	—	—	4	—	—
Low Newton	—	—	—	—	—
Winchester	—	—	—	—	4
Pucklechurch	—	—	1	4	2

Transfer of Prisoners from HMP Styal in 1995

Destination of Transfer	*January*	*February*	*March*	*April*	*May*
Brockhill	—	—	—	—	—
Drake Hall	1	2	16	1	2
Bullwood Hall	—	—	—	—	2
Cookham Wood	1	—	—	—	3
New Hall	4	—	—	—	2
Holloway	2	3	5	1	3
Askham Grange	2	1	3	2	9

Destination of transfer	*June*	*July*	*August*	*September*	*October/ November*
Risley	8	11	10	11	8
Durham	—	1	—	1	1
Low Newton	—	1	—	—	—
Winchester	—	—	—	—	—
Pucklechurch	—	1	—	1	1
Brockhill	—	—	—	—	5
Drake Hall	5	2	—	—	—
Bullwood Hall	—	—	—	1	—
Cookham Wood	—	—	2	—	—
New Hall	1	1	4	2	4
Holloway	—	4	1	2	4
Askham Grange	—	10	1	4	3

Probation Officers

Ms Janet Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received *(a)* for and *(b)* against his proposals to eliminate the social work training element for probation officers. [146]

Mr. Kirkhope: Since the government's decisions about probation officer recruitment and training were announced on 2 October, 89 letters have been received, of which 61 were against and 28 were for a break with social work education.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many asylum seekers who have been held in detention have been on hunger strike during the current year. [993]

Mr. Kirkhope: A total of 40 people detained under Immigration Act powers have refused food or fluids at some stage during 1995 up to 17 November. Central records of people who have refused food or fluids do not distinguish between those who have applied for asylum from others, and this information could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

As at 17 November only one immigration detainee was refusing food or fluids.

Prison Service

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the projected private sector involvement in the Prison Service; and what was the basis for calculating this figure. [385]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. George Howarth, dated 21 November 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about projected private sector involvement in the Prison Service.

Our aim is to create a private sector able to provide sustained competition, to improve standards and cost efficiency. There is a commitment that, in the initial phase, about ten per cent of prisons in England and Wales (thirteen in total) will be managed by the private sector.

This strategy is designed to secure continuing and lasting improvements in standards, quality and cost efficiency across the whole of the prison system in England and Wales. For these objectives to be achieved, the private sector must be large enough to provide sustained competition and involve several private sector companies.

Prison Population

Ms Janet Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate he has made of the projected growth in the prison population as a result of measures he announced on 12 October. [137]

Mr. Maclean: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave her on 26 October *Official Report*, column *755–56*.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his estimate of *(a)* the total prison inmate population of prisons in each of the next five years and *(b)* the totals of prison places that will be available. [348]

Miss Widdecombe: *[holding answer 20 November 1995]:* Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Pearson to Mr. Paul Flynn, dated 21 November 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question about the estimate of the total prison inmate population of prisons in each of the next five years and the totals of prison places that will be available.

The most recent available projections were published in May as part of the Prison Service's 1995 Corporate Plan. Revised and updated projections will be published in the new year as part of the 1996 Corporate Plan.

Police Constables

Ms Janet Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made as to the experience, briefing and training of police constables on the beat. [151]

Mr. Maclean: The way in which beat patrol officers are used is an operational matter for chief constables. The scope and content of the probationer training curriculum is currently being reviewed to ensure that new recruits are equipped with the necessary skills and abilities to undertake this key role.

Victimisation (Homosexuals)

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the co-ordinated police initiatives on a United Kingdom or Wales basis intended to combat violence against homosexuals. [605]

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 20 November 1995]:* The prevention and detection of crime are operational responsibilities of chief officer of police. Forces co-operate with others where circumstances indicate that to be an effective approach to reducing crime of whatever form.

LORD PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

Late Payment

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Lord President of the Council how his Department publicises payment practices other than as percentages of invoices paid late.

Mr. Newton: Consideration is being given to the inclusion of a statement on payment practices in my Department's next annual report.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Lord President of the Council what is the average length of time it takes for his Department to pay invoices.

Mr. Newton: The practice of the Privy Council Office is to pay all invoices within 30 days.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Charter Mark Scheme

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make a statement on British Gas's decision to withdraw from the charter mark award scheme.

Mr. Freeman: Charter mark assessors were looking into standards of service at British Gas when the company relinquished its award earlier this month. This pre-empted any recommendation the assessors might have reached as a result of their investigation into standards of service at the company.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

Aid Budget

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what increases to the total overseas aid budget would be required in each of the next three years to preserve the real value of the bilateral aid programme. [1592]

Mr. Hanley: I refer the hon. Member to the answer that I gave the hon. Member for Ilford, South (Mr. Gapes) on 8 November *Official Report*, columns *902–903*.

Overseas Aid

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the impact of the general agreement on tariffs and trade on overseas aid to *(a)* sub-Saharan Africa, *(b)* Latin America and the Caribbean, *(c)* south and central Asia, *(d)* middle east and north Africa, *(e)* other Asia and Oceania and *(f)* eastern Europe. [1541]

Mr. Hanley: There is no direct linkage between trade liberalisation and the volume of overseas aid. However, many developing countries have taken advantage of successive general agreements on tariffs and trade to achieve export-led growth and so have reduced their need for aid.

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the impact of a shift from bilateral aid to multilateral aid on nations which receive overseas aid from the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement. [1549]

Mr. Hanley: As the share of multilateral aid, particularly that through the EC, rises it is all the more important to work to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of multilateral aid; to focus bilateral aid on activities where the United Kingdom has a comparative advantage; and to pursue the greatest possible complementarity between both forms of aid. Action is in hand on all these points.

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to change the level of expenditure on overseas aid and development. [1545]

Mr. Hanley: We shall maintain an effective and substantial programme focused on the poorest countries. Future levels of aid will be announced by my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer in his Budget statement on 28 November.

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations he has had from business interests with regard to distribution of the overseas aid programme. [1539]

Mr. Hanley: None. But my noble Friend the Minister for Overseas Development has regular discussions with the business community about the aid programme with the twin aims of explaining developments in aid policy, and exploring with them how expenditure through the aid programme can, as a secondary objective, lead to future United Kingdom commercial relations. The question of the distribution of the aid programme is one topic occasionally referred to.

EU Development Council

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the matters discussed and decisions taken, indicating any votes, at the EU Development Council in Brussels on 13 November. [1556]

Ms Quin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the outcome of the EU Development Council on 13 November. [1204]

Mr. Hanley: The EU Development Council has been rescheduled to 20 December.

Immunisation Programmes

Ms Glenda Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what percentage of the overseas aid budget is allocated to immunisation programmes; and if this percentage will be increased over the next five years. [222]

Mr. Hanley *[holding answer 20 November 1995]:* Immunisation against infectious diseases is one of the most cost-effective means available for improving human health. During 1994, the ODA contributed around £250 million, or at least 10 per cent. of the aid budget, directly to health and population aid. A further sum was provided indirectly, through British contributions to the European Commission, World bank and UNICEF.

Funds were used to improve the effectiveness of health services in developing countries and countries in transition; to promote improved reproductive health including safer maternity; to reduce suffering due to communicable diseases, especially tuberculosis, malaria and HIV; and to improve access to essential health care in emergencies. In all these circumstances, United Kingdom funding contributes to improved population coverage with effective vaccines. Funds are routed through the ODA's bilateral country, emergency and technology development and research programmes, grants to UNICEF and WHO, and joint funding of non-governmental organisations like Save the Children Fund, Oxfam and MERLIN.

Separate figures are not available for UK spending on immunisation work within these broader programmes.

Land Mines

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations have been made to the Governments of *(a)* Vietnam, *(b)* Cambodia, *(c)* Mozambique and *(d)* other developing countries regarding the results of British research into the control and destruction of land mines. [108]

Mr. Hanley *[holding answer 20 November 1995]:* None.

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what public funds have been expended on research into the control and destruction of land mines for each of the past five years. [109]

Mr. Hanley *[holding answer 20 November 1995]:* The Ministry of defence supports a programme of generic research into battlefield engineering, part of which is directed towards studies into the control and destruction of land mines. It is estimated that expenditure on such work in this financial year will be more than £150,000. Figures for preceding years are not readily available but are understood to be comparable for the past three years and lower prior to that.

In addition, the United Kingdom participates in a number of programmes to the same purpose in NATO and in information exchanges with our allies under the technical co-operation programme.

The Overseas Development Administration has provided £104,928 to fund a short research programme by the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency to review the application of various techniques for mine detection against the operational requirements of humanitarian mine clearance programmes.

ENVIRONMENT

Regional Government (North-West)

13. **Mr. Mans:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received about regional government in the north-west. [744]

Mr. Curry: I have received no representations on this issue.

Local Government Finance

14. **Mr. Harvey:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the future of the area cost adjustment. [745]

Mr. Curry: I have announced my proposals for an independent review of the area cost adjustment.

16. **Lady Olga Maitland:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on local government spending. [747]

Sir Paul Beresford: My right hon. Friend will be making a statement on the provisional 1996–97 local government finance settlement shortly after my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor's Budget statement.

23. **Mr. Hanson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what consideration he has given to changes to the 1995–96 capping criteria guidelines. [756]

Mr. Curry: We review the capping criteria every year. My proposals for criteria for 1996–97 will be announced with the rest of the local government finance settlement after the budget.

Out-of-town Supermarkets

15. **Mr. Jim Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what estimate he has as to how many out-of-town supermarkets have been opened in the past five years. [746]

Sir Paul Beresford: The Department does not have information on applications granted by local planning authorities.

Housing

17. **Mr. Ian Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many tenants bought their homes under the right-to-buy legislation last year. [748]

Mr. Curry: In England, over 43,000 homes were sold under the right to buy between April 1994 and March 1995. The figure for Great Britain as a whole is more than 66,000.

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will propose changes to the Landlord and Tenant Act 1954 following the decision in Howson *v.* Buxton and in relation to persons working in association. [415]

Mr. Clappison: It is not clear how the decision in Howson *v.* Buxton which was decided in 1928, gives rises to an argument for change to the Landlord and Tenant Act 1954.

Single Regeneration Budget

18. **Mr. Khabra:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he intends to announce allocation of the single regeneration budget. [750]

Mr. Curry: My. right hon. Friend intends to announce successful bids under the second round of the single regeneration budget challenge fund by Christmas.

Local Government (Candidates)

19. **Mr. David Atkinson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to encourage more business men to stand as candidates for local government. [751]

Sir Paul Beresford: Our aim is to encourage people with a wide range of backgrounds, including business men, to serve as councillors. The changes which we have recently made to the councillors' allowances system are designed to achieve just this.

Biodiversity

20. **Mr. Welsh:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what further efforts will be made to preserve biodiversity within critical habitats in Britain; and if he will make a statement. [752]

Mr. Clappison: The Government plan to submit further candidate special areas of conservation under the EC habitats directive when the results of the recent public consultation on the proposed list have been fully considered. In addition, the steering group, set up by the Government to advise on biodiversity, will publish its report on 13 December. The report will contain proposals for targets and costed action plans for key species and habitats in the United Kingdom.

Noise Controls

21. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received about restricting noise. [753]

Mr. Clappison: My Department receives representations about all forms of environmental noise on a regular basis. The vast majority of this correspondence relates to neighbour noise issues.

Regional Government (West Midlands)

22. **Mr. Luff:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what recent representations he has received about regional government in the west Midlands. [754]

Sir Paul Beresford: I have received no representation on this issue.

Social Housing

24. **Mr. Sutcliffe:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assistance he will give to local authorities to build affordable social housing. [757]

Mr. Curry: Housing Associations are now the main providers of new social housing. In total, in 1995–96 around 70,000 additional new lettings are expected to be provided through a mixture of public and private funding.

National Parks

25. **Mr. Chris Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to announce the creation of any new national parks. [758]

Mr. Clappison: The Government have no plans to designate any new national parks.

Community Forests

26. **Mr. Simon Coombs:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many hectares of community forest have been promised to date by local authorities; and if he will make a statement. [759]

Mr. Clappison: We have approved the business plans for 12 community forests in England. The aims of the forests are to assist economic regeneration by landscape and amenity improvements, and to provide recreation opportunities on the edges of towns and cities. Individual planting targets vary, but the overall aim is to increase tree cover in each forest to around 30 per cent. over the next 30 to 50 years. Since 1991, 2,347 hectares of woodland has been planted and over 2,000 hectares of wildlife habitat created.

Building Research Establishment

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will place in the Library a copy of the brief which his Department intends to issue to consultants advising on the privatisation of the Building Research Establishment. [314]

Sir Paul Beresford: Consultants have been invited to tender for providing advice on the relative disadvantages and advantages of the options for transferring BRE to the private sector. I have placed a copy of the specification issued to them in the Library of the House today.

Water Industry (Customer Satisfaction)

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to commission any independent research into customer satisfaction with the water industry. [129]

Mr. Clappison: This is a matter for the companies and the independent regulator for the water industry, who carry out research as appropriate.

Mrs. Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what cut-off date has been used for the collection of statistics relating to customer complaints about the water industry in the current year; [125]

(2) what categories are used to identify the subject of a customer's complaints to a water undertaker; [128]

(3) if he will list the number of *(a)* written and *(b)* telephone complaints made to each water or sewerage company in each of the five years from 1990 to 1995; and what month they are calculated from. [899]

Mr. Clappison: Information on the number of written and telephone billing complaints, and the total number of written complaints to water and sewerage companies, is published by the Office of Water Services in its annual "Report on Levels of Service for the Water Industry in England and Wales", covering the period 1 April to 31 March each year, copies of which are in the Library.

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what has the number of *(a)* written and *(b)* telephone complaints made to Ofwat regional committees in each of the years from 1990 to 1995. [900]

Mr. Clappison: Information on the number of complaints made to Ofwat regional customer service committees is contained in the individual annual reports of the committees and in the Office of Water Services' "Review of Companies' Complaints Procedures" of October 1995, copies of which are in the Library.

Water Supplies

Mr. Chris Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when the National Rivers Authority will report to him on the adequacy of water companies' plans to safeguard water supplies next summer; and what is the minimum time required if Government intervention is necessary to protect and provide water supplies if the water companies' plans prove inadequate. [409]

Mr. Clappison: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has asked the National Rivers Authority to report to him by 15 December, following consultation with the companies, on the adequacy of water companies' plans to safeguard supplies next summer. The minimum time required to implement additional measures will depend on the nature of those measures.

Power Lines (Safety)

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what powers regional electricity companies have to access land designated as a site of special scientific interest in order to maintain the safety of power lines. [112]

Mr. Clappison: General powers of access are set out in paragraph 7 of schedule 6 to the Electricity Act 1989.

Vehicle Emissions

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what proposals he has for countering the effect of vehicle emissions in city centres and if he will make a statement. [733]

Mr. Clappison: We are on course for a significant reduction from primary road transport emissions over the next 10 years.

Nevertheless, we want to take every opportunity to press for further progress. This summer, the Environment Act 1995 set out a radical new framework for improving air quality.

Local Authority Staff

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many people are estimated to be currently employed by local authorities; at what cost; what were the figures in 1979; and if he will make a statement. [1479]

Sir Paul Beresford: The total numbers of general services staff employed by local authorities in England were as follows:

Thousands

	Full-time	*Part-time*	*Total staff*
June 1979	1,469	876	2,345
June 1995	1,092	875	1,967

There have been various changes in general services employment in the period arising from changes in the functions of local government. Four major events caused significant reductions from the local authority sector:

(1) Approximately 6,300 full-time equivalents—FTEs—due to the abolition of the GLC and the metropolitan county councils in 1986.

(2) Around 14,500 full-time equivalents—FTEs—due to changes in the status of local authority bus and municipal airport staff in 1986 and 1987.

(3) Around 39,000 full-time equivalents—FTEs—when polytechnics and higher education institutions transferred from local authority control in 1989.

(4) Around 97,000 full-time equivalents—FTEs—when further education institutions became the responsibility of the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) on 1 April 1993.

Comparable figures for the cost of local authority employment are not available because of the various changes in function of local government and because of changes in the way estimates of employment costs have been compiled. In 1994–95, the latest year for which figures are available, the total cost of wages and salaries for all local authorities, including law and order authorities, was £33 billion.

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the numbers of people employed by each local authority in England in *(a)* 1979, *(b)* 1990 and *(c)* currently; and if he will make a statement. [358]

Sir Paul Beresford *[holding answer 20 November 1995]:* The total numbers of general services staff employed by local authorities in England were as follows:

Thousands

	June 1979	*June 1990*	*June 1995*
Full time	1,469	1,327	1,091
Part time	876	955	875
Full time equivalents	1,813	1,709	[1]1,468

[1] Estimated.

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(4) Around 97,000 full-time equivalents—FTEs—when further education institutions became the responsibility of the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC on 1 April 1993.

Tables covering figures for individual authorities have been placed in the Library of the House.

Leaseholders' Rights

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will introduce a right to manage for leaseholders in flats. [1482]

Mr. Curry: I am aware that proposals on a right to manage have been put forward. Important issues of principle and practicality need to be considered carefully before any decisions are taken. My officials will be discussing these shortly with interested parties.

Water Resources

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on and give his response to the conclusions of the National Rivers Authority report, "Saving Water", sent to him on 3 October. [1486]

Mr. Gummer: I welcome publication of the consultation document as a further contribution to the debate on efficient management of water resources. My Department is considering the proposals and will comment in due course.

Environmental Pollution (Central and Eastern Europe)

Ms Quin: To ask the Secretary of state for the Environment when he next intends to meet his EU counterparts to discuss environmental pollution in central and eastern Europe. [732]

Mr. Clappison: The next meeting of EU Ministers to discuss pollution in central and eastern Europe will be held under the Italian presidency in March 1996. The meeting will consider the follow-up to last month's Sofia conference of European Environment Ministers, in which the Secretary of State and his EU counterparts played an active part.

Housing Revenue Account Subsidy

Mr. Carrington: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he proposes to issue the draft housing revenue account subsidy and item 8 determinations for 1996–97. [1896]

Mr. Curry: Local authorities have today been sent the draft housing revenue account subsidy and item 8 determinations for 1996–97 together with a consultation paper on proposed arrangements to discourage them from increasing their rents by more than the Government's guideline increase for next year. Authorities have been invited to let my Department have their views by 15 December 1995.

I am pleased to be able to say that we are proposing to freeze the average guideline rent for 1996–97, in real terms, at £34.70 a week. The increases on this year for individual authorities would range between 67p and £1.17 a week. This is good news for council tenants.

The assessment of each authority's proposed guideline rent would, for the first time, explicitly include allowance for average earnings of manual workers. Authorities' guideline rents would be based equally on local capital values and earnings. This would improve the targeting of subsidy and would ensure that the pattern of rents charged by authorities nationally better represented the income pattern of tenants. It would help us ensure that local authority rents remained affordable for those on low incomes.

We are proposing a change in the subsidy rules to encourage authorities to keep their rent increases within the guideline. Rent rebate subsidy would be limited and the limit would be linked to the guideline rent increase. Authorities which stay within this limit would be unaffected.

To provide authorities with greater certainty about their subsidy entitlement and to reduce the administrative burden both for authorities and for the Department, the proposed subsidy determination has been streamlined and the calculation of subsidy considerably simplified.

Total provision for management and maintenance costs will be £3.4 billion. The provision is slightly higher than this year per dwelling. We propose to update the distribution formula to include data from the English house condition survey and to include an allowance for social factors. About 10 per cent. of the maintenance component would be indexed to measures of social deprivation. These changes are designed to improve the allocation of subsidy so that it goes where it is needed most.

In common with the remainder of the public sector, we want to see housing departments of local town halls constantly seeking greater efficiency. Up to now, spending has continued to rise while the number of council houses has fallen, with the cost being picked up by tenants and general taxpayers. Our proposals will encourage authorities to keep their rent increases down to the Government's guideline levels and will provide a spur for them to use opportunities, such as compulsory competitive tendering, to improve efficiency, bring costs down and provide tenants with better services.

Goole

Mr. Fabricant: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he will announce his decision on the future of Goole and rural Goole. [1846]

Mr. Gummer: In light of the commission's recommendation and the representations I have received, I have decided to accept the commission's recommendation that there should be no change to the boundaries of Goole and rural Goole. As a consequence, the area will form part of the new east riding of Yorkshire authority provided for in the Humberside (Structural Change) Order 1995.

Unitary Development Plans

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information *(a)* is available and *(b)* will be made available to persons concerned about major changes to unitary development plans under the provisions of the citizens charter. [111]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The free booklet, "Development Plans: What You Need to Know", published by the Department of the Environment, contains a code of practice for development plans and sets out the procedures that are to be followed by a local planning authority when it proposes to make alterations to, or replace, a unitary development plan. The Town and Country Planning Act 1990 requires the authority to place those proposals on deposit for public inspection for a period of six weeks, during which objections or representations may be made by any member of the public. Notices of the deposited proposals are required to be advertised locally and in the *London Gazette*. Additionally, in planning policy guidance note 12, "Development Plans and Regional Planning Guidance", the Secretary of State advises authorities to give adequate publicity at an early stage to the proposed alteration or replacement, and to give members of the public an opportunity to participate in the preparation of those proposals, prior to deposit.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Workstart Scheme

Mr. Heppell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) what factors underlay the omission from guidelines sent to employment officials overseeing workstart placements of a requirement to *(a)* withdraw a client and *(b)* inform the employer immediately when a health and safety risk within the workplace is noticed; and what assessment her Department has made of the risk to workstart clients from the omission of this requirement; [978]

(2) how many of the workplaces with people on the workstart scheme have been found not to meet health and safety requirements; [976]

(3) how many of the workplaces with people on the workstart scheme have been inspected by health and safety officers; [892]

(4) what provisions she is making to ensure that unemployed people on the workstart scheme are placed in working environments which meet all health and safety requirements; [890]

(5) how many accidents have occurred involving people placed on the workstart scheme since it began. [891]

Mr. Forth: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from M. E. G. Fogden to Mr. John Heppell, dated 21 November 1995:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your questions about Health and Safety issues and the Workstart Employment Subsidy Scheme.

Workstart aims to encourage employers to take on long term unemployed people by the payment of a subsidy. Once recruited, subsidised people are employees of the employer concerned and their status is identical to that of any other employee. They are therefore covered as any other employee by health and safety legislation.

As part of the audit procedures, Workstart co-ordinators from the Employment Service (ES) visit a percentage of the firms who are in receipt of a subsidy. The purpose of this visit is for the co-ordinators to satisfy themselves that the Workstart recruit is still employed at the firm.

As the co-ordinators will be on the employers' premises, the ES sought legal advice regarding its position should they observe what appears, to a lay person, to be a health and safety problem during the course of the visit. The advice given was that the ES has no legal responsibility to identify or to act on any suspected breach of health and safety legislation. ES people undertaking Workstart visits are neither trained nor qualified to assess whether a situation is in contravention of health and safety legislation or is liable to constitute a danger. As such the monitoring visit can in no way constitute an inspection of the employer's premises. Nevertheless if the co-ordinator sees something of concern to themselves about the safety of the employer's premises they are advised to report the matter to the Health and Safety Executive. The ES has no power to 'withdraw' the employee as they are no longer employed.

The Employment Service places importance on ensuring that employers are made fully aware that agreeing to the conditions of Workstart does not negate their responsibility for health and safety issues. We therefore insist the employer signs a declaration which outlines their intent to comply with all relevant health and safety legislation when a Workstart subsidy is agreed and would not allow subsidies to be paid to employers who refused to do so.

Given that the responsibility for Health and Safety is solely that of an employer, no specific records are kept of accidents on the premises of employers in receipt of a Workstart subsidy or of visits by officials of the Health and Safety Executive to their premises.

I hope this is helpful in explaining the position.

Dance and Drama Students (Funding)

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will make a statement on her policy on the funding of dance and drama students. [172]

Mr. Forth: The Government are aware of the difficulties faced by some potential students of dance and drama in obtaining discretionary award support from their local authorities. We are continuing to look at whether anything might be done to help. No decisions have yet been taken.

Primary School Class Sizes

Mr. Pearson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is the estimated number at January 1995 of primary school pupils educated in class sizes of 40 and above in the Dudley metropolitan borough; and what proportion this figure is of all primary children in England and Wales educated in these sized classes. [578]

Mr. Robin Squire: The number of pupils in single teacher classes of 40 or more pupils in maintained primary schools in Dudley local education authority area in January 1995, provisional, was 1,027. This represented 5.6 per cent. of pupils in single teacher classes of 40 or more pupils in maintained primary schools in England.

Information on classes in Wales is the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

Information Technology

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans she has to ensure that teachers are properly trained in the use of information technology. [18]

Mr. Robin Squire: The Government's criteria for initial teacher training require that newly qualified teachers should be able to make effective use of information technology as a learning resource. The Teacher Training Agency has identified support for teachers using information technology as one of the national priorities to be addressed through its action programme for continuing professional development.

Ministerial Transport, London

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many times in the last year she has used *(a)* London Transport buses and *(b)* London Underground while on official business. [421]

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: I have not used either London Buses or London Underground on official business, although I often walk.

Jobclub

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list by area *(a)* the percentage of unemployed persons who attend a jobclub and *(b)* the percentage of those who attended who were successful in finding full-time work. [184]

Mr. Forth: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from M. E. G. Fogden to Mr. Gerry Steinberg, dated 21 November 1995:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question about Jobclubs.

The information is not available in the form requested.

I am, however able to provide details of the number of people who joined the Jobclub during 1994/95 by Employment Service Region, together with the total average number of unemployed people during the same period. The proportion of Jobclub leavers who took up any job is also shown.

I hope this is helpful.

Numbers of unemployed and jobclub performance April 1994–March 1995

	Average number of unemployed claimants in year	*Total number of jobclub entrants in year*	*Percentage of those leaving jobclub entering work*
Northern	139,011	16,239	40
Yorkshire and Humberside	221,085	23,499	44
East Midlands and Eastern	233,134	23,087	41
London and South East	795,377	86,209	44
South West	183,931	21,162	46
Wales	115,938	12,263	50
West Midlands	235,085	28,073	42
North West	297,695	32,159	38
Office for Scotland	224,287	24,731	46
National total	2,455,987	266,422	43

Remploy

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) if she will list the major companies to which Remploy supplies its products; [1027]

(2) what Government funding will be provided to Remploy during the period April 1995 to April 1996. [1026]

Mr. Forth: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from M. E. G. Fogden to Mr. Jim Cunningham, dated 21 November 1995:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your questions about the major companies to which Remploy supplies its products and about Government funding for Remploy in 1995/96.

I am unable to list Remploy's major customers as this information is commercial in confidence to the Company. During the period 1 April 1995 to 31 March 1996 Remploy will receive Government funding of £94.161 million.

I hope this is helpful.

Mr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans she has to contract out Remploy to the private sector. [1025]

Mr. Forth: We have none.

Literacy and Numeracy

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans she has to increase literacy and numeracy among school age children. [17]

Mrs. Gillan: Raising standards of literacy and numeracy is at the heart of our school reforms, notably the national curriculum, regular testing, performance tables, regular inspection and improvements to teacher training. The chief inspector of schools has confirmed that our reforms are improving the quality of education.

Assisted Places Scheme

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many allegations of fraudulent claims she has investigated under the assisted places scheme, due to claimants understating their incomes. [21]

Mrs. Gillan: It is for participating schools, in the first instance, to investigate any claims by parents seeking help under the assisted places scheme which schools have reason to believe may have been made fraudulently. The Education (Assisted Places) Regulations 1995 provide that, if the parents of an assisted pupil do not duly furnish the school with supporting documentary evidence, or if they knowingly or recklessly furnish false information, they shall not be entitled to any remission of fees for that year.

Undergraduates

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what estimate she has made of the drop-out rate of undergraduates as a direct result of financial hardship. [180]

Mr. Forth: Our latest estimate of the drop-out rate of students from full-time and sandwich first-degree courses is 17 per cent. in the academic year 1992–93. This covers all those leaving because of exam failure, ill health, personal and other reasons including financial difficulties. It is not possible to identify the drop-out rate caused by financial difficulties alone, but recent research in one university suggests that financial difficulties are less likely to be the cause than personal reasons or students' coming to the view that their course is unsuitable.

Teacher-pupil Ratios (Durham)

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what was the teacher-pupil ratio in Durham local education authority in 1989–90 and the latest year for which figures are available. [183]

Mr. Robin Squire: The overall pupil-teacher ratios in Durham local education authority in January 1990 and 1995, provisional, were 18:3 and 19:1 respectively.

University Professors

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what representations she has received regarding the posts of recently appointed university professors and their remuneration; and if she will make a statement. [382]

Mr. Forth: My right hon. Friend has received no such representations. As autonomous institutions, universities are free to determine the appointments of professorial staff and their remuneration. The nationally agreed minimum salary for professors from 1 April 1995 is £31,999.

Apprentices (Manufacturing Industry)

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what was the total number of apprentices in manufacturing industry for each year since 1979. [454]

Mr. Paice: The information requested is given in the table. Estimates for years prior to 1984 are not available.

Number of people doing an apprenticeship in manufacturing industry 1984–95

Thousands

United Kingdom	*Number*
1984	117
1985	112
1986	106
1987	94
1988	89
1989	102
1990	111
1991	92

Number of people doing an apprenticeship in manufacturing industry 1984–95

Thousands

United Kingdom	*Number*
1992	89
1993	76
1993[1]	78
1994	60
1995	48

Note:
[1] A revised Standard Industrial Classification was adopted in 1993. Estimates on the new basis are not directly comparable with those for earlier years.
Source:
Labour Force Survey, spring of each year.

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what discussions she has had over the last year with trade unions on the subject of apprenticeships in the manufacturing industry; and if she will make a statement. [452]

Mr. Paice: We have had no personal discussions with trade unions on this subject. Industry training organisations have involved manufacturing sectors' trade unions widely in discussions about the development of modern apprenticeship frameworks.

Higher Education

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment when she expects to complete her review of the funding models of future higher education and to be able to make an announcement. [1417]

Mr. Forth: The Government's review of higher education is looking at wider issues than funding models. We recognise the importance of higher education to the country's future economy and society, and do not intend to rush the review by setting arbitrary deadlines.

Special Educational Needs

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment when the first special educational needs tribunal was held; how many appeals have been heard; how many are outstanding; and what is the average waiting time from an appeal being received to a tribunal being held. [1060]

Mr. Forth: The Department does not maintain detailed records about appeals to the special educational needs tribunal, which is an independent non-departmental public body. I have therefore asked the president of the tribunal, Mr. Trevor Aldridge QC, to write to the hon. Member.

Information about the numbers of appeals to the tribunal will be available in the president's annual report to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, which will be placed in the Library when it is published.

Social Chapter

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what legislation has been agreed by the European Union arising from the social chapter of the Single European Act treaty or the work programme arising from the social charter agreed in Strasbourg by the European Council in 1989, which by virtue of the protocol on social policy in the treaty on European Union does not apply to the United Kingdom; what articles authorised such legislation; and what proposals in or likely to be in this category of legislation are before either the Council of Ministers or the Council of Permanent Representatives. [1481]

Mr. Forth: One directive, on European works councils, has been adopted by the other European Community member states under article 2.2 of their agreement on social policy. Three other dossiers, covering parental leave, part-time and temporary work and reversal of the burden of proof in sex discrimination cases, are currently being considered under the agreement and may result in further legislative measures.

Welfare and Counselling (Students)

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what steps her Department have taken to improve the welfare and counselling services to students in the last five years; and if she will make a statement. [1206]

Mr. Forth: None. Colleges and universities are independent, autonomous bodies, responsible for managing their own affairs. Any arrangements that institutions make for the welfare and counselling of their students are for the governing body of each institution to determine; Ministers have no powers to intervene.

Mr. Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what research has been undertaken in the last five years by her Department into the level of students suffering from stress and depression; and if she will make a statement. [1212]

Mr. Robin Squire: The Department has undertaken no such research in the last five years.

Student Grants

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what was the average grant received by students in *(a)* 1991, *(b)* 1992, *(c)* 1993 and *(d)* 1994; and if she will make a statement. [1213]

Mr. Forth: The average net maintenance grants after means testing received by mandatory award holders in England and Wales in the academic years 1990–91 to 1993–94 are set out in the table. Since 1990–91, eligible students have also had access to non-means-tested student loans.

Average net maintenance grants to holders of mandatory awards

£

Academic year	*Average net maintenance grant paid by local education authorities*[1]
England and Wales	
1990–91	1,480
1991–92	1,540
1992–93	1,610
1993–94	1,670

[1] To the nearest £10.

Hardship Funds

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many students applied for hardship funds in *(a)* 1991, *(b)* 1992, *(c)* 1993 and *(d)* 1994; and if she will make a statement. [1216]

Mr. Forth: The purpose of the hardship funds, correctly known as the access funds, is to provide financial help to students whose access to further or higher education might be inhibited by financial considerations or who, for whatever reason, including physical or other disabilities, face financial difficulties.

From the information provided by institutions, it is estimated that the numbers of applications for further and higher education access funds are as follows:

Academic year	*Further education*	*Higher education*
1990–91	22,100	116,000[1]
1991–92	30,000	118,200[1]
1992–93	32,400	67,440
1993–94	Not available	77,060
1994–95	Not available	Will be available later in the year

[1] Figures relate to the UK; other figures are not for England only.

Figures for further education access funds may exclude some students at colleges who failed to submit returns.

Student Loans

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) how many students applied for student loans in *(a)* 1991, *(b)* 1992, *(c)* 1993 and *(d)* 1994; and if she will make a statement; [1215]

(2) how many students who graduated in *(a)* 1989, *(b)* 1990, *(c)* 1991, *(d)* 1992, *(e)* 1993 and *(f)* 1994 are still in debt to the Student Loans Company; and if she will make a statement. [1214]

Mr. Forth: These are matters for the Student Loans Company. I have asked the acting chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Ethnic Monitoring

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans she has for the continuation of ethnic monitoring of school pupils following the consultation exercise earlier this year. [1975]

Mrs. Gillan: Our consultations of future arrangements for ethnic monitoring of school pupils produced a clear consensus for improving the usefulness of monitoring while reducing the burden on schools. We have therefore decided to cease the existing separate ethnic monitoring surveys and introduce instead a combination of approaches. First, the 1996 schools census will include simple new questions about the ethnic backgrounds of pupils. The three new questions will cover: the total number of ethnic minority pupils in each school; the names of the largest groups; and the total number of pupils for whom English is a second language. More detailed questions will be developed for inclusion in the 1997 schools census. Secondly, Ofsted will monitor the progress of ethnic minority pupils in individual schools, as part of its regular inspection process. Thirdly, research will be undertaken where necessary to investigate particular issues in depth. Details of the new arrangements were sent to local authorities and schools in September.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 22 November 1995

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Invoices

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Attorney-General what is the average length of time it takes for his Department to pay invoices. [934]

The Attorney-General: The information available for the Law Officers' Departments is as follows:

Over recent sample periods the average time between receipt of a valid invoice and payment was 17 days for the Serious Fraud Office, and 35 days for the Treasury Solicitor's Department. The Government Property Lawyers process all claims within five days.

The Crown Prosecution Service pays over 80 per cent. of witness expense claims within 10 working days.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Attorney-General how his Department publicises payment practices other than as percentages of invoices paid late. [951]

The Attorney-General: The Departments for which I am responsible make every effort to settle invoices promptly and in accordance with the requirements published in *Government Accounting*. Information about those Department's payment practices is published in the annual departmental report of the Lord Chancellor's and Law Officer's Departments.

In addition, the performance of the Crown Prosecution Service against its target of paying claims for witness expenses within 10 working days is published in its statutory annual report.

Invitations to tender issued by the Treasury Solicitor's Department also contain a reference to the effect that payment will be made within 30 days of receipt of a valid invoice.

The Government Property Lawyers publish details of payment policy in the annual report and accounts.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Invoices

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how his Department publicises payment practices other than as percentages of invoices paid late. [961]

Mr. John M. Taylor: The Department's general conditions of contract contain a clause informing suppliers that we shall make a payment within agreed terms, or within 30 days of receipt of an invoice, where no such terms exist. The conditions also give advice on how to complain if the Department fails to make payment on time. Annual surveys of invoice payments are carried out, the latest of which showed that 93.9 per cent. of invoices were paid on time. A further survey is being carried out of invoices authorised for payment during the month of November. The survey results, together with details of the Department's payment policies, are published in the Department's annual report.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what is the average length of time it takes for his Department to pay invoices. [927]

Mr. Taylor: The information required to answer the question is not recorded centrally. An examination of the procedures for paying invoices throughout the Department has shown that, on average, invoices are paid within seven days of receipt.

Lockerbie

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many officials of his Department are part-time involved in legal matters relating to the destruction of the airliner Pan Am 103 over Lockerbie. [1630]

Mr. John M. Taylor: None.

Antarctic Minerals

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department for what reasons the Antarctic Minerals Act 1989 has not fully been brought into force; and when he intends to fully bring it into force. [196]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: I have been asked to reply.

The Convention on the Regulation of Antarctic Mineral Resource Activities (CRAMRA) has, in effect, been superseded by the 1991 environmental protocol to the Antarctic treaty. Provisions to enable the United Kingdom to ratify the protocol were included in Antarctic Act 1994. The Act also repealed the Antarctic Minerals Act 1989, except for provisions relating only to the administration of justice for the British Antarctic Territory.

TREASURY

Invoices

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the amount owed to those businesses whose invoices were not paid within 30 days of receipt or in accordance with contractual agreements in each of the last five years. [1117]

Mrs. Angela Knight: Records of the promptness of payment for the past five years are not maintained. Over the past three years, the amount owed to businesses whose invoices were not paid within 30 days of receipt was:

1993–94: £1,006K

1994–95: £1,689K

1995–96 to date: £818K

The majority of the invoices to which the sums above relate were delayed due to problems associated with the particular suppliers such as an error in the invoice or failure to deliver the goods or service.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many (i) orders and (ii) firms are represented by the 18 per cent. of invoices not paid by his Department within 30 days or in accordance with contractual agreements in 1994–95; how many of those are related to firms with fewer than 500 employees. [912]

Mrs. Knight: The number of (i) orders and (ii) firms represented by the 18 per cent. of invoices not paid within 30 days is shown in the table:

(i) orders: 380

(ii) firms: 152

These figures include invoices which were delayed due to problems associated with the particular suppliers such as an error in the invoice or failure to deliver the goods or service.

The Treasury does not distinguish between different sizes of suppliers. Information on how many of those invoices relate to firms with fewer than 500 employees is not available.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the average length of time it takes for his Department to pay invoices. [919]

Mrs. Knight: The average number of days taken to pay invoices is 23 days from date of receipt.

This includes invoices which were delayed due to problems associated with the particular suppliers such as an error in the invoice or failure to deliver the goods or service.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how his Department publicises payment practices other than as percentages of invoices paid late. [969]

Mrs. Knight: Departmental payment performance figures are published annually within the Chancellor of the Exchequer's departmental report. Figures are given showing the percentage of invoices paid within 30 days of receipt of an invoice or within the payment period specified in a contract if different.

Alcohol and Tobacco (Cross-border Trade)

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the present estimated annual value of revenue lost to the Exchequer because of illicit cross-border trade in alcoholic and tobacco products. [80]

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: By its nature, the scale of illicit cross-border trade in alcohol and tobacco is very difficult to assess. Reliable figures are not available. Officials are working closely with United Kingdom trade representatives to determine whether a satisfactory method of estimating the value of this trade can be developed.

European Monetary Institute

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) who represents Britain on the European Monetary Institute; whose policy they articulate; whom they report to; and what is their brief in respect of monetary union; [1101]

(2) who represents Britain in the European Monetary Institute; and which body determines United Kingdom policy in respect of the institute. [545]

Mrs. Angela Knight: In accordance with the terms of article 109f of the EC Treaty, and article 1 of the protocol on the statute of the European Monetary Institute annexed to the treaty, the Bank of England is a member of the EMI, and the Governor of the Bank of England is a member of the EMI's council. Active participation by the Governor on the council of the EMI is in accordance with the Government's policy of full involvement in preparations for economic and monetary union, which the Government believe is necessary to protect our interest whether or not the UK participates in the single currency.

Monetary Union

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what obligations are imposed on the United Kingdom and what changes have to be made to British economic policy to allow the United Kingdom to qualify for monetary union and to take Her Majesty's Government to the point at which it can decide to enter monetary union or not. [1106]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The Council, meeting in the composition of Heads of State and Government, will decide for each member state whether it fulfils the necessary conditions for the adoption of a single currency, in accordance with the provisions of article 109j of the EC treaty and protocol No. 6 on the convergence criteria. Protocol No. 11, annexed to the EC treaty, means that the United Kingdom shall not be obliged or committed to move to the third stage of economic union without a separate decision to do so by the Government and Parliament. We will agree to take part in a single currency only if it is in our national interest to do so, given the circumstances at the time. The Government's economic policies aim to bear down on inflation and ensure sound public finances. These policies make good economic sense and are entirely consistent with the convergence criteria.

Value Added Tax

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what would be the effect on Treasury revenue in 1996–97 and in a full year of extending value added tax at *(a)* 8 per cent. and *(b)* 17.5 per cent. to all those zero-rated, giving figures separately for each item. [91]

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Table 10 of the Treasury publication "Tax Ready Reckoner and Tax Reliefs" shows the estimated cost of not applying standard rate VAT to those items currently zero-rated. Those figures make no allowance for changes in consumer behaviour. It is possible to derive estimates for revenue from 8 per cent. VAT from those figures. The latest figures available are for 1995–96.

£ million

	8.0 per cent.	*17.5 per cent.*
Food	3,450	7,550
Construction of new dwellings	820	1,800
Domestic passenger transport	620	1,350
International passenger transport	530	1,150
Books, newspapers and magazines	550	1,200
Childrens clothes and shoes	340	750
Water and sewerage services	410	900

£ million

	8.0 per cent.	17.5 per cent.
Drugs and medicines on prescription	300	650
Supplies to charities	90	200
Ships and aircraft above a certain size	210	450
Vehicles and other supplies to disabled people	70	150

Ordtech Trials

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the total cost to the public funds of the Ordtech trials. [1023]

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: It is not possible at this stage to give a total cost to the public funds of the Ordtech trials. Legal fees paid to date by HM Customs and Excise, as prosecuting authority, amount to £175,808.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

Sri Lanka

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans Her Majesty's Government have to provide humanitarian assistance to displaced people and refugees from the Jaffna area of Sri Lanka. [566]

Mr. Hanley: Earlier this month, we provided two emergency aid grants of £250,000 and £100,000 to the International Committee of the Red Cross and Christian Action, Research and Education respectively, to help alleviate the suffering of those affected by the recent fighting. We also provide on-going support, through Save the Children and Oxfam, for relief and rehabilitation programmes which help displaced families. In 1995–96, we expect to spend around £1.2 million on these programmes.

Aid Programme

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what *(a)* percentage and *(b)* amount of the annual expenditure for overseas aid is channelled through non-governmental organisations (i) in developing countries overall, (ii) in each country and (iii) on each project. [1546]

Mr. Hanley: In 1994–95 total expenditure for overseas aid to developing countries was £2.018 billion. Of this, £1.048 billion was in the form of bilateral aid, of which 16.5 per cent. or £173 million was channelled through non-governmental organisations. More detailed breakdowns of this expenditure by individual countries and projects are not available and could be produced only at disproportionate cost.

ENVIRONMENT

Insulation

Mr. Hanson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) how many voucher booklets offering discounts on home insulation products were recently distributed; which body was responsible for producing them; to whom they were distributed; and at what cost; [600]

(2) how many inquiries about cavity wall insulation were generated because of the television advertising campaign that formed part of the energy efficiency scheme promoted by his Department; [601]

(3) which body was responsible for the promotion of the cavity wall insulation scheme with which his Department was involved as part of the energy efficiency scheme; and how the body responsible for the promotion was chosen; [602]

(4) what was the cost to public funds of the recent television campaign promoting cavity wall insulation under the energy efficiency scheme. [603]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The voucher booklets were produced by the Department of the Environment with the aim of increasing the take-up of energy efficiency measures through offers provided by private sector companies and trade associations at their own expense. Cavity wall insulation was only one of 14 different products and services included in the booklet. The voucher book as a whole was supported by television advertising costing £1,232,313.

Over 5 million voucher books have been distributed direct to owner-occupied older properties which are likely to be able to benefit from the full range of offers included. Distribution costs were £58,750. The voucher books can also be obtained from local energy advice centres and by using press advertisement coupons.

The cavity wall insulation offer is nominally promoted by InstaGroup, but covers four major fibre-based cavity insulation system designers, the National Cavity Insulation Association and the Cavity Insulation Guarantee Agency. InstaGroup's role as promoter came as a result of agreement among all the participants. All the vouchers are valid at least until the end of the year, and longer in some cases. It is therefore too early to assess the results.

Housing

Sir David Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what studies or research are being undertaken into the particular care and support requirements in housing of the elderly living in rural areas. [207]

Mr. Curry: In 1995, my Department commissioned research into the nature of demand for housing in rural areas including the housing needs of elderly people. A final report is due in July 1996.

Sir David Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his policy in respect of local initiatives which provide care and support services, including specialist retirement housing, to meet the needs of elderly home owners in rural areas; and if he will make a statement. [206]

Mr. Curry: The Government's policy is that care should be provided to people as far as possible in their existing housing where this is their preference and it is

cost effective to do so. This policy is supported by the availability of home renovation grants and the work of home improvement agencies.

Ms Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the impact of the introduction of stress area enhancement on the number of new homes built in *(a)* the south-west and *(b)* Great Britain. [593]

Mr. Clappison: The purpose of stress area enhancement is to channel additional housing resources to those local authority areas with the greatest social, environmental housing problems. Any effect on the number of new homes built is marginal, and the specific information requested is not available.

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will place in the Library copies of the housing investment programme bids made by each housing authority in England; and if he will summarise the total lists from each region. [975]

Mr. Curry: Copies of local authorities' HIP bids for 1996–97 along with strategy statements and associated HIP forms are being collated and will be placed in the Library shortly. Regional summaries of the bids will be placed in the Library when all the bid data have been verified.

Mr. Carrington: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what action he now intends to take to improve standards in houses in multiple occupation. [2214]

Mr. Curry: I am proposing a package of measures which will be able to deal with the problems in this sector of the housing market in a more cost-effective and flexible way than a national mandatory licensing scheme. I intend, therefore, to bring forward legislation as soon as possible.

There are four principal elements to this legislative package. First, there will be general duty of care placed on HMO landlords with respect to amenity and fire safety standards. Breach of this duty will be a criminal offence punishable by a fine not exceeding level 5 on the standard scale—£5,000. Guidance on the duty will be set out in a national code of practice which will be issued before the new duty is brought into force.

Secondly, local authorities will be able to introduce a modified form of HMO registration scheme. This will exclude smaller HMOs—those with only two households or with one household and no more than four other occupants—and houses converted entirely into self-contained flats. The registration schemes will contain powers enabling local authorities to refuse to register all properties where conditions are substandard or where management is inadequate. Re-registration will be required after five years and there will be higher fees chargeable to landlords for registration and new re-registration fees at a lower rate. These fees will help local authorities to resource an enhanced programme of enforcement activity.

Thirdly, I also propose to extend local authorities' existing mandatory duty to ensure that there are adequate fire safety precautions in larger HMOs. This duty will be introduced by statutory instrument and there will be further consultation on its scope, but I am minded to apply it to all HMOs which could come within the scope of the new form of registration scheme providing these properties have three storeys or more. I also propose exemptions for specific public sector landlords, but these HMO landlords will of course still be subject to the new duty of care.

Finally, I shall be introducing some important deregulatory measures by making an order under the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act 1994 to modify some of the local authority HMO enforcement procedures. For the principal HMO enforcement notices, local authorities will be required first to serve a notice informing landlords that they are minded to take action, but this procedure can be dispensed with in emergencies. Where a formal enforcement notice is still required, I propose that local authorities will have power to recover the costs of their enforcement action from the landlord, subject to a maximum amount.

Local authorities will be required to consult the fire authorities mainly about the exercise of their statutory duty to check fire safety in HMOs, but will no longer have to consult them about HMO enforcement notices served in other circumstances. In addition to this substantial package of new provisions, and as stated in the consultation paper, the new planning controls on the switch from hotel to hostel use will remain in force.

I share the widespread concern that the rapid expansion of hostels in a number of popular resort areas is causing very serious problems. As these new HMO controls begin to take effect, however, we should see a great improvement in these areas—providing that the local authorities concerned pursue a vigorous programme of enforcement action using their new powers.

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if the White Paper "Our Future Homes" (CM 2901) was *(a)* subject to, and *(b)* modified on account of an environmental appraisal using the guidance contained in "Policy Appraisal and the Environment" produced by his Department; and if he will publish the appraisal; [303]

(2) what alternative courses of action from those detailed in the White Paper "Our Future Homes" (Cm 2901) were considered in any environmental appraisal undertaken by his Department; [304]

(3) what procedures have been put in place by his Department to monitor the impacts arising from his implementation of the White paper "Our Future Homes" (Cm 2901). [305]

Mr. Curry: The housing White Paper "Our Future Homes" sets out the Government's aim of meeting demand for housing in an environmentally sustainable way, using our resources effectively, building where possible on existing urban land rather than greenfield sites and reducing the number of empty homes. Environmental considerations have been, and continue to be, an integral part of policy development. They have for instance played a large part in decisions made to:

promote energy efficiency in new and existing homes of all tenures;

set a target that half of all new homes should be built on re-used sites;

test the use of EMAS—the EC Eco-Management and Audit Scheme—in the field of housing association policy and programmes.

The effectiveness of housing policies, including environmental and sustainable development considerations, is reviewed continually.

General Needs Index

Ms Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what factors underlay the removal of *(a)* homelessness and *(b)* temporary accommodation from the general needs index. [592]

Mr. Clappison: We decided to remove those indicators because they do not provide a good measure of the need for investment in social housing. Homelessness figures say much more about the flow of people into existing social rented housing than about the need to build new homes; they are very volatile and their use in allocating capital resources can cause disruption to capital programmes; and they reflect different administrative practice in different local authorities.

Boulsbury Wood

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how much public money he estimates will be spent in total to prevent the destruction of Boulsbury wood: who will receive most of the money; and what assessment he has made of the value for money of such expenditure. [374]

Mr. Clappison: A management agreement is a commercial arrangement between the nature conservation bodies and the recipient. The financial guidelines make it clear that details of such arrangements cannot be released. The National Audit Office report "Protecting and Managing SSSIs" concluded that agreements reached with English Nature complied with the financial guidelines.

Leaseholders

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many leaseholders in flats have to date been able to acquire the freehold of their homes under the provisions of part I of the Leasehold Reform Housing and Urban Development Act 1993. [312]

Mr. Curry: It is not possible to obtain comprehensive information on how many leaseholders in flats have been able to acquire the freehold of their homes, as enfranchisement is a private transaction between the freeholder and leaseholders.

Housing (Dudley)

Mr. Pearson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many new housing units were constructed by *(a)* the local authority and *(b)* housing associations in Dudley metropolitan borough area in each year since 1979. [580]

Mr. Clappison: Local authorities' primary housing tasks are now the efficient management of their own stock of housing and enabling other organisations to provide new housing. Housing associations are now the main providers of new social housing.

The publications "Housebuilding in England by Local Authority Area: 1980 to 1989" and "Local Housing Statistics" show estimates of housebuilding completions for each local authority area in England, including the Dudley metropolitan borough area. They show completions by sector, including activity by local authorities and housing associations.

"Housebuilding in England by Local Authority Area: 1980 to 1989" shows figures for the period 1980 to 1984. "Local Housing Statistics" shows figures for 1979 and later years: issue 59 covers 1979; No. 103 covers the years 1985 to 1990; No. 105 covers 1991: No. 106 covers 1992; No. 110 covers 1993; and No. 114 covers 1994.

Copies of these publications are in the Library.

Clean Air Act 1993

Mr. Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what proposals he has to amend provisions contained in the Clean Air Act 1993. [130]

Mr. Clappison: As announced in "Cutting Red Tape", published in January 1994, the Government intend to repeal sections 4 to 13 of the Clean Air Act 1993—formerly contained in the Clean Air Acts 1956 and 1968. They are no longer necessary in the light of changes in fuel use and the provisions of the Environmental Protection Act 1990.

Uranium, Caldecott

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has about the source of the uranium found on Poplar farm, Caldecott, Northamptonshire. [336]

Mr. Clappison: I have nothing further to add at this stage, to the answer that I gave to the hon. Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin) on 27 October 1995, *Official Report*, column *817*.

Contaminated Land

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how much public money was spent on cleaning up contaminated land on inner-city development sites during 1994–95. [310]

Mr. Clappison: Public expenditure support for the redevelopment of inner-city and other sites—including, where necessary, the costs of dealing with contaminated soil—is made available under a number of different programmes. In England, these included in 1994–95 English Partnerships' investment fund, city challenge and urban programme; parallel arrangements exist in Wales and Scotland.

Funding to meet the costs of land remediation typically constitutes only one element of a wider package of support for individual projects under these programmes. The various different cost elements are not separately identified in centrally collected records, and it is therefore not possible to provide a detailed breakdown in the form requested.

Work-related Upper Limb Disorders

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many employees in *(a)* the public sector and *(b)* the private sector, have been diagnosed with work-related upper limb disorders during the years (i) 1992–93, (ii) 1993–94 and (iii) 1994–95. [1126]

Sir Paul Beresford: Some types of work-related upper limb disorders are prescribed under the industrial injuries scheme. The number of cases in Great Britain diagnosed with at least 1 per cent. disability for the periods 1992–93 and 1993–94 are shown in the table:

Disorders	*1992–93*	*[1]1993–94*
Cramp of hand or forearm	116	135
Beat hand	16	18
Beat elbow	38	42
Inflammation of tendons of the hand, forearm or associated tendon sheaths (Tenosynovitis)	911	800
Carpal Tunnel Syndrome	20	267

[1] Provisional.

Data broken down by private and public sectors are not collated in the form requested, and data for 1994–95 are not yet available.

The industrial injuries statistics cover only the most serious cases from a restricted range of occupationally defined upper limb disorders. From a survey based on respondents' own perception of the link between their occupation and ill-health, it was estimated that in the 12 months prior to March 1990, 110,000 people in England and Wales suffered from an upper limb disorder which they believed was caused by their work. This estimate was based on responses to a special set of questions in the 1990 labour force survey and covers a wider range of upper limb disorders and degrees of severity than the industrial injuries scheme.

Mr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many employers have complied with the Health and Safety (Display Screen Equipment) Regulations 1992 in respect of the instructions to employers to *(a)* analyse VDU workstations, *(b)* assess the risks to health and *(c)* take action to reduce such risks; and how many employers have been prosecuted for not complying with the regulations. [1005]

Sir Paul Beresford: Information on the extent of compliance with the Health and Safety (Display Screen Equipment) Regulations 1992 is not available in the form requested. However, the Health and Safety Executive has started work to evaluate the impact of the regulations. This has included a survey of employers. This evaluation is due for completion in 1996 and should produce information on the extent of awareness of, and compliance with, the regulations, and what actions employers have taken to comply.

The available figures for 1993–94 and 1994–95, provisional figures show that HSE's field operations division inspectors took no prosecution action under the display screen equipment regulations, but issued five improvement notices under these regulations. Equivalent figures are not available for local authority inspectors, who enforce health and safety regulations in premises such as offices, banks and shops.

Public Interest Immunity Certificates

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list all those in his Department who have authority to issue public interest immunity certificates; how many such certificates have been issued in each of the last five years; and what were the main reasons for them. [1423]

Sir Paul Beresford: The Secretary of State for the Environment has not in the last five years produced or authorised the production of any public interest immunity certificates in any legal proceedings.

Green Ministers

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what assessment he has made of the advantages of having *(a)* a junior minister and *(b)* a Secretary of State as a Green Minister; [242]

(2) if he will publish the criteria used to select the Minister to be designated as the Green Minister within a Government Department; [240]

(3) who is responsible for selecting the Green Minister within each Government Department. [241]

Mr. Gummer: Green Ministers are appointed by the senior Minister for each Department who will look for whoever may best fulfill the role and combine it with other duties. There are no fixed criteria, and the appropriate level in the team may vary. The responsibility of the Green Minister in each Department is to ensure that environmental considerations are integrated into the strategy and policies of that Department.

Regional Planning Guidance (West Midlands)

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what procedures have been put in place by his Department to monitor the environmental impacts arising from the implementation of regional planning guidance for the west midlands. [252]

(2) if regional planning guidance for the west midlands was *(a)* subject to and *(b)* modified on account of an environmental appraisal using the guidance contained in "Policy Appraisal and the Environment" produced by the Department of the Environment; and if he will publish the appraisal; [250]

(3) what alternative courses of action from those detailed in regional planning guidance for the west midlands were considered in any environmental appraisal undertaken by his Department. [251]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The regional planning guidance followed the principles set out in "Policy Appraisal and the Environment". During its three-year development, a number of alternative courses of action were considered and environmentally appraised. The west midlands local authorities held a conference at which a wide range of organisations expressed their views on a series of strategic planning options for the region. The authorities then submitted their advice to my Department and there was a period of consultation on that advice. My Department published draft regional planning guidance and again a period was allowed for consultation. The final guidance included numerous modifications to the original advice reflecting the view expressed by environmental organisations and others. I do not intend to publish a separate environmental appraisal in addition to the material already published.

We have asked the west midlands local authorities to keep the guidance under regular review in partnership with the Government office for the west midlands and others. Follow-up studies are required on particular aspects. The authorities' attention is particularly drawn to the aim of achieving a more sustainable pattern of development in the region.

Invoices

Mrs. Barbara Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what is the average length of time it takes for his Department to pay invoices; [932]

(2) how his Department publicises payment practices other than as percentages of invoices paid late; [956]

(3) what is the amount owed to those businesses whose invoices were not paid within 30 days or within the agreed contractual arrangements in each of the last five years. [1119]

Sir Paul Beresford: The Department only holds central data on its performance in paying invoices within 30 days or the agreed credit period where this is different. It does not hold a central record of the amount owed to businesses not paid within the agreed period. This information could be provided only at disproportionate cost. The Department's payment practices are publicised in its terms and conditions of contract and its annual report.

Water Conservation

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what alternative courses of action from those detailed in "Water Conservation: Government Action" were considered in any environmental appraisal undertaken by his Department; [248]

(2) if "Water Conservation: Government Action" was *(a)* subject to, and *(b)* modified on account of, an environmental appraisal using the guidance contained in "Policy Appraisal and the Environment" produced by his Department; and if he will publish the appraisal; [247]

(3) what procedures have been put in place by his Department to monitor the environmental impacts arising from the implementation of "Water Conservation: Government Action". [249]

Mr. Clappison: "Policy Appraisal and the Environment" sets out an approach whereby environmental effects can be taken into account in policy development, while recognising that this will vary from case to case depending on the complexity and significance of the impacts. "Water Conservation: Government Action" outlines the Government's policy for England and Wales on the various issues surrounding the conservation of water resources, including the proposed approach to the future method of charging for water. The Government's position is that, before additional resources are developed, existing resources should be used as far as possible, taking into account economic and environmental consideration.

The general policy and the specific proposals were developed following widespread consultation. They are designed to reduce the potential environmental impact of increased demand for water by measures to promote its efficient distribution and use.

The effectiveness of the policy and the specific proposals will be monitored by the Department of the Environment, the Office of Water Services and the National Rivers Authority.

Rural Policy

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if the White Paper "Rural England" (Cm 3016) was *(a)* subject to, and *(b)* modified on account of an environmental appraisal using the guidance contained in "Policy Appraisal and the Environment" produced by his Department; and if he will publish the appraisal; [300]

(2) what alternative courses of action from those detailed in the White Paper "Rural England" (Cm 3016) were considered in any environmental appraisal undertaken by his Department; [301]

(3) what procedures have been put in place by his Department to monitor the environmental impacts arising from the implementation of the White Paper "Rural England" (Cm 3016). [302]

Mr. Clappison: The rural White Paper "Rural England" sets out the Government's vision for the future of the countryside, looking at economic, social and environmental issues together. The White Paper was formulated in line with the Government's commitment to sustainable development.

Environmental considerations are an essential element of policy considerations and will be taken into account in following up the commitments contained within the White Paper.

Regional Staff

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many staff his Department employs on a regional basis in each standard English region; what is the cost of running these regional operations; what was the total budget for each region in 1994–95; and what are the main purposes for which the budget is used. [266]

Sir Paul Beresford: Detailed information on Department of Environment staff employed in the Government offices for the regions, their budgets and activities is provided in GO-MINIS 1, copies of which were placed in the Library in July 1995.

Biological Diversity

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the achievement of the meeting, referred to in his answer of 8 November 1995, *Official Report*, column 995, of the convention on biological diversity in Jakarta, 6 to 17 November in regard to the transfer of living modified organisms between countries. [1631]

Mr. Clappison: The second conference of the parties to the convention on biological diversity, held in Jakarta, Indonesia from 6 to 17 November 1995, decided to set in hand the development of a biosafety protocol which will specifically focus on the transboundary movement of living modified organisms. The conference also recognised the importance of the United Nations environment programme international technical guidelines

on safety in biotechnology as a possible interim measure during the development of the protocol and as a complement to it after its completion.

Other important decisions included the acknowledgement of the importance of parties establishing national strategies and in-situ conservation measures, the establishment of a three-year scientific work programme on coastal and marine ecosystems, the establishment of a pilot phase of the clearing house mechanism to facilitate the sharing of information and the choice of Montreal as the location for the biodiversity convention secretariat.

As last year, it was not possible to reach agreement on voting provisions on financial issues. These will be considered again at the third conference of the parties to be held in November 1996.

Environmental Technology Industry

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what was *(a)* the total output and *(b)* the percentage of GNP of the United Kingdom environmental industry for each year since 1990–91; and if he will provide an estimate for the current financial year; [1163]

(2) what assessment he has made of the growth in the last five years of the United Kingdom environmental technology industry in terms of *(a)* output, *(b)* percentage of GNP and *(c)* employment; [1165]

(3) how many people in the United Kingdom are employed in the environmental technology industry; and how many people have been employed in that industry for each year since 1990. [1164]

Mr. Ian Taylor: I have been asked to reply.

Information on the environmental technology and associated industries is very limited. Using a definition of the environmental products industries as producing

"a product which enhances or prevents the deterioration of the external environment"

information available suggests that the value added by the environmental products sector has increased strongly over the period from 1985 to 1991. In 1990 and 1991, there were approximately 110,000 people employed in the environmental products industries.

The available information on this topic, which was derived by the Department's statisticians, has been published in "Statistical News; Summer 1995" and is available in the Library of the House. No further assessment has yet been made on the growth of this sector.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Ministerial Transport, London

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many times in the last year he used *(a)* the London Underground and *(b)* London Transport buses while on official business. [372]

Mr. Hanley: My right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary uses public transport from time to time.

Hydronuclear Experimental Tests

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is Her Majesty's Government's policy in respect of whether hydronuclear experimental tests may be conducted within the terms of the proposed comprehensive nuclear test ban treaty. [1587]

Mr. David Davis: We are working to achieve a comprehensive test ban treaty which would prohibit all nuclear weapon tests explosions involving any release of nuclear energy.

Iraq

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has on the number of prisoners from other nations currently being detained in Iraq and their countries of origin. [1588]

Mr. Hanley: We have no reliable figures on the total number of foreigners held in Iraqi gaols.

Precise numbers of foreign prisoners are not given out by the Iraqi regime.

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what communication he has had with Hussein Kamil in respect of Iraqi compliance with Security Council resolutions involving disclosure of information on prisoners of war. [1590]

Mr. Hanley: It would not be appropriate to comment on this matter. We continue to press the Iraqi authorities through every available means to disclose the fate of the detainees.

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Iraqi Government concerning Kuwaiti prisoners of war still being held captive; and if he will make a statement. [1589]

Mr. Hanley: We take every opportunity at the UN and through the tripartite commission to press Iraq to co-operate. The November review of sanctions stressed that Iraq must comply with all its UN obligations including that on Kuwaiti detainees.

Exports

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if it is the practice of his Department to make an assessment of the loss of earnings by British exporters, excluding military equipment, which may be caused as a result of war or internal conflict. [1571]

Mr. David Davis: This Department, together with the Department of Trade and Industry, alerts British exporters to potential difficulties in repatriation of export earnings that may occur as a result of war or internal conflicts abroad. Further action is then a matter for the individual companies. We have no central figures for the total amount involved in loss of earnings as the result of such actions.

Caroline Beale

Mr. Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations his Department has made to the relevant United States authorities to ensure that the legal proceedings concerning Caroline Beale, or any decision on her future, are not unduly delayed; and if he will make a statement. [1150]

Mr. Hanley: Her Majesty's consul has pressed both the New York district attorney's office and the defence counsel for a decision in this case on many occasions, most recently on 13 November.

Land Mines

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will set out the criteria which will be used to determine non-detectable anti-personnel land mines. [1570]

Mr. David Davis: We are working to incorporate stringent specifications on the detectability of anti-personnel land mines into the 1981 United Nations weaponry convention. Specifically, we support a proposal from the International Committee of the Red Cross to the effect that:

"Anti-personnel mines shall incorporate in their construction, or have attached, in a manner not easily removable, material or a device that enables the mine to be detected by commonly available technical mine detection equipment and provides a response signal equivalent to a signal from 8 grams, or more, of iron in a single coherent mass".

Invoices

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many orders and firms are represented by the 13 per cent. of invoices not paid by his Department within 30 days or in accordance with contractual agreements in 1994–95; and how many of those related to firms with fewer than 500 employees. [1116]

Mr. Hanley: The 13 per cent. of payments not made by the Overseas Development Administration in 1994–95 within 30 days of receipt of a valid invoice or in accordance with contractual arrangements amounted to 3,328 payments out of a total number of 25,234. Separate figures for small firms are not available.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how his Department publicises payment practices other than as percentages of invoices paid late. [957]

Mr. Hanley: The FCO, Diplomatic Wing and Overseas Development Administration, publishes payment performance, as a percentage of invoices paid on time, in the annual departmental report. The FCO, DW and ODA, is committed to the CBI prompt payment code, which includes a clause to the effect that properly supported invoices will be paid within 30 days of receipt. The ODA is introducing a payment advice slip which informs the payee of the ODA's commitment to the CBI prompt payment code and invites them to take up an query with the head of ODA's accounts department.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the average length of time it takes for his Department to pay invoices. [931]

Mr. Hanley: The FCO Diplomatic Wing has, since 1994, measured its payment performance using a random sample of invoices submitted throughout the year. An analysis of this sample shows that the average time taken to pay invoices is 20 days. The Overseas Development Administration takes an average of 10 days, the Wilton Park executive agency an average of 25 days and the Natural Resources Institute an average of 10 days.

Ethiopia

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what support the United Kingdom Government are offering the Government of Ethiopia towards *(a)* the preparation of cases and *(b)* the setting up of courts and procedures to hear cases of human rights abuses under the former Derg regime. [530]

Mr. Hanley: Along with other members of the international community, we have given certain office equipment to the special prosecutor's office for the preparation of human rights trials involving members of the Derg regime.

Nigeria

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the meeting between the Prime Minister and Chief Shonekan, a representative of the Nigerian military regime, on 21 September. [1209]

Mr. Hanley *[holding answer 21 November 1995]:* My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister saw Chief Shonekan on 21 September to receive a message from General Abacha. My right hon. Friend pressed first the case for clemency for General Obasanjo and the alleged coup plotters who were at that time under sentence of death; and second for rapid progress towards civilian democratic rule in Nigeria. As a prominent businessman, Chief Shonekan was not affected by EU visa restrictions on Nigeria, which applied at that time only to military personnel and their families.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Students

Mr. Bryan Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his Department's estimate of the public expenditure savings which will result from the decision not to allow students who have temporarily suspended their studies to claim social security benefit. [982]

Mr. Roger Evans: The information is not available. In general, it is the educational maintenance system which is designed to provide support for students, not the social security system. Amendment regulations were laid before the House on 10 July to restore the original policy intention regarding students who temporarily suspend their studies, following a Court of Appeal decision. The regulations were not amended in isolation. The Department for Education and Employment has recently issued revised and expanded guidance to all local education authorities about their discretionary powers to continue to pay mandatory awards to students during periods of temporary absence.

Incapacity Benefit

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people have failed the test of incapacity but have scored *(a)* between one and five points, *(b)* between six and nine points and *(c)* 10 points and over. [572]

Mr. Burt: The information could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many claimants of incapacity benefit are currently exempt from all the work test of incapacity; how many of these *(a)* were previously entitled to invalidity benefit and *(b)* are claimants of the new incapacity benefit claimants; and if he will make a statement. [1102]

Mr. Burt: The information is not available in the format requested. Of those considered for the all-work test in the period April to October 1995, a total of 159,804 people[1] have been found to be exempt. This is made up of 138,828 suffering from a severe medical condition and 20,976 in receipt of the higher rate care component of disability living allowance.

Notes:

[1] This figure excludes Incapacity Benefit claimants who are also in receipt of Widow's Benefit as this information is not currently available.

Giro Cheques

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many giro benefit cheques have been recorded lost in each year since 1979. [371]

Mr. Heald: The information is not available in the format requested. Figures are available to show the numbers of requests received by Girobank for giro cheques which have been cashed, to be returned to benefit offices. These requests will be made for a number of reasons:

1. A Giro cheque has been reported as not received, stolen, lost etc., and is required for investigation purposes.
2. The customer has denied or queried the receipt of the Giro cheque.
3. The customer has queried the amount shown on the Giro cheque.

These statistics are only available from 1992–93 and are as follows:

1992–93: 697,954

1993–94: 493,113

1994–95: 444,054

In 1994–95, 82.9 million giro cheques were issued by the Benefits Agency and the Employment Service.

Income Support

Mr. French: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people aged under 19 years and in non-advanced education are currently claiming income support on account of their being estranged from their parents. [173]

Mr. Roger Evans: This information is not available.

Mortgage Interest

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his latest estimate of the total number of claimants receiving income support towards mortgage interest in 1995, the average amount of each payment and the total cost of all such payments. [313]

Mr. Roger Evans: On the basis of the November 1994 quarterly statistical inquiry, the latest available data, it is estimated that the total number of claimants receiving income support help towards mortgage interest is 510,000, the average weekly award is £36.66 and the total annual cost is £973 million.

Industrial Injuries

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to make hand and arm vibration syndrome a prescribed industrial disease. [1063]

Mr. Roger Evans: We are currently considering the recommendations made by the Industrial Injuries Advisory Council in its report "Hand Arm Vibration Syndrome", Cm 2844.

Staffing

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many staff his Department employs on a regional basis in each standard English region; what is the cost of running these regional operations; what was the total budget for each region in 1994–95; and what are the main purposes for which the budget is used. [263]

Mr. Burt: The information is not available in the format requested and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. Such information as is available is in the table:

Region	*Number of staff employed by the Department including its Executive Agencies as at 1 October 1995*
North	16,347
Yorks and Humberside	7,592
North west	20,795
East Midlands	4,069
West Midlands	7,071
East Anglia	1,748
South east	19,147
South west	5,092

The table excludes:

1. Staff on loan or secondment and not being paid by the Department.
2. Staff on unpaid leave for more than three months or on unpaid maternity leave; and
3. Casual staff.

Invalid Care Allowance

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many children with the metabolic disease phenylketonuria have been awarded invalid care allowance; how much has been spent by Her Majesty's Government on appeals after which they have turned down the original application; how many applications have been refused; and for what reasons the refunds were made. [154]

Mr. Burt: Invalid care allowance is available to people who provide care for severely disabled people. The disability causing the person to require care is not recorded centrally and the information asked for could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Invoices

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how his Department publicises payment practices other than as percentages of invoices paid late. [967]

Mr. Burt: There is a statutory agreement with the Public Accounts Committee to publish the results of the annual payment of bills exercise in its present format—expressed as percentages of invoices paid timeously.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the average length of time it takes for his Department to pay invoices. [922]

Mr. Burt: The information is not available in the format requested.

Our aim is that all such bills should be paid within any special terms agreed, or if none exist within 30 days of receipt of the goods or service, or 30 days of receipt of a valid invoice, whichever of these is the later. Our latest monitoring exercise of the timeous payment of bills show that to date we are achieving 96 per cent. payment on time.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the amount owed to those businesses whose invoices were not paid within 30 days or in accordance with special terms agreed in each of the last five years. [1124]

Mr. Burt: Information is not available for the financial years 1990–91 and 1991–92. For 1992–93 and 1993–94 information could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. Details for the financial year 1994–95 and 1995–96 to 31 October are in the table.

Agency	*1994–95*	*1995–96 to 31 October*
DSS Headquarters	179,810.00	385,221.00
Benefits Agency	248,143.47	62,526.36
Resettlement Agency	1,872.87	1,948.86
War Pensions Agency	1,373.02	23,781.77
Child Support Agency	185,583.32	53,773.75
Information Technology Services Agency	24,899.67	1,255.20
Contributions Agency	1,298,024.38	47,178.46

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many (i) orders and (ii) firms are represented by the 10.5 per cent. of invoices not paid by his Department within 30 days or in accordance with contractual agreements in 1994–95; and how many of those are related to firms with fewer than 500 employees. [915]

Mr. Burt: The information is not available in the format requested.

The number of firms represented by the 10.5 per cent. of invoices not paid by DSS headquarters within 30 days or in accordance with contractual agreements in 1994–95 is 33.

The method of recording suppliers and payments does not allow for differentiation categories of suppliers with fewer than 500 employees.

Living Standards

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security in which year since 1965 the living standards of each decile of high to low income population were half their present level; and in which such year average living standards were half their present level. [1518]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: The available information relates to income as measured in "Households Below Average Income"; this is "equivalent" income—household income adjusted for household size and composition. The DSS series runs from 1979; the Institute for Fiscal Studies has extended it back to the 1960s. This shows that incomes in the top decile doubled between 1965 and 1992–93. Average equivalent income as measured in HBAI, and incomes in other deciles, did not double within this period. The HBAI measure has weaknesses as a guide to living standards, especially at the bottom of the income distribution.

HEALTH

NHS Capital Investment

Mr. Pearson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on procedures for, and stages of, public consultation in relation to NHS capital investment plans which involve transfer of services and closure of hospitals. [582]

Mr. Sackville: Health authorities are expected to consult local people and statutory and voluntary agencies in drawing up their annual purchasing plans and longer-term strategies. Health authorities also have a statutory responsibility to consult community health councils on any proposals for substantial changes in service provision. Where a community health council contests a proposal to close or change the use of a hospital the matter is referred to the regional health authority. If the regional health authority supports the proposal, it is referred to Ministers to make a decision.

NHS Staff

Mr. Hugh Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many vacant posts for *(a)* consultants and *(b)* other medical staff there were in English NHS trusts in each region on (i) 15 April 1994 and (ii) at the latest date for which figures are available in (1) psychiatry, (2) accident and emergency, (3) geriatric medicine, (4) general surgery, (5) anaesthetics, (6) general medicine and (7) obstetrics and gynaecology. [542]

Mr. Malone: This information is not available centrally.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to introduce a system of assessment for *(a)* consultants and *(b)* general practitioners; and if he will make a statement. [326]

Mr. Malone: The report, "Maintaining Medical Excellence", made a number of recommendations to ensure that standards of professional performance are maintained at a higher level. For hospital doctors, it recommended that employers and professional bodies should explore the feasibility, costs and benefits of mentoring systems and report back. For general practitioners, it recommended that for regulatory purposes systems of objective assessment against a national framework should be introduced into vocational training, subject to satisfactory costing.

The report was issued for consultation in August and we are awaiting the outcome of the consultation exercise, which ends on 29 December 1995.

NHS Treatment Costs

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the reasons for not making patients aware of the cost of their individual treatment. [1097]

Mr. Malone: Present costing systems within the national health service are intended to provide accurate estimates of total costs involved in providing a service at a pre-determined level of activity. This system enables average treatment costs to be produced, and it is these figures that are used in the price lists for extra contractual referrals. The price lists are available to the public. The additional costing work necessary to produce individual patient treatment costs would not represent best use of NHS resources.

"Mental Health and Stress in the Work Place"

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects to publish the pamphlet, "Mental Health and Stress in the Work Place", which he commissioned; what factors underlay the timing of publication; what were its main recommendations; and if he will make a statement. [327]

Mr. Bowis: The booklet "Mental Health and Stress in the Work Place" is not, and was never intended to be, a Department of Health publication. I understand that the document will be published in due course. It would not be appropriate for me to comment on its content prior to publication.

Mentally Ill Homeless People

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action he has taken, and what money he has allocated for *(a)* key teams of care workers to make contact with mentally ill homeless people, *(b)* specialist hostels and *(c)* provision of permanent homes with care following the homeless mentally ill initiative; and if he will make a statement. [325]

Mr. Bowis: Over £20 million has been allocated to the homeless mentally ill initiative since it was launched in 1990. This has covered the capital costs of 10 short-stay hostels providing nearly 150 bed spaces. The long-term revenue costs of these high-care bed spaces are met from the mental illness specific grant; costs are currently £15,500 per annum per bed space for the first three years, tapering to £7,750. This funding will continue for the foreseeable future. The Housing Corporation has committed £9.5 million to the provision of 181 units of move-on accommodation. Funding for five multi-disciplinary community psychiatric outreach teams is built into the annual allocations to regional health authorities.

Cardiac Services

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which health authorities in London do not have the necessary technical equipment in their locality to undertake *(a)* permanent pacemaker implantations and *(b)* cardiac catheterisation; when he estimates they will all be able to provide these operations; and if he will make a statement. [339]

Mr. Sackville: This information is not available centrally.

Khat

Mr. Tim Rathbone: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, what review is being made of the harmful health effects of khat; and what plans are being made for banning it in the United Kingdom. [311]

Mr. Bowis: The Department of Health continues to monitor the misuse of khat. Khat is not subject to control under the international United Nation drug treaties and we have no plans at present to schedule it under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971. The key criterion in the 1971 Act is whether the misuse of a substance has or is capable of having harmful effects sufficient to constitute a social problem.

The Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs considered the misuse of khat in 1988 against this criterion and reached the view that bringing it within the 1971 Act's controls would not be appropriate.

We are keeping the matter under review.

File WOP/4/5

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health on what date and where his Department's file WOP/4/5 that was mislaid in 1981 was discovered; what was the cause of it being mislaid; and if he will make a statement. [55]

Mr. Sackville: The file was found on 4 August 1995 among closed files retained for reference. The file had been closed in 1990, but this had not been noted.

Embryo Eggs

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action his Department is taking in respect of *(a)* the commercial selling of embryo eggs and *(b)* gender clinics. [1020]

Mr. Sackville: The Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority is reviewing its policy on the payment of egg and sperm donors and will examine any claim that a licensed clinic is acting improperly. In the light of this review, the Government will consider whether any action needs to be taken.

The HFEA has advised all centres which it licenses for infertility treatment that sex selection for social reasons is not acceptable. Sperm separation techniques used in gender clinics offering sex selection for social reasons are considered to have no scientific basis.

Bradford Hospitals NHS Trust

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will carry out an investigation in conjunction with the Bradford Royal Infirmary NHS trust into the *(a)* age, *(b)* ethnic background and *(c)* mental state for the female patient who had stitches to a wound carried out by a 16-year-old work experience trainee; and if he will make a statement. [62]

Mr. Sackville: This is a matter for Bradford Hospitals National Health Service trust. The hon. Member may wish to contact Rodney Walker, chairman of the trust for details.

Community Health Councils

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance has been given by his Department to regional offices on the future funding status and remit of community health councils. [320]

Mr. Malone: Following consultation on the report of the NHS executive's working group on the future establishing arrangements for community health councils, we intend to issue revised guidance shortly.

NHS Treatment Entitlement

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the procedures that are in place and identify and charge patients who are not eligible for free NHS treatment and the mechanism used to ensure that the procedures are in place and followed. [1096]

Mr. Sackville: The procedures to identify and charge patients who are not eligible for free national health service treatment are found in the manual of guidance for the NHS treatment of overseas visitors, copies of which are available in the Library.

The Department liaises regularly with NHS officials who have immediate responsibility for enforcing the procedures.

Emergency Admissions

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research his Department has commissioned into changes in numbers of accident and emergency admissions and surgical emergency admissions; and if he will place in the Library copies of guidance issued to health authorities or regions about funding these types of admissions in *(a)* the current year and *(b)* future years. [322]

Mr. Sackville: My Department has not commissioned research into changes in the numbers of accident and emergency and surgical emergency admissions; nor has it issued guidance on funding these admissions.

Osteopaths Act 1993

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health for what reasons the Osteopaths Act 1993 has not fully been brought into force; and when he intends to fully bring it into force. [198]

Mr. Sackville: We expect to announce the membership of the General Osteopathic Council shortly. The Osteopaths Act will be brought into force in stages according to the programme the Council develops for implementing the statutory scheme.

Residential Accommodation

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many people, since the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990, are known to have deliberately deprived themselves by transferring their assets; and what action was taken against them under section 21 of the Health and Social Services and Social Security Adjudication Act 1983; [1129]

(2) what plans he has to strengthen the law with respect to the deliberate transfer of assets. [1130]

Mr. Bowis: Information on numbers of people who have deliberately deprived themselves of assets for the purposes of reducing their contribution towards the cost of residential accommodation, and any action taken against them under section 21 of the Health and Social Services and Social Security Adjudication Act is not available centrally.

The legislation relating to charging for residential accommodation, including the deprivation of assets, is kept under constant review.

Mr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement clarifying the role of the state and the individual in paying for long-term care; and if he will make that information widely available to the elderly. [1134]

Mr. Bowis: The role of the state and the individual in paying for residential care is as laid down by the Government of 1948 in their National Assistance Act.

Hospital Admissions

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measure he proposes to take to ensure that the national health service can cope with an above-average demand for hospital admission; and if he will make a statement. [1153]

Mr. Sackville: Planning for fluctuating levels of hospital admission is a routine task for health authorities and hospitals, taking into account previous experience and local circumstances.

"The Health of the Nation"

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what procedures have been put in place by his Department to monitor the environmental impacts arising from the implementation of "The Health of the Nation" [258]

Mr. Sackville: "The Health of the Nation" is a Government strategy. It is subject to environmental monitoring and appraisal in the same way as other Government policies.

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if (1) "The Health of the Nation" Cm 1523, was *(a)* subject to and *(b)* modified on account of environmental appraisal using the guidance contained in policy appraisal and the environment produced by the Department of the Environment; and if he will publish the appraisal; [256]

(2) what alternative courses of action from those detailed in "The Health of the Nation" were considered in any environmental appraisal undertaken by his Department. [257]

Mr. Sackville: "The Health of the Nation" is a Government strategy agreed after widespread consultation. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment was fully involved in that consultation and is a member of the Cabinet sub-committee which oversees development and monitoring of the strategy. Healthy environments are one of the "healthy settings" which "The Health of the Nation" recognises as being important to public health. The Government's policy on environmental matters is described in the Environment White Paper, "This Common Inheritance" and the sustainable development strategy.

Staffing

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many staff his Department employs on a regional basis in each standard English region; what is the cost of running these regional operations; what was the total budget for each region in 1994–95; and what are the main purposes for which the budget is used. [265]

Mr. Sackville: The information requested on staff employed in each of the standard English regions is shown in the table.

Information about departmental running costs by region is not available. Details of the Department's gross running costs are provided in the Department's annual report for 1994–95, Cm 2512.

Region	
Northern	16
Yorkshire and Humberside	929
North west	637
East Midlands	62
West Midlands	108
East Anglia	0
South east	2,822
South west	21

Source:

1. MANDATE returns to Treasury from Chessington Computer Centre and Departmental records both as at 1 July 1995.
2. Figures include inward loans and secondments, fixed term appointments, casuals and staff in Agencies.
3. Figures exclude industrial staff and outwards loans and secondments.

Invoices

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the average length of time that it takes his Department to pay invoices. [930]

Mr. Sackville: The latest available information shows that the average time in 1994–95 was 16 days.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what is the amount owed to those businesses whose invoices were not paid within the agreed credit period or within 30 days in each of the last five years; [1068]

(2) how many orders and firms are represented by the 8.1 per cent. of invoices not paid by his Department within 30 days or in accordance with contractual agreements in 1994–95; and how many of those are related to firms with fewer than 500 employees. [917]

Mr. Sackville: The information is not available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how his Department publicises payment practices other than as percentages of invoices paid late. [958]

Mr. Sackville: The Department's policy, which will be published in the Departmental annual report, is to make payment to suppliers within the time limits agreed and specified in contracts with them. This will normally be within 30 days. Where appropriate, departmental contracts also require contractors to make payment to sub-contractors within 30 days of receipt of an invoice.

Population Statistics

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of the population is *(a)* white European, *(b)* Asian, *(c)* black and *(d)* other ethnic minorities. [113]

Mr. Sackville: The latest available information from the labour force survey is shown in the table:

Ethnic group	*Estimated percentage of private household population of Great Britain during period June 1994 to May 1995*
White	[1]94.2
Asian	3.4
Black	1.7
Other groups	0.6
Total	[2]100.0

[1] All but 0.5 per cent. of people in the White group are estimated to have European Nationality (Including Turkey and nations from the former USSR).
[2] Percentages do not sum exactly to 100.0 because of rounding.

Public Interest Immunity Certificates

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list all those in his Department who have authority to issue public interest immunity certificates; how many such certificates have been issued in each of the last five years; and what were the main reasons for them. [1433]

Mr. Sackville: A claim to public interest immunity relating to departmental documents or information is normally made by the appropriate Minister.

I refer the hon. Member to the replies I gave the right hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) on 19 July *Official Report*, column *1286* and on 24 October, *Official Report*, column *571*.

Vitamins

Mr. Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to fortify cereal grain flour in accordance with recommendations of the Medical Research Council vitamin study; and if he will make a statement. [334]

Mrs. Browning: I have been asked to reply.

The Medical Research Council vitamin study research group on the prevention of neural tube defects made no recommendations on the fortification of foods. An expert advisory group was, however, convened to consider the dietary implications of the results of the MRC study. Its report recommended *inter alia* that the range of breads and breakfast cereals fortified with folic acid should be increased; that fortification with folic acid should be limited to breads and breakfast cereals; and that there should continue to be available a choice of unfortified breads and breakfast cereals. There was no recommendation to fortify flour. In response to the report the Government have encouraged the food industry to increase the range of breads and breakfast cereals fortified with folic acid on a voluntary basis. It is estimated that last year 50 to 60 per cent. of breakfast cereals and about 10 per cent. of breads were fortified with folic acid.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Ministerial Transport, London

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many times in the last year he has used *(a)* London Transport buses and *(b)* London Underground while on official business; [405]

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Minister without portfolio how many times in the last year he has used *(a)* London Transport buses and *(b)* London Underground while on official business. [399]

Mr. Roger Freeman: None.

Energy Consumption

Mr. Battle: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what progress has been made towards cutting energy consumption in Government buildings for which he has responsibility, in each year since 1990. [1453]

Mr. Freeman: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment to my hon. Friend the Member for Surrey, East (Mr. Ainsworth) on Wednesday 17 May 1995 *Official Report*, column *260*.

Invoices

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what is the average length of time it takes for his Department to pay invoices. [936]

Mr. Freeman: The average length of time taken by my Department to pay invoices is 27 days.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how his Department publicises payment practices other than as percentages of invoices paid late. [954]

Mr. Freeman: In accordance with the Government's undertaking given in the 1994 competitiveness White Paper, my Department sets out its payment policy in its annual report, Cm 2820, together with payment performance statistics expressed as a percentage of invoices paid. It is not intended to change the method by which performance is measured.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make a statement on the pilot project for a single licensing point for small businesses. [945]

Mr. Freeman: A study into a computer-based, one-stop system to provide new businesses with customised information about their regulatory and licensing requirements was announced on 8 August 1995. The study, which is being undertaken by KPMG Management Consulting, is due to be completed by the end of this year. Following the study, the intention is to undertake a pilot scheme in some selected business links covering starting up as a vehicle component manufacturer, a corner shop, a small hotelier and a small builder. Depending on the outcome of the pilot the Government, will consider the case for extending the system to other sectors of business and all areas of the country.

Deregulation

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what have been *(a)* the staffing costs and *(b)* other running costs of the administrative support to the deregulation unit; and what future expenditure has been estimated. [1650]

Mr. Freeman: The total staffing costs and other running costs of the deregulation unit are as follows:

£ thousands

	1994–95 Outturn	*1995–96 Budget*
Staffing costs	1,038	1,171
Other running costs	193	194

The 1995–96 budget was set before the unit's transfer to the Cabinet Office from the Department of Trade and Industry in July 1995.

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what has been the total amount expended on travel and subsistence expenses in respect of the deregulation task force so far; and what future expenditure has been estimated. [1651]

Mr. Freeman: The total amount of expenditure on travel and subsistence in respect of the deregulation task force since it was set up in July 1994 to 31 October 1995 is £8,564. Future expenditure is expected to be at similar levels.

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list the members of the deregulation task force indicating the factors underlying the recruitment of each member. [1652]

Mr. Freeman: There are 16 member of the deregulation task force, which is chaired by the right hon. Francis Maude of Morgan Stanley Ltd.

The other members are: David Band (Barclays de Zoete Wedd); David Campbell (Laporte Fine Organics Ltd.); Maurice Denyer (Fowler Bros (Cowfold) Ltd.); Michael Fallon (Quality Care Homes plc); Mike Fisher (Whale Tankers Ltd.) George Goring (The Goring Hotel); Teresa Graham (Baker Tilly); Janet Morgan (Sainsbury Family Charitable Trusts); Archie Norman (Asda Group plc); Timothy Parker (Kenwood Appliances plc); David Parry (formerly BP); Tony Rammelt (Regis Europe Ltd.); Roger Singleton (Barnardo's); Dan Wright (Albion Automotive Ltd.) and Peter Wyman (Coopers and Lybrand).

Members have been drawn from across a wide range of industries, and from the voluntary sector. They have been appointed for the personal contribution they can make to the deregulation initiative and to the work of the task force.

Invoices

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what is the average length of time it takes for his Department to pay invoices. [937]

The Deputy Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster today.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how his Department publicises payment practices other than as percentages of invoices paid late. [953]

The Deputy Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster today.

TRANSPORT

British Rail

Ms Glenda Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many staff have left British Rail since January 1993 under redundancy or early retirement arrangements; and what has been the total cost of payments made to staff leaving the industry. [283]

Mr. Watts: I understand that 24,364 staff have left British Rail under voluntary redundancy or early retirement arrangements, at a cost of £471.4 million. There have been no compulsory redundancies. In this time, BR has made significant efficiency improvements, bringing benefits to farepayers and taxpayers.

Mr. Chris Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) how many British Rail locomotives are currently being stored out of use as surplus to requirements or to the cannibalised for spare parts; how many have been offered for sale to operators or potential operators in *(a)* Britain and *(b)* overseas; and how many are available for sale; [182]

(2) if he will take steps to require British Rail to make surplus locomotives and wagons available for sale to private operators. [408]

Mr. Watts: The information requested is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

In relation to passenger services, vehicles currently in store represent a small percentage of the total fleet; nevertheless it is for the three rolling stock leasing companies to decide when and on what terms these vehicles are offered for sale. Other than when the vehicles are being cannibalised for spare parts, the franchising director must be informed in advance of the disposal and be given an opportunity to bid.

As for vehicles used for freight services, where equipment has no current or potential use, it should be offered for competitive sale. It is for British Rail to determine whether or not equipment is surplus to requirements.

Ms Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what estimates were given to him by British Rail for its costs arising from the restructuring of British Rail for rail privatisation in *(a)* the current financial year and *(b)* the forthcoming financial year. [289]

Mr. Watts: British Rail estimates its costs linked to privatisation for the period 1 April 1995 to 30 September 1995 to be £44 million. No estimate has been received for the second half of 1995–96 or for 1996–97.

London Transport Property

Ms Glenda Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the estimated book value of all assets owned by London Transport Property for each of the years 1979 to 1995. [274]

Mr. Norris: London Transport Property is a division of London Transport and does not itself own property assets but, as agent, manages the property portfolios of LT and its subsidiaries. Information is not available in the form requested, but London Transport's annual report and accounts, copies of which are available in the Library, give information for each year on the value of assets, including property, owned or occupied by LT or its subsidiaries.

Ms Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what was the gross sales revenue received by London Transport Property for each of the years 1979 to 1995. [275]

Mr. Norris: London Transport's property revenue for these years is shown in its annual report and accounts, copies of which are available in the Library.

Environmental Pollution

Ms Glenda Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list those recommendations of the Royal Commission on environmental pollution his Department *(a)* has implemented, *(b)* plans to have implemented within the next 12 months, *(c)* plans to have implemented within the next 24 months, *(d)* plans to have implemented by 2000 and *(e)* has no plans to implement. [278]

Sir George Young: We have asked for views on the Royal Commission report as part of the national debate on transport policy.

"Transport: The Way Ahead"

Ms Glenda Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he intends to publish the findings of his "Transport: The Way Ahead" consultation. [297]

Sir George Young: A further report drawing together the threads of the transport debate will be published when my colleagues and I have considered the responses to "Transport: The Way Ahead".

Ms Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list those policies he has so far implemented as a result of his "Transport: The Way Ahead" consultation. [296]

Sir George Young: It would be premature to announce results from the discussions of "Transport: The Way Ahead" before my colleagues and I have properly considered the responses made to us.

Ms Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the number of responses he has received to his "Transport: The Way Ahead" Consultation. [279]

Sir George Young: We have so far received about 200 written responses, many of which represent the collected views of a range of different people. In addition, we have received reports from a number of seminars which have been held around the country, at which various groups were represented. Further written responses and seminar reports are expected.

Railtrack

Ms Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many staff have left Railtrack Group plc since January 1993 under redundancy or early retirement arrangements; and what has been the total cost of payments made to staff leaving the industry. [280]

Mr. Watts: Railtrack was formally vested with operating assets, including staff, on 31 March 1994. Since that date, some 463 staff have left the company, at a cost of £11,050,000 in severance costs.

Ms Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what has been the total remuneration paid by his Department to *(a)* the chairman of Railtrack Group plc, *(b)* the chief executive of Railtrack Group plc, *(c)* the finance director of Railtrack Group plc, *(d)* the director of safety and standards of Railtrack Group plc, *(e)* the director of engineering and production of Railtrack Group plc and *(f)* the commercial director of Railtrack Group plc. [277]

Mr. Watts: None. Directors of the Railtrack Group plc board are paid by the company.

Ms Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what funds his Department has spent on advice from consultants, outside organisations and individuals on the recruitment of *(a)* the chairman of Railtrack Group plc, *(b)* the chief executive of Railtrack Group plc, *(c)* the finance director of Railtrack Group plc, *(d)* the director of safety and standards of Railtrack Group plc, *(e)* the director of engineering and production of Railtrack Group plc and *(f)* the commercial director of Railtrack Group plc. [276]

Mr. Watts: None.

Accidents (Greater London)

Ms Glenda Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the number of *(a)* road accidents involving heavy goods vehicles within the Greater London area for each of the following years, *(b)* serious injuries resulting from those accidents and *(c)* fatalities in each year from 1991 to 1995. [271]

Mr. Norris: The information request is shown in the following table.

Injury road accidents in Greater London involving HGVs

	1991	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*
No Accidents	1,184	1,048	1,078	1,118
Fatalities	35	38	38	36
Serious Injuries	242	237	192	221

Trunk Roads

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if the "Trunk Roads in England—1994 Review" was *(a)* subject to, and *(b)* modified on account of, an environmental appraisal using the guidance contained in "Policy Appraisal and the Environment", produced by the Department of the Environment; and if he will publish the appraisal; [259]

(2) what alternative courses of action from those detailed in the "Trunk Roads in England—1994 Review" were considered in any environmental appraisal undertaken by his Department. [260]

Mr. Watts: The 1994 review involved a reassessment of priorities within the roads programme rather than the adoption of a new policy. As explained in paragraph 4.5 of "Trunk Roads in England—1994 Review", each scheme's likely effects on the environment were taken into account during the review. A number of schemes were withdrawn because they could not achieve an acceptable environmental balance.

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what procedures have been put in place by his Department to monitor the environmental impacts arising from the implementation of the "Trunk Roads in England—1994 Review". [261]

Mr. Watts: The environmental impacts of each scheme in the national roads programme are assessed and considered carefully before a decision is taken to proceed.

Ms Glenda Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what funding his Department has provided for maintenance of the trunk roads network within the Greater London area in each of the years from 1991 to 1995. [273]

Mr. Norris: I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Ms Glenda Jackson, dated 22 November 1995:

As you known, Steven Norris has asked me to reply to your Parliamentary Question asking the Secretary of State for Transport what funding his Department has provided for maintenance of the trunk road network within the Greater London area in each of the years from 1991 to 1995.

The breakdown between Current and Capital maintenance expenditure on London's trunk road network is as follows:

£ million

Financial year	Capital expenditure	Current expenditure	Total
1991–92	42.2	18.6	60.8
1992–93	40.3	22.8	63.1
1993–94	44.6	22.5	67.1
1994–95	64.6	19.4	84.0

Current maintenance is largely safety-related and covers routine tasks, such as cleansing, changing light bulbs, grass cutting, winter gritting, emergencies/incidents cover, addressing safety defects and inspections. Capital maintenance includes essential repairs to carriageways, footways and structures to ensure safety and to protect the investment in the infrastructure.

The variability in the Capital expenditure can be explained by variability in the requirement for major maintenance works. For example, in 1994 the M4 near Heathrow and the M1 near Scratchwood were successfully refurbished, including carriageway and drainage repairs, bridgeworks and the replacement of safety fencing and street lighting. I would add that the work was carried out with very little disruption to road users.

Rail Privatisation

Ms Glenda Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what funds he has made available to the Office of Passenger Rail Franchising to implement rail privatisation; and what are his estimates for the financial years 1995–96, 1996–97, 1997–98. [292]

Mr. Watts: The public expenditure plans announced in last year's unified budget allocated provision for the Office of Passenger Rail Franchising to spend £11 million in 1995–96. Provisions was made for the expenditure of £10 million in 1996–97 and in 1997–98.

Ms Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what funds he has made available to the Office of the Rail Regulator to implement rail privatisation; and what are his estimates for the financial years 1995–96, 1996–97, 1997–98. [293]

Mr. Watts: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced on 31 October that the Office of the Rail Regulator would have provisions for expenditure of £10 million this year, *Official Report*, column *131*. Provision has been made for the expenditure of £7 million in 1996–97 and in 1997–98.

Ms Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what funds his Department has spent, or is estimated to spend, on preparations for rail privatisation, excluding funds made available to *(a)* British Rail, *(b)* Railtrack Group Plc, *(c)* Opraf and *(d)* the Office of the Rail Regulator in (i) 1994–95, (ii) 1995–96 and (iii) 1996–97. [294]

Mr. Watts: The answers are as follows:

(i) 1992–93: £6.7 million
(ii) 1993–94: £13.5 million
(iii) 1994–95: £14.2 million
(iv) 1995–96: £24.6 million
(v) 1996–97: £5.3 million

Figures for 1995–96 onwards are current estimates. These exclude main sale costs for the flotation of Railtrack, which are yet to be determined.

Ms Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what funds he made available to Railtrack to implement privatisation in 1994–95; and what is his estimate for 1995–96. [291]

Mr. Watts: Railtrack spent £46 million on privatisation-related expenditure in 1994–95. The estimate for 1995–96 is £30 million.

Ms Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will show for all consultants and other outside organisations or individuals currently or previously employed by his Department for advice or assistance in rail privatisation *(a)* the name of the consultancy, organisation or individual, *(b)* the length of the contract offered to each consultancy, organisation or individual, *(c)* the total amount inclusive of VAT paid to date to each consultancy, organisation or individual and *(d)* the services required by his Department from each consultancy, organisation or individual; and if he will make a statement. [270]

Mr. Watts: Information about payments to individual contractors is commercially confidential.

Payments made to date to consultants currently or previously employed by the Department total £35.4 million.

Consultants currently employed by the Department on rail privatisation are:

Company	Consultancy
Linklaters and Paines	Legal advice
Freshfields	Legal advice
Samuel Montagu	Merchant Banking
Hambros	Merchant Banking
SBC Warburg	Merchant Banking
Merril Lynch	Merchant Banking
KPMG Peat Marwick	Accountancy and Taxation
Ernst and Young	Accountancy
Price Waterhouse	Accountancy
Shandwick	Marketing
Gresham	Marketing
Dewe Rogerson	Marketing
Ernst and Young	Information Systems
Richard Ellis	Property matters
Sedgwick	Insurance
Brodies	Advice on Scots law
Travers Morgan	Specialist advice on BRIS contract pricing
Ernst and Young	Corporate finance advice on BRIS contract pricing

Consultants previously employed by the Department on rail privatisation are:

Company	Consultancy
Arthur D. Little	Research
Coopers and Lybrand	Access and access charging
Mercer Management	Freight and franchising
Norman Broadbent	Recruitment
Putnham Hayes and Bartlett	Access and access charging
Debenham Tewson and Chinnocks	Property matters
NERA	Regulatory matters
Deloitte Haskins and Sells	Industry structure

Contracts for consultancy advice are normally offered on an on-going basis with provision for the Department to terminate the contract.

Ms Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what funds he has made available to British Rail for reorganisation in preparation for privatisation. [290]

Mr. Watts: Costs linked to privatisation incurred by British Rail are shown in the table:

	£ million cash
1993–94	92.2
1994–95	85.0
1995–96	[1]44.0

Note:
[1] Estimated costs to 30 September 1995.

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport which lines in the West Yorkshire region will be receiving maintenance attention before rail privatisation. [1447]

Mr. Watts: All operational railway lines in West Yorkshire are maintained in accordance with statutory requirements and Railtrack's rigorous safety standards.

Ms Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list each British Rail *(a)* subsidiary and *(b)* company formerly part of British Rail which has been privatised indicating the receipts from each sale. [1274]

Mr. Watts: Sales have been completed for the following businesses:

Red Star
Special Trains Unit
BRIS Design Offices
DCU Birmingham
Mainline Swindon
IDG Glasgow
BPE Mechanical and Engineering Consultancy, Doncaster.
Civil Engineering Design Group, York.
BR Maintenance Ltd.
Swindon Electronic Service Centre
Chart Leacon Depot
Ilford Depot
Doncaster Depot
Wolverton Depot
Springburn Depot
Eastleigh Depot
OBS Services Ltd.
Meldon Quarry Ltd.
Baileyfield Switches and Crossings Works
Ditton Timber Treatment Works
Quality and Safety Services Ltd.
BR QAS Ltd.

Gross proceeds to date from these sales amount to nearly £47 million. Details of individual sales completed by BR will be made public in due course, but it would be contrary to the commercial interests of British Rail and the Government to publish those details at this stage, as they may prejudice sales still in progress. In addition to proceeds from sales by BR, proceeds of approximately £1.8 billion are expected from the sales of the rolling stock leasing companies, following the signing of sale and purchase agreements announced on 9 November.

Invoices

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how his Department publicises payment practices other than as percentages of invoices paid late. [968]

Mr. Norris: The transport report sets out the Department's payment policy and records performance against targets, in terms of the percentage of bills paid within the time allowed. My right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade reports to the House each year the performance of all Departments. I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to my hon. Friend the Member for Dover (Mr. Shaw) on 18 July, *Official Report*, column *1211–12*.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the average length of time it takes for his Department to pay invoices. [920]

Mr. Norris: No average payment times are calculated. Our objective is to pay 95 per cent. of bills within contractual conditions, or—where no other conditions are stated—within 30 days of receipt of goods or services or presentation of a valid invoice, whichever is the later.

Robin Hood Line

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what compensation he will give to the residents of Nottinghamshire in respect of their contributions to the cost of the Robin Hood line. [1613]

Mr. Norris: The Government have contributed over £6.5 million to stages 1 and 2 of the Robin Hood line; the balance was funded by the European regional development fund and the local authorities concerned. We are discussing with Nottinghamshire county council the case for making a further Government contribution towards the capital cost of the scheme.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he is planning to privatise the Robin Hood line. [1624]

Mr. Norris: Services on the Robin Hood line have been designated as experimental services and are currently being operated by Central Trains Ltd. under an agreement with Nottinghamshire county council. The operating agreement would pass to a future franchisee. The franchising director aims to offer Central to the private sector during or after 1996. The inclusion of the Robin Hood line services in the passenger service requirement for the franchise will be considered by the franchising director before the expiry of the five-year experimental period.

Fishing Vessels

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when fishing vessels are *(a)* registered an *(b)* re-registered what checking procedures occur in respect of (i) actual engine capacity, (ii) convictions for illegal fishing, (iii) unpaid fines and (iv) the financial status and viability of the company owing the vessel; and

if he will make it his policy to institute such checks and refuse licenses when the results are unsatisfactory. [979]

Mr. Norris: I have asked the chief executive of the Marine Safety Agency to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from R. M. Bradley to Mr. Austin Mitchell, dated 22 November 1995:

I have been asked to reply to your Question about the checks undertaken on the registration and re-registration of fishing vessels.

Fishing vessels are registered and re-registered in accordance with the Merchant Shipping (Registration of Ships) Regulations 1993. The only check listed in the Question which is required by the Regulations is details of engine capacity. Such information is provided to the Registry by surveyors and measurers authorised for that purpose by the Secretary of State.

Matters concerning the issue of fishing licences are the responsibility of the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.

Ferries (Evacuation Requirements)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what instructions he has issued to the companies who own the *(a)* Pride of Bruges, *(b)* Pride of Cherbourg, *(c)* Pride of Hampshire and *(d)* Pioneer ferries to ensure that they fulfil 100 per cent. dry-shod evacuation arrangements; what time limit he has set the companies to fulfil this commitment; what has been their reply; and if he will make a statement. [57]

Mr. Norris: I have asked the chief executive of the Marine Safety Agency to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from R. M. Bradley to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 22 November 1995:

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your Question about what instructions have been issued to the companies who own the four ferries named, what time limits have been set and what has been their reply.

The evacuation requirements for these ferries have not changed. However, the operators concerned have advised that they now offer 100% dry shod evacuation arrangements from these vessels. They have achieved this by limiting the number of passengers carried.

Night Flights (Heathrow)

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what penalties exist for those who exceed the night flight maximum into Heathrow; and if he will list the occasions when such penalties have been levied in each of the past five years. [9]

Mr. Norris: The current night restrictions regime, which began in winter 1993–94, includes provision for end of season flexibility. This allows a carry-over of 10 per cent. of the movements limits if there is a surplus and anticipation of up to 10 per cent. of the next season's movements in the event of overrun. Any excess overrun would be penalised in the following season at double the amount of the excess.

Under the previous regime, if the maximum number of movements at Heathrow was exceeded by 50 or fewer movements, the limit for the following season was reduced by the same number; if by more than 50 movements, the limit for the following season was reduced by a total of 50 plus twice the number of movements in excess of 50. Movements underused in a season could be carried forward to the following season, subject to a maximum of 50.

In two seasons within the last five years, the number of night movements in the relevant period has exceeded the limit but has been within the end of season flexibility arrangements. In the winter 1992–93 season, there were 3,078 movements, of which 3,000 counted against the limit, 43 movements scored against the amount carried forward from the previous season, and the remaining 35 movements were deducted from the movements limit for the summer 1993 season. In winter 1994–95, there were 2,668 movements; the limit was 2,550 but the excess was within the amount carried forward from the previous season.

In all other seasons within the last five years, the number of night movements has been within the limits.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many aircraft are allowed to fly into Heathrow between 23.30 and 0600. [8]

Mr. Norris: In my announcement of 16 August 1995, I confirmed the night flying restrictions at Heathrow, Gatwick and Stansted. These restrictions include a control on the number of aircraft movements permitted by season. The movements limit for the winter season at Heathrow is 2,550, the limit for the summer season is 3,250.

In addition, the movements of aircraft which are exempt from the night restrictions are unrestricted. Exempt aircraft are jet aircraft with a maximum certificated weight not exceeding 11,600 kg and those propeller aircraft which on the basis of their noise data are classified at less than 87 EPNdB.

The arrangements for dispensations in various exceptional circumstances also continue to apply. A copy of the relevant guidelines was placed in the House Library on 6 May 1994.

Aircraft Noise Limits

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list all the occasions on which airport companies have fined those who have infringed noise limits under their charging powers in the last year for which figures are available *(a)* at Heathrow and *(b)* at other airports. [7]

Mr. Norris: The Secretary of State may set requirements for limiting noise at airports designated for the purposes of section 78 of the Civil Aviation Act 1982. The only airports so designated are Heathrow, Gatwick and Stansted. The noise limits are 110 PNdB (97 dBA) by day (0701–2300) and 102 PNdB (89 dBA) by night (2301–0700).

From 1 April 1993 at Heathrow and Stansted and from 1 May 1993 at Gatwick, the airport companies have imposed financial penalties for breaches of the night noise limits and are progressively introducing financial penalties for the breaches of the daytime noise limits. Information on breaches of the noise limits and on the fines collected is provided by each of those airport companies to their respective airport consultative committees. I have asked the three airport companies to send the reports for the last 12 months to the hon. Member for Nottingham, North.

At other airports, noise mitigation measures are the responsibility of the airport operator.

Nuclear Rail Flask Incidents

Ms Glenda Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the number of nuclear rail flask incidents declared in each year from 1990 to 1995. [281]

Mr. Norris: This information is not readily available. I will write to the hon. Member.

Western Orbital Motorway

Mr. Pearson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans his Department has to undertake a full environment and economic impact assessment of the proposed western orbital motorway; and if he will make a statement. [583]

Mr. Watts: Economic and environmental appraisal is carried out throughout the life of a scheme. If draft orders were published for the western orbital, the results of the work at that stage would also be published.

Transport Infrastructure Schemes (Greater London)

Ms Glenda Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list those transport infrastructure schemes within the Greater London area to which his Department has contributed funding in excess of £10 million over the past 16 years, the amount of funding provided to each scheme, the start date for each scheme and the completion date for each scheme. [295]

Mr. Norris: This information is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. Details of the Department of Transport's spending since 1989–90 are set out in "Transport Report 1995", presented to Parliament in March 1995.

Pollution

Mr. William O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make it his Department's policy to take account of the prevailing winds when pollution samples are taken along motorways; and if he will make a statement. [1317]

Mr. Norris: Whenever air quality monitoring is undertaken, the possible effect of the prevailing wind is taken into account as part of the measurement.

Mr. O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport at what distance from the edge of a motorway sampling is taken for PM10 and particulates. [1316]

Mr. Norris: Where PM10 and particulates are sampled, there is no fixed distance from the motorway edge applied. The distance is normally set by the requirements of the sampling equipment and the characteristics of the monitoring location.

Mr. O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what reports his Department receives from the Department of the Environment in respect of the monitoring of pollution along motorways. [1318]

Mr. Norris: We receive no such reports. The Department of the Environment does not carry out air quality monitoring adjacent to motorways.

Mr. O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what are the terms of reference given by his Department when measuring air quality along motorways. [1315]

Mr. Norris: There are no fixed terms of reference for the measurement of air quality alongside motorways.

Each site is assessed on a preliminary basis in accordance with the design manual for roads and bridges volume 11 "Environmental Assessment" and this informs the need for any further specific measurements.

River Thames (Freight)

Ms Glenda Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what has been the volume of freight, in tonnes, carried on the River Thames in each year from 1979 to 1995. [272]

Mr. Norris: The volume of freight, in millions of tonnes, carried on the River Thames in each year from 1980 to 1994 was as follows:

Year	*Internal traffic*	*Seagoing traffic*
1980	6.15	20.49
1981	5.40	18.36
1982	4.39	21.18
1983	3.72	21.13
1984	3.78	19.65
1985	3.50	21.74
1986	3.18	23.30
1987	3.00	20.90
1988	2.93	23.43
1989	3.17	23.25
1990	2.00	24.75
1991	1.83	21.83
1992	1.84	20.89
1993	1.87	20.39
1994	2.83	21.30

Figures not available for 1979.

Fare Capping

Ms Glenda Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what percentage of passenger rail fares will be capped as a result of the Government's fare capping formulae. [282]

Mr. Watts: Across the network, regulation will ensure that there is at least one regulated fare available for every journey. The percentage of passenger revenue subject to fares regulation will vary according to the nature of the franchise. Invitations to tender have been issued in respect of seven passenger rail services—LTS Rail, Great Western, South West Trains, InterCity East Coast, Midland Main Line, Network SouthCentral and Gatwick Express. For those which provide a significant number of commuter services, the percentage of passenger revenue subject to fares regulation, based on 1994–95 figures, is expected to be between approximately 47 per cent., and 80 per cent. For InterCity services, the range is expected to be between approximately 21 per cent. and 25 per cent. These figures do not include Gatwick Express, for which only a very small percentage of passenger revenue will be subject to fares regulation.

Public Interest Immunity Certificates

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list all those in his Department who have authority to issue public interest immunity certificates; how many such certificates have been issued in each of the last five years; and what were the main reasons for them. [1426]

Sir George Young: A claim to public interest immunity relating to departmental documents or information is normally made by the appropriate Minister. No certificates signed by Ministers in my Department have been produced in proceedings in the last five years. Certificates were signed in 1990 and 1992 and in relation to them. I refer to my reply to the hon. Member for Clwyd, South-West (Mr. Jones) on 16 October 1995, *Official Report*, column *91*.

M11 Link Road

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) how much has so far been spent on legal surveillance and other relevant costs to construct cases against people protesting against the building of the M11 link road; how much further public expenditure is expected to bring the cases to trail; how much it is expected will be recouped if the cases are successful; and if he will make a statement; [323]

(2) if he will list the resident engineers of the various contracts in connection with the A12 Hackney to M11 link road; if he will indicate their salaries and to whom they are responsible; what discrepancies on contractors' claims on personnel matters they have discovered; and if he will make a statement. [328]

Mr. Norris: I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. Harry Cohen, dated 22 November 1995:

As you know, the Minister for Railways and Roads, Mr John Watts, has asked me to reply to your Parliamentary Questions asking the Secretary of State for Transport, about the A12 Hackney Wick to M11 Link Road including resident engineers and contractors' claims and the costs of pursing injunctions to stop protestors interfering with the works.

The resident engineers for the A12 Hackney Wick to M11 Link Road are, for Contract 2, Mr P Mann and for Contract 4, Mr J P Wood, both of W S Atkins.

The Code of Practice on Access to Government Information exempts disclosure of Third Party's commerical confidences such as employees' salaries. Resident engineers are responsible to the company employing them.

If your reference to personnel matters relates to security personnel, I can confirm that in the last two years there have been claims containing errors or anomalies which have been discovered by the resident engineers' staff. The number of these instances has been about average for a contract of this type and all the claims have been resolved under the terms of the contract. However, if you have details of particular discrepancies these will of course be investigated.

Costs of pursing injunctions incurred to date amount to about £600,000. In order to minimise costs while at the same protecting the contract from continuation of these unlawful protests, the Secretary of State is minded to accept permanent in junction against named defendants and to leave aside the financial aspects provided these injunctions are conceded.

An offer has been made by the Secretary of State in these terms. Whether further costs arise and to what value, will depend on the defendants and if they concede the injunctions.

Forth Rail Bridge

Mr. Donohue: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when Railtrack expects to be able to carry out the structural investigation of the Forth rail bridge in accordance with the stipulation of the Health and Safety Executive as part of its investigation of the Forth rail bridge. [1254]

Mr. Watts: Railtrack is currently carrying out the structural analysis of the bridge, as requested by the Health and Safety Executive.

Mr. Donohue: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what guidance his Department issued to Railtrack in relation to its co-operation with the Health and Safety Executive's report on the structural condition of the Forth rail bridge. [1256]

Mr. Watts: The Department has issued no specific guidance to Railtrack.

Mr. Donohue: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much was spent on painting the Forth rail bridge in each financial year since 1989–1990; and how the arrangements for painting the bridge have been changed during this period. [1258]

Mr. Watts: I understand that British Rail spent approximately £0.5 million on painting and £0.5 million on other maintenance in each financial year from 1989–90 to 1993–94. Railtrack had a similar spending programme in 1994–95, and also completed a £4 million investment programme to replace the weighbeams and renew the rails in July 1994. In the current financial year, Railtrack has doubled the painting budget.

Mr. Donohue: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement indicating the reasons why Railtrack have delayed carrying out a comprehensive structural investigation of the Forth rail bridge. [1413]

Mr. Watts: Railtrack is currently carrying out the structural analysis of the bridge, as requested by the Health and Safety Executive. I understand that this analysis is taking slightly longer than planned, due to the complexity of the project.

Mr. Donohue: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the current painting and maintenance arrangements for the Forth rail bridge; and to what extent these have been altered during the last year. [1257]

Mr. Watts: In July 1995, Railtrack appointed Amec to provide a construction management system ensuring the safe co-ordination of all contractors working on the structure of the bridge. Maintenance has since been organised into 17 distinct work packages and new contracts have been let accordingly. Painting is being carried out by the infrastructure maintenance unit Scotland of British Rail infrastructure services and by Wilkie Hooke.

Mr. Donohue: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations his Department has received from the Health and Safety Executive relating to the delays in the publication of its report on the structural condition of the Forth rail bridge. [1253]

Mr. Watts: None.

Mr. Donohue: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when his Department originally requested the Health and Safety Executive to publish its report on the structural condition of the Forth rail bridge; and what is the expected timetable for this project. [1255]

Mr. Watts: The Department agreed that the Health and Safety Executive should publish its report when the assessment was complete. I understand that HSE's original timetable has slipped slightly and that it now hopes to be able to publish its report early in the new year.

Rail Electrification Schemes

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the outstanding rail electrification schemes in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement. [1178]

Mr. Watts: Railtrack informs me that there are two outstanding electrification schemes on which implementation works are currently under way. They are Heathrow Express, and North London line electrification.

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what was the total mileage of electrified railtrack in each of the last 20 years; what percentage of the network this represents; and if he will make a statement; [1177]

(2) what has been the increase in the electrification of the rail network in each of the last 20 years; what are the projected figures for the next five years; and if he would make a statement. [1179]

Mr. Watts: Railtrack informs me that approximately 30 per cent. of the 10,300 route miles in Britain are electrified using overhead and third rail systems. The other information is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Nuclear Fuel Trains

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects Direct Rail Services Ltd. to begin taking over the running of irradiated nuclear fuel trains and whether its licences include the carriage of irradiated fuel which emanates from abroad. [1566]

Mr. Watts: I understand that Direct Rail Services Ltd. intends to begin running services as soon as its train operator's licence is granted. This will be dependent on the necessary pre-conditions being met, which must include a fully approved safety case. The origin of any irradiated fuel carried is not a rail licensing matter.

Motorways

Mr. William O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what responsibilities his Department has in respect of motorway developments and the publication of them to interested parties; and if he will make a statement; [1394]

(2) who is responsible for issuing statutory notices in connection with motorway changes. [1397]

Mr. Watts: I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. William O'Brien, dated 22 November 1995:

As you know, the Minister for Railways and Roads, Mr. John Watts, has asked me to reply to your Parliamentary Questions asking the Secretary of State for Transport, what responsibilities his Department has in respect of motorway developments and the publication of them to interested parties; and if he will make a statement, and who is responsible for issuing statutory notices in connection with motorway changes.

The main statutory procedures for the development of road schemes are set out in the Highways Act 1980. The Agency is responsible for preparing motorway schemes in accordance with scheme briefs, targets and budgets from the Secretary of State. This includes publicity for schemes at their various stages, issuing statutory notices and publishing draft orders where appropriate.

Highways Agency

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport on what date the former road programme director left the Highways Agency; if the severance terms included lump sum payments; and what subsequent applications under the business appointment rules have been received from him. [1104]

Mr. Watts: I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes dated 22 November 1995:

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your recent question about what date the former Road Programme Director left the Highways Agency; if the severance terms included lump sum payments; and what subsequent applications under the business appointment rules have been received from him.

The former Road Programme Director left the Highways Agency on 30 April 1995. He received the normal severance terms, which included lump sum payments. The former Road Programme Director made an application under the business appointment rules to accept an appointment with the company Ove Arup and Partners, and this was approved following reference to the Cabinet Office and consultation with relevant trade associations.

Bicycling

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps he has taken to encourage bicycling; and if he will make a statement. [1180]

Mr. Norris: Following the Government's statement of policy on cycling last year, we have taken a number of initiatives to encourage cycling. We are currently considering bids made under the cycle challenge competition, designed to bring forward new ideas and partnerships capable of widespread application in the United Kingdom. We have encouraged local highway authorities to give a higher profile to cycling within their transport policies and programme submissions, and we have indicated that we will take special account of package bids which include provision for cycling. We are supporting the development of the national cycle network, which will open up new route opportunities for recreational, tourist and utility cyclists alike. And we are making good progress in generating a national strategy for cycling which I hope will be complete by next summer.

WALES

Childhood Immunisation

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to review the rules regarding financial penalties imposed on general practitioners who have not met targets set for immunisation; and if he will make a statement. [547]

Mr. Richards: Childhood immunisation target payments were introduced to provide incentives for general practitioners to encourage and increase patient take-up of childhood vaccinations. The success of the immunisation programme has resulted in the incidence of childhood diseases being at their lowest-ever levels and I have no plans to review the criteria GPs have to meet in order to qualify for target payments.

Public Interest Immunity Certificates

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list all those in his Department who have authority to issue public interest immunity certificates; how many such certificates have been issued in each of the last five years; and what were the main reasons for them. [1429]

Mr. Hague: A claim to public interest immunity relating to departmental documents or information is normally made by the appropriate Minister. There have been no cases in which certificates were used inter partes in proceedings.

Invoices

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what is the amount owed to those businesses whose invoices were not paid in accordance with agreed contractual conditions or within 30 days in each of the last five years; [1118]

(2) how many orders and firms are represented by the 5 per cent. of invoices not paid by his Department within 30 days or in accordance with contractual agreements in 1994–95; and how many of these are related to firms with fewer than 500 employees. [941]

Mr. Hague: The information is not available in the form requested and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how his Department publicises payment practices other than as percentages of invoices paid late. [970]

Mr. Hague: The Welsh Office publicises its payment policy in its annual departmental report, and on all official orders and contracts.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the average length of time it takes for his Department to pay invoices. [918]

Mr. Hague: The information is not available in the form requested. However, once valid invoices are received by my finance division, they are all paid within seven working days.

Cardiff Bay Development Corporation

Sir Wyn Roberts: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he expects to announce his final decision, on the sites to be acquired for development as bird compensation/mitigation measures, for the loss of Cardiff bay habitat following completion of barrage construction. [2212]

Mr. Hague: The Cardiff Bay development corporation, acting on the advice of the Countryside Council for Wales, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and the Land Authority for Wales, has submitted its report on alternative site options to the Goldcliff/Redwick proposals. I expect to announce my final decision on site acquisition and place a copy of the Cardiff Bay development corporation report in the Library of the House shortly, following detailed discussions with the European Commission and the Countryside Council for Wales.

Education

Sir Wyn Roberts: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he is likely to reach conclusions following consultation on "A Bright Future: Getting the Best for Every Pupil at School in Wales". [2213]

Mr. Hague: Comments were invited on how best to raise standards and make a success of the programme set out in "A Bright Future". Earlier today I indicated that the reaction has been heartening. It confirms that the achievements of higher standards in Welsh schools is both possible and necessary. There is a ready acceptance that targets for improvement should be set—school by school, as well as at the national level. I shall be publishing a commentary on all this shortly, to emphasise the significance of the programme and to affirm its contents.

In addition, "A Bright Future" consulted on a proposal that a specific target be set for Wales so that, by 2000, half of all individual 15-year-olds should get an A-C grade in each of GCSE mathematics, science, English or Welsh (first language). I can confirm this target. It will demand a significant uplift in performance annually; but even matching the progress of the last two years, in each of the next five would bring us within striking distance of the goal. It is important to measure the progress against a target expressing ambitions for what ought to be achieved. The target is for Wales as a whole, not for individual schools. I look to schools to set their own targets—where appropriate with the assistance of LEAs and others who can provide local support—to improve their performance year by year.

The independent school inspectorate is also working with schools to set new targets following inspections and it will monitor progress.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Further Education

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) how many full and part-time lecturing staff were employed in colleges of further education using funds provided by the Training and Employment Agency in each year since 1990; [1113]

(2) how much money has been provided by the Training and Employment Agency for the employment of lecturing staff in institutes of further and higher education in real and constant price terms. [114]

Mr. Ancram: Responsibility for the subject in question has been passed to the Training and Employment Agency under its chief executive, Mr. Ian Walters. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Ian Walters to Mr. Tony Worthington, dated 21 November 1995:

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has asked me as Chief Executive of the Training and Employment Agency, to reply to your question.

The Agency purchases training from approximately 160 training providers in Northern Ireland including the Colleges of Further Education. Since these colleges also provide training which is paid for from other sources, it is therefore not possible for the Agency to determine the number of full and part-time lecturing staff whose employment is directly or indirectly due to Agency funding.

The Training and Employment Agency does not itself employ lecturing staff in Colleges of Further Education and therefore cannot provide a meaningful response to your question.

I am sorry that I cannot be more helpful on this occasion.

Neighbour Disputes

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what priority the RUC places on dealing with disputes between neighbours; what resources it has in place in North Down to counteract this problem; and what discrete statistics it maintains to monitor the scale and growth of such disputes. [74]

Sir John Wheeler: The primary duty of a police officer is to serve the whole community and protect its citizens from all unlawful and harmful acts, from whatever source. The RUC places a high priority on investigating all breaches of the law, including disputes between neighbours.

Disputes between neighbours in the North Down area are given the same priority as elsewhere in the Province. Disputes of this kind are considered within the role of normal police duty and the police liaise with relevant agencies such as Northern Ireland Housing Executive, Department of the Environment or North Down Borough Council if the dispute relates to dogs or noise.

No discrete statistics are held relating to such disputes.

Invoices

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the amount owed to those businesses whose invoices were not paid within 30 days or in accordance with contractual agreements in each of the last five years; [1120]

(2) how many orders and firms are represented by the 5.3 per cent. of invoices not paid by his Department within 30 days or in accordance with contractual agreements in 1994–95; and how many of these are related to firms with fewer than 500 employees. [940]

Sir John Wheeler: The information is not readily available in the format requested and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how his Department publicises payment practices other than as percentages of invoices paid late. [963]

Sir John Wheeler: The Northern Ireland Office and the Northern Ireland Departments payment practices and performances are published in the departmental report. The Department of Agriculture also publishes its payment targets in the booklet "Our Service Standards".

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the average length of time it takes for his Department to pay invoices. [925]

Sir John Wheeler: The information requested is not available in the Northern Ireland Office, the Department of Economic Development or the Department of Health and Social Services, excluding the Child Support Agency. The average length of time taken to make payments by the other four Northern Ireland Departments and the CSA ranges from 10 days to 20 days.

Students

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many Northern Ireland students attend *(a)* English and Welsh, and *(b)* Scottish universities; and how many there are in each by academic specialism. [1219]

Mr. Ancram: The information is as follows:

	English and Welsh institutions	*Scottish institutions*
Medicine and Dentistry	304	386
Subjects Allied to Medicine	613	242
Biological Sciences	244	245
Veterinary Science	55	59
Agriculture and Related Subjects	155	84
Physical Sciences	344	199
Mathematical/Computer Sciences	1,129	573
Engineering and Technology	458	308
Architecture, Building and Planning	1,079	423
Social, Economic and Political Studies/Law	1,263	832
Business and Administrative Studies	351	232
Librarianship and Information Science	205	100
Languages	443	76
Humanities	591	105
Creative Arts	249	112
Education	398	453
Combined	0	0
Total	7,881	4,429

In addition, there were 2,556 Northern Ireland domiciled students studying with the Open university.

Exclusion Orders

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) how many exclusion orders have been *(a)* imposed, *(b)* revoked, *(c)* reimposed at the expiry of a previous order and *(d)* allowed to lapse in the last 12 months; [1220]

(2) how many exclusion orders made under the prevention of terrorism legislation are currently in force. [1221]

Sir John Wheeler: No exclusion orders have been imposed or reimposed by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland in the past 12 months. All 10 outstanding exclusion orders for which he was responsible were revoked in February of this year.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Scratchcards

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what *(a)* complaints and *(b)* representations she has received about the sale of scratchcards to young people below the age of 16 years; and if she will make a statement. [422]

Mr. Sproat: I have received a number of representations about the national lottery. It is not possible to determine the number which have been about the sale of scratchcards to young people below the age of 16, without incurring disproportionate cost.

"Sport: Raising the Game"

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what was the total cost involved in the printing and publication of "Sport: Raising the Game". [1554]

Mr. Sproat: The total cost to the Department of National Heritage of the printing and publication of 70,000 copies of "Sport: Raising the Game" was £63,900.00.

A further 15,000 copies of the document were reprinted in October, at a cost of £19,500 to meet exceptional demand.

The cost of the distribution of the document to all schools, higher education and further education institutions and all local education authorities was approximately £28,000 and was met by the then Department for Education.

Lockerbie

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what advice has been sought by representatives of the media from Her Majesty's Government about problems associated with the destruction of the airliner Pan Am 103 over Lockerbie. [1629]

Mr. Sproat: I am not aware that any such advice has been sought from my Department.

British Library

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will make a statement regarding progress on the construction of the British library. [410]

Mr. Sproat: The building is being constructed in two phases—phase 1A and the completion phase. Phase 1A is largely complete, and work on the completion phase will continue into the last quarter of 1996. It is planned that the whole building will be completed toward the end of 1996.

Works of Art

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how many acquisitions of works of art museums in England and Wales have purchased for each year since 1985; and what was their value in each year in constant prices. [193]

Mr. Sproat: The information requested is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Purchase Grants (Museums)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what would be the present value of purchase grants for museums in England and Wales had the grants been uprated in line with inflation since 1985. [192]

Mr. Sproat: Until 1992–93, grant in aid allocations to national museums and galleries in England included a separate provision for purchases which had been kept constant since 1985. Since 1992–93, trustees of those institutions have been free to decide for themselves how much of their grant in aid should be devoted to purchases for their collections. The national museums and galleries of Wales still receives a differentiated grant in aid for running costs, building and maintenance work and purchases for the collection. Had the purchase grants for 1985–86 been increased exactly in line with the deflators for the gross domestic product, they would be as follows:

£ million

Institution	*1995–96*
British Museum	2.316
Imperial War Museum	0.159
National Gallery	4.362
Natural History Museum	0.301
National Maritime Museum	0.325
National Portrait Gallery	0.492
Science Museum	0.731
Tate Gallery	2.879
Victoria and Albert Museum	1.816
Wallace Collection	0.0
National Museum's and Galleries of Wales	1.757

Coronation Crown of Queen Adelaide

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will take steps to ensure the frame of the coronation crown of Queen Adelaide is classified as regalia and is not granted an export licence to the United States of America. [194]

Mr. Sproat: Following an objection to the issue of an export licence by my Department's expert adviser, the application to export the frame of the coronation crown of Queen Adelaide was referred, in the normal way, to the reviewing committee on the export of works of art. The reviewing committee consulted my Department, the Treasury Solicitor's Department and the Lord Chamberlain's Office on whether the crown frame constituted regalia. The reviewing committee was advised that the discarded crown frame could not be regarded as part of the regalia.

A decision on the export licence application has been deferred until after 24 January 1996 to give the opportunity for an offer to purchase the crown frame to be made at or above the fair market price of £425,000.

A summary of this case is contained in the annual report of the reviewing committee on the export of works of art 1994–95, which was placed in the Library of the House last 24 October. Decisions on the export licence applications for the frame of the imperial crown of George I and the frame of the coronation crown of George IV have also been deferred until after 24 January 1996 to enable purchase offers to be made.

Invoices

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what is the average length of time it takes for her Department to pay invoices. [926]

Mr. Sproat: The information requested is not available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost, but a sample of invoices received by the Department of National Heritage during this financial year shows that the average length of time for payment of invoices is currently 20 days.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how many orders and firms are represented by the 9.4 per cent. of invoices not paid by her Department within 30 days or in accordance with contractual agreements in 1994–95; and how many of those are related to firms with fewer than 500 employees. [916]

Mr. Sproat: The sample of invoices used in the calculation shows that the figure represents 90 orders and firms. Our records cannot be used to determine firms with fewer than 500 employees.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how her Department publicises payment practices other than as percentages of invoices paid late. [962]

Mr. Sproat: The Department of National Heritage publicises only payment practices as percentages of invoices paid within contract terms or 30 days. As required, these details of our annual payment performance are included in our departmental reports.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what is the amount owed to those businesses whose invoices were not paid within 30 days or within agreed contractual provisions in each of the last five years. [1122]

Mr. Sproat: The information requested is not available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost, but the following has been produced on the basis of the sample of invoices received by the Department of National Heritage and used to reply to the hon. Member on 1 November, *Official Report*, column 267:

Amount owed £'000

1993–94: 246

1994–95: 753

1995–96: 166

There are no comparable departmental figures for earlier years as the Department's payment system was not in place until 1993, following the establishment of DNH in April 1992.

British Academy of Sport

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage when her Department plans to publish proposals relating to the establishment of the new British academy of sport. [1469]

Mr. Sproat: I expect the Sports Council to publish a consultation paper on proposals for the British academy of sport on 5 December.

Television Rights (Football)

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what action her Department is planning to prevent any single broadcasting company having a monopoly on the rights to televise live domestic football. [1477]

Mr. Sproat: The Government have no plans to alter current arrangements under which, with the exception of listed sporting events which cannot be shown on a pay-per-view basis, sports rights holders are free to dispose of their rights to broadcast in the way they choose.

European Championship

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how much money the Government have promised to help fund activities associated with the Euro-96 tournament. [1474]

Mr. Sproat: We have made available £400,000 for the cultural festival linked to Euro-96. We are also considering how National Music Day, which falls on the weekend of the championship finals, can be focused on associated cultural events.

Sporting Events (Broadcasting)

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage when her Department last examined the likely impact of digital technology on the broadcasting of sporting events; and what was the outcome. [1498]

Mr. Sproat: We have been looking carefully at this and many other issues as we have been developing our proposals for the regulatory framework for digital terrestrial television. Digital technology will mean that there will be more opportunities for the coverage of sport on television, providing greater access and choice for the viewer.

Public Interest Immunity Certificates

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will list *(a)* who in her Department has authority to issue public interest immunity certificates and *(b)* how many have been issued in each of the last five years, giving the reasons for each case. [1420]

Mr. Sproat: A claim of public interest immunity relating to departmental documents or information would normally be made by the appropriate Minister.

Since my Department was established in April 1992, it has not issued any public interest immunity certificates.

Royal Palaces

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what was the cost to grant in aid of the occupied royal palaces in *(a)* 1990, *(b)* 1991 and *(c)* 1992 net of (i) the costs associated with the fire at Windsor and (ii) the costs of the exceptional work started at Windsor in 1987–88. [1321]

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 21 November 1995]:* Costs associated with the fire and costs of the exceptional work were given in my earlier reply on 31 October 1995, *Official Report*, column *185*. The grant in aid net of these factors was:

1990–91: £19.93[1] million

1991–92: £19.71 million

1992–93: £15.53 million

[1] This figure assumes that expenditure on the exceptional work was the same in each of the five years 1986–87 to 1990–91. As stated in the earlier answer, figures for each year are not available.

Mr. Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what estimate has been made of the cost of providing details of expenditure on the furnishing of directors' apartments in the occupied royal palaces in each year from 1982 to 1991; and how these costs have been arrived at. [1322]

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 21 November 1995]:* It is estimated that extraction of this information would cost about £2,000 in direct additional staff costs. File handling, transport and supervision could double that.

The PSA files have been put away in bulk. It seems from its lists that we would probably need to screen some 200 volumes to identify the right ones before we could extract and present the right information. Even then, we might not find the information in these files and might have to search further. The estimate was built up on the basis of time for each volume depending on how relevant it is found to be.

Ministerial Transport, London

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how many times in the last year she has used *(a)* the London Underground and *(b)* London buses while on official business. [423]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Infrequently. Such records are not kept.

LORD PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

Public Interest Immunity Certificates

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will list all those in his Department who have authority to issue public interest immunity certificates; how many such certificates have been issued in each of the last five years; and what were the main reasons for them.

Mr. Newton: A claim to public interest immunity relating to departmental documents or information is normally made by the appropriate Minister. No public interest immunity certificates have been issued by my Department in the last five years.

Ministerial Transport, London

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Lord President of the Council how many times in the last year he has used *(a)* London Underground and *(b)* London Transport buses while on official business.

Mr. Newton: None. However, the nature of my duties means that the overwhelming majority of my movements in London on official business are only between Whitehall and the House.

SCOTLAND

Motorway Crash Barriers

6. **Mr. Bellingham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many miles of dual carriageway and motorway there are in Scotland that do not have the protection of crash barriers. [776]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: A total of 71 miles.

Munitions Dumping (South-west Scotland)

16. **Mr. Foulkes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received regarding the survey he has asked the Marine Laboratory to undertake off the coast of south-west Scotland. [787]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: A number of companies with specialist expertise in underwater exploration have contacted Scottish Office scientists to offer their assistance with the marine survey of the Beaufort's dyke area.

Local Government Services

17. **Mr. McMaster:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he next plans to meet representatives of the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities to discuss the funding of local government services. [788]

Mr. Kynoch: On 19 January.

23. **Mrs. Adams:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he next plans to meet COSLA to discuss local government finances. [795]

Mr. Kynoch: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave earlier today to the hon. Member for Paisley, South, (Mr. McMaster).

Migration

18. **Mr. David Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what estimate he has made of the number of individuals who moved residence from England to Scotland in the last year. [789]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: It is estimated that 47,000 individuals moved residence from England to Scotland in 1994.

Scottish Economy

19. **Dr. Reid:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he last met with the chief executive of Scottish Enterprise to discuss the Scottish economy; and if he will make a statement. [790]

Mr. Kynoch: Last week.

National Health Service

20. **Mr. Ernie Ross:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he last met the chairman of health boards in Scotland to discuss the national health service. [792]

21. **Mr. Malcolm Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he last met the chairman of Grampian health board to discuss community hospital provision in the north-east. [793]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My right hon. Friend and I meet health board chairmen regularly to discuss matters of current interest.

Tree Planting

22. **Mr. Ian Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many trees have been planted by the forestry industry in the United Kingdom within each of the past five years. [794]

Mr. Kynoch: Over 70 million trees were planted in the United Kingdom in each of the last five years.

A92 (Accidents)

24. **Mr. Welsh:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will state the number of deaths, injuries, and accidents on the A92 Dundee, Arbroath to Montrose road in the current year to date; and if he will make a statement. [796]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Between 1 January and 31 October 1995, the latest date for which the requested statistics are available, there were five deaths and 30 other casualties arising from 60 accidents, including 39 non-injury accidents, on the A92 between Dundee and Montrose. This stretch of the A92 is a local road and responsibility for road safety on it rests with the local roads authority, Tayside regional council.

Departmental Staff

25. **Mr. Canavan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will name all Scottish Office staff who are political appointments, the nature of their responsibilities and the cost to public funds of employing them. [797]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I have two special advisers, Mr. Gerald Warner and Mrs. Jacqui Low. They assist me with that part of my work which is partly governmental and partly political. There is a nationally agreed salary range for special advisers; individuals are paid at a rate within that range which equates to salary in their previous employment.

Forestry Commission Woodland

26. **Mrs. Ray Michie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to increase the number of Forestry Commission woodlands to be held by local communities. [798]

Mr. Kynoch: We are currently considering how local communities can become more involved in the management of Forestry Commission woodlands.

Private Finance Initiative (NHS)

27. **Mr. Robert G. Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the private finance in initiative in the national health service. [799]

Mr. Kynoch: Good progress is being made with the private finance imitative. A number of major schemes are now at advanced stages in the process and are due to come to fruition within the next few months. There is confidence among those taking these schemes forward that the PFI will offer considerable benefits to the NHS.

Under-age Drinking

28. **Mr. Gallie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to reduce under-age drinking in public places in Scotland; and if he will make a statement. [801]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Under-age drinking is a cause for concern in any context. The Health Education Board for Scotland continues to promote a range of materials aimed at educating young people about the risks of excessive or inappropriate drinking. We are also looking, together with other Government Departments, at what steps might be taken to address the problem of so-called designer alcoholic products associated with under-age drinking.

We are also concerned to reduce the problem of nuisance caused by people of any age drinking in public places and have invited local authorities to propose byelaws to address this by making it an offence to drink in designated public places. We have so far confirmed byelaws in six local authority areas. Many other authorities are in the process of preparing proposals.

Road Programmes

29. **Mr. McKelvey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he next plans to meet COSLA to discuss roads programmes. [802]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My right hon. Friend has no plans at present to meet COSLA specifically to discuss roads programmes.

Job Creation

30. **Mr. Kirkwood:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to promote job creation in the Border region; and if he will make a statement. [803]

Mr. Kynoch: Scottish Borders Enterprise, which has a budget of £9.6 million in 1995–96, has the main responsibility for promoting economic development in the Borders. The SBE acts in co-operation with local authorities and other economic development agencies.

Fisheries

31. **Mrs. Ewing:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he last met representatives of the Scottish Fishermen's Federation to discuss current problems of the fishing fleet; and if he will make a statement. [804]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: My right hon. Friend last met representatives of the Scottish Fishermen's Federation in Luxembourg on 26 October when, together

with my hon. Friend the Minister of State at the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, he represented the United Kingdom at the Council of Fisheries Ministers. The current problems facing the fishing fleet were fully discussed.

34. **Mr. Hicks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what discussions his Department has had with MAFF concerning allegations that Scottish-based fishing vessels have been fishing illegally in the south-west mackerel box; and if he will make a statement. [808]

Mr. Robertson: The Scottish Office maintains close contact with the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on fisheries issues. The mackerel box is kept under close surveillance by the Ministry's sea fisheries inspectorate. There is no evidence of illegal fishing by Scottish vessels operating in the box.

National Tree Week

32. **Mr. Rathbone:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to support national tree week. [805]

Mr. Kynoch: The Government support tree planting every week of the year. Last year, we provided funds for the planting of over 70 million trees.

Infill Tax

33. **Mr. Eric Clarke:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he has met Scottish Power to discuss the consequences of the proposals to impose an infill tax on fly ash from coal-fired generating units in Scotland. [807]

Mr. Kynoch: In the course of a recent visit I made to Longannet power station, Scottish Power raised with me a number of issues including the implementation of the landfill tax proposal by the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Departmental Staff (Duties)

35. **Mr. Nigel Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will review the work of civil servants in the Scottish Office in dealing with matters affecting the political party in government. [809]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The rules about civil servants participating in party political matters are clear and rigorously enforced. There is therefore no need for me to review the work of civil servants in the Scottish Office regarding such matters.

Historic Buildings (Restoration)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what steps is he taking to ensure there is an adequate supply of Scottish slate and other traditional building materials needed for the authentic restoration of Scotland's historic buildings. [195]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Since these are matters for Historic Scotland, I have asked the agency's chief executive, Mr. Graeme Munro, to write to the hon. Member as soon as possible. A copy of Mr. Munro's letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Letter from Graeme N. Munro to Mr. Gordon Prentice dated 22 November 1995:

I have been asked to reply to your question to the Secretary of State for Scotland on the steps being taken to ensure the continuing supply of Scottish slate and other traditional building materials for use on Scotland's historic buildings.

As you will appreciate, this is a topic which greatly concerns us in Historic Scotland and a considerable amount of work is presently being devoted to it. Where necessary, we are working in conjunction with colleagues in Scottish Enterprise and other organisations to address the issues involved.

To undertake effective conservation and the authentic restoration of Scotland's built heritage, it is critical that properly trained craftsmen have appropriate traditional building materials at their disposal. Through an integrated approach, Historic Scotland aims to encourage industry, material suppliers, and the education and training providers, to achieve this objective.

In 1993, Historic Scotland established a Technical Conservation, Research and Education Division. The Division is charged with the responsibility of conducting or commissioning research into technical conservation issues, developing skills relating to the built heritage, and raising the standard of conservation practice among owners, contractors, professional groups and craftsmen.

If we are successfully to encourage the revival of key supply industries there is a need to investigate the supply of traditional building materials. As a result, a number of related studies are currently underway.

To obtain a comprehensive overview of Scottish *stone* supplies, and their potential for use in future conservation and restoration projects, a strategic study has been commissioned. This will involve examining ways in which the Scottish stone industry might arrest the decline in the use of indigenous stone, and give pointers to how this trend might be reversed.

As no *slate* has been produced in Scotland since the early 1950s a major geological study into Scottish slate reserves has been commissioned from Glasgow University. A separate study by Dundee University will try to quantify the extent of change which has taken place through the use of alternative roof covering materials. Both studies aim to provide Historic Scotland with a strategic overview of the issues involved and with information which will assist decision makers and specifiers on the available, and future, potential for Scottish slate.

Over recent years there has been a steadily increasing awareness of the significant damage being caused to historic buildings as a result of the inappropriate use of cement in repair work. Whilst a number of Scottish outlets still produce *lime*, none of that is readily available for use in building conservation work. To assess the quality of what is to hand, Historic Scotland has commissioned a scientific analysis of lime from 15 locations around Scotland. This information will be used to encourage industry to restart lime burning and slaking. If successful, this will greatly enhance the ability of specifiers to choose the correct material to undertake sensitive repairs on the exterior and interior of historic buildings.

To assist in this process, Historic Scotland has recently published 3 relevant technical publications—

Preparation and Use of Lime Mortars—Technical Advice Note 1

Conservation of Plasterwork—Technical Advice Note 2

The Repair of Historic Buildings in Scotland

Supplementary publications, promoting the results of case studies into traditional lime harling and a Technical Advice Note on lime washing are also planned.

As part of the associated education process, Historic Scotland recently held a successful international conference on lime. This attracted 170 delegates, with representatives from 15 different countries and was warmly received by practitioners and industry representatives alike.

With a greater researched awareness of Scottish traditional building details has come a fuller understanding of the widespread use of *earth and clay* as an indigenous building material. Currently, Historic Scotland is researching this area with a view to producing a further technical publication. Our plan is that this should be launched at an international conference on the topic, due to be held at Dundee University in August 1996, in conjunction with the ICOMOS Out of Earth conference series.

A similar increasing understanding of the wide variety of natural materials used in traditional Scottish *thatching* techniques has steadily developed in recent years. Much of this information has been rediscovered as a result of grant-aiding the repair of thatched buildings around the country under Historic Scotland's Historic Building Repair Grant Scheme. Presently, research is underway to analyse the practical aspects of these projects, and to link this to an increased historic understanding. The intention is to produce a Technical Advice Note on Scottish Thatch and Thatching Techniques by the end of 1995 this year.

In taking a key role in the promotion of the need to use appropriate traditional materials, Historic Scotland is playing a major part through its Historic Buildings Repair Grant Scheme to pump prime the industry in this area. With repair and maintenance output in Scotland now amounting to over 40% of all construction spend in Scotland, this input has considerable influence. By promoting the results of its research programmes through publications, conferences, seminars and lectures, Historic Scotland also aims to take forward with industry, the professions, and the education and training providers, an integrated approach to the future development and use of Scottish traditional building materials.

Public Interest Immunity Certificates

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list all those in his Department who have authority to issue public interest immunity certificates; how many such certificates have been issued in each of the last five years; and what were the main reasons for them.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Public interest immunity certificates are authorised and signed by my right hon. Friend.

In 1993, two certificates were signed. Each related to proceedings in the Court of Session raised by a prisoner against the Secretary of State for Scotland. Each certificate concerned matters of prison security. In one of the cases, the certificate was produced in the court proceedings.

In each of the other years, no certificates have been issued.

Skye Bridge (Tolls)

Mr. Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will express the average toll charge per mile for a car in respect of the Skye bridge; and if he will make a statement. [237]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: *[holding answer 21 November 1995]:* The Skye crossing is approximately 1.5 miles long, of which the bridge itself is about 0.5 miles. A regular car user will pay £2.44 per crossing, equivalent to £1.63 mile. A car user at the non-discount price will pay £4.30 per crossing equivalent to £2.87 per mile. The tolls were fully discussed at the public local inquiry and are less than the pre-existing ferry fares.

NHS Staff Pay Rates

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what rate of pay increases have been negotiated for 1995–96 in respect of nurses and other employees subject to Whitley Council pay rates who are in the employment of Orkney health board and Shetland health board; and if he will make a statement [238]

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 21 November 1995]:* Hospital doctors and dentists were awarded increases of 2.5 per cent. with the facility for further increases to be negotiated locally for those in the consultant grade. These enhanced rates have been in payment since April 1995.

Agreement has recently been reached that nurses and all other staff employed by health boards, except general and senior managers, will be awarded a pay increase of 2.5 per cent. on national rates, backdated to 1 April 1995, with the opportunity for further increases to be negotiated locally.

These increases apply to all staff not employed in NHS trusts and form part of a package which has, I am pleased to say, brought an end to the dispute over the 1995 pay award to NHS staff.

Structural Funds

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will provide details of the distribution of EU objective 3 structural funding in Scotland in respect of *(a)* 1994 and *(b)* 1995 to date. [239]

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 21 November 1995]:* The amount claimed for 1994 by Scottish-based applicants is £46.3 million. This excludes a small amount of grant claimed for Scottish projects run by applicants based elsewhere in Great Britain.

For 1995, £45.3 million has so far been committed to Scottish projects. A further £1 million will be committed before the end of the calendar year.

Distribution of objective 3 moneys within Scotland, by area or agency, is not yet available.

Highlands and Islands Airports

Mr. Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he expects to announce his conclusions on the review of Highlands and Islands airports; if he intends to publish the consultants' report; and if he will make a statement. [226]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 21 November 1995]:* The report by Quayle Munro has not yet been received and no conclusions have been reached.

No decision has been made on whether the report will be published.

Invoices

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how his Department publicises payment practices other than as percentages of invoices paid late. [965]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Department's payment practices are publicised in the departmental report and the guide to suppliers wishing to do business

with the Scottish Office—"Selling to The Scottish Office". The Department's standard terms and conditions of contract give details of payment terms and what action should be taken by suppliers on late payment of invoices. The booklet and standard terms and conditions are available on request.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the average length of time it takes for his Department to pay invoices. [923]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: In 1994–95 the Scottish Office paid suppliers on average 10 days from receipt of a valid invoice or the goods or services, whichever was the later.

This was the result of pursuing three objectives:

1. The aim of paying all suppliers within the period stipulated by the contract—normally, but not always, 30 days. This objective was met on 96 per cent. of payments in 1994–95.
2. The desirability of taking advantage of early settlement discounts where this makes good business sense.
3. The need to batch together payments covering several invoices in order to minimise the administrative costs of making payments.

Flooding (Clyde)

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what information he holds on the impact of dredging policy and building on low-lying land on both sides of the Clyde on the likelihood of flooding; and if he will make that information available. [1225]

Mr. Kynoch: Developments on low-lying land adjacent to rivers face an inherent risk of flooding, however small. The assessment of this risk is primarily for developers and owners and a national planning policy guideline, planning and flooding, has been published to ensure that this is fully taken into account in the planning process. Strathclyde regional council, and the port authority jointly commissioned a study in 1988 of the possible effects of dredging operations reducing in line with the needs of the port. This concluded that this would have little effect on the risk of fluvial or tidal flooding but might lead to operational concerns for sewerage systems.

Tourism

Mr. Simon Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the state of the tourism industry in Scotland. [770]

Mr. Kynoch: Tourism is a major contributor to the Scottish economy. My right hon. Friend has made clear his commitment to the industry. I am pleased to say that all the signs are that the industry has done well in 1995. In the first seven months alone, tourism trips to Scotland from within the United Kingdom were up by 24 per cent. over the same period last year, bednights up 32 per cent. and spend up by 15 per cent. Overseas trips to the UK as a whole also rose substantially and I expect Scotland to show a similar position. This success is underpinned by substantial Scottish Office support for tourism, through the Scottish tourist board and the enterprise agencies. We intend to continue to support the industry in its efforts to become still more competitive.

Local Government Reorganisation

Mr. Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland on what basis he will determine the allocation of borrowing consents to the new unitary authorities in 1996–97 and 1997–98; and if he will make a statement. [778]

Mr. Kynoch: On the basis of relative needs and inherited legal commitments.

DEFENCE

Public Interest Immunity Certificates

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list all those in his Department who have authority to issue public interest immunity certificates; how many such certificates have been issued in each of the last five years; and what were the main reasons for them. [1432]

Mr. Soames: Ministers alone sign public interest immunity certificates in this Department. Since April 1992 the total number of PII certificates signed remains as stated in my answer of 16 October 1995 to the hon. Member for Clwyd, South-West (Mr. Jones), *Official Report*, columns *27–28*. In the event, not all the certificates have been used. They cover a number of individual subjects, including the screening of certain members of the armed forces from the public at various criminal or civil proceedings and the protection of certain information from disclosure.

Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many of the extramural contractors to the chemical and biological defence establishment, Porton Down, have agreed to allow disclosure of their contractual relationship with CBDE, in line with CBDE's open government initiative. [1593]

Mr. Arbuthnot: This is a matter for the Defence Evaluation Research Agency under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive, DERA, to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from John Chisholm to Mr. Ken Livingstone, dated 22 November 1995:

Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking how many extramural contractors have agreed to allow disclosure of their contractual relationship with the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment, Porton Down has been passed to me to reply as the Chief Executive of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency which includes CBDE as one of its divisions.

Forty four of our extramural contractors have agreed to their contractual relationship with CBDE being disclosed to the public. They include university departments and industrial companies.

I hope this information is helpful.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what specific measures have been implemented by the chemical and biological defence establishment to make it more open about its current activities. [1594]

Mr. Arbuthnot: This is a matter for the Defence Evaluation Research Agency under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive, DERA, to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from John Chisholm to Mr. Ken Livingstone, dated 22 November 1995:

Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking what specific measures have been implemented by the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment to make it more open about its current activities has been passed to me to reply as the Chief Executive of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency which includes CBDE as one of its divisions.

CBDE places a high degree of importance on publicising the work it carries out to protect the UK Armed Forces from the threat presented by chemical and biological weapons. The staff at CBDE have always published the results of their work in technical journals and represented CBDE at scientific conferences. While it was an autonomous Next Steps Agency CBDE also provided four full Annual Reports and Accounts detailing its activities. These will continue in future under the auspices of DERA. In addition CBDE encourages visits from all interested parties and has welcomed members of parliament and representatives from local and district councils, schools, universities and the local and national media.

I hope this information is helpful.

Invoices

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how his Department publicises payment practices other than as percentages of invoices paid late. [950]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The payment of the vast majority of the Department's bills and those of its agencies is a matter for the chief executive of the Defence Accounts Agency. The Defence Evaluation and Research Agency is responsible for paying its own bills. I have asked the chief executives of these agencies to reply.

Letter from P. J. Trevelyan to Mrs. Barbara Roche, dated 22 November 1995:

You asked the Secretary of State for Defence how his Department publicises payment practices other than as percentages of invoices paid late. As Chief Executive of the Defence Accounts Agency I have been asked to reply.

All new MOD contractors receive a 'Prompt Payment Guide' and billing timetable from the Liverpool payment office. This booklet provides guidance on MOD payment procedures to help contractors submit bills correctly and therefore receive prompt payment. Contractors are invited to submit bills fortnightly in accordance with the timetable. Information about payment arrangements over Christmas and Easter is printed on the remittance advice notes which detail payments made. Details of payment schedules are also published widely throughout MOD.

Because the MOD payment targets are key targets for the Defence Accounts Agency they are published in the Agency's Corporate Plan. Performance against the targets is published in the Agency's Annual Report and the House of Commons Official Report. The agreed target for financial year 1995/96 is to pay 97% of bills within 11 days of receipt at Liverpool, and all within 30 days. Currently the 11 day target is being achieved, and 99.99% is being achieved for the 30 day target.

Letter from John Chisholm to Mrs. Barbara Roche, dated 22 November 1995:

You asked the Secretary of State for Defence how his Department publicises payment practices other than as percentages of invoices paid. I am replying for the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency.

Details of payment practices are included in the terms and conditions of contracts sent to suppliers. Additionally we are preparing a new booklet, to be published shortly, that is intended to assist companies in doing business with DERA. This will include a section on our bill paying policies.

I hope this is helpful.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the average length of time it takes for his Department to pay invoices. [935]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The payment of the vast majority of the Department's bills and those of its agencies is a matter for the chief executive of the Defence Accounts Agency. The Defence Evaluation and Research Agency is responsible for paying its own bills. I have asked the chief executives of these agencies to reply.

Letter from P. J. Trevelyan to Mrs. Barbara Roche, dated 22 November 1995:

You asked the Secretary of State for Defence what is the average length of time it takes for his Department to pay invoices. This matter falls to me, as Chief Executive of the Defence Accounts Agency for reply. This statistic is not recorded locally and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

The statistics which are readily available to the Liverpool payment office go back two and a half years. During this time 99.99% of bills have been paid within 30 days of presentation of a valid invoice. The Liverpool payment office also measures its performance against a higher departmental standard of payment within 11 days of receipt of a valid invoice. It achieved its 1993/94 target of 96%, and its 1994/95 target of 97%. It has also achieved its 1995/96 target of 97% so far this financial year.

Some low value bills are paid locally throughout MOD, but information about these is not held centrally and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Letter from John Chisholm to Mrs. Barbara Roche, dated 22 November 1995:

You asked the Secretary of State for Defence what is the average length of time it takes for his Department to pay invoices. I am replying for the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency.

As I said in my earlier reply of 1 November 1995, virtually all validated invoices are paid within 9 days of being received by our bill paying section.

I hope this is helpful.

Mines

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his Department's rationale underlying the procurement of the future anti-personnel scatterable mine; [1072]

(2) what is his Department's policy for replacing the Ranger scatterable anti-personnel mine system; [1071]

(3) what progress has been made on the future anti-personnel scatterable mine system; and when it is intended to replace the Ranger system. [1073]

Mr. Arbuthnot: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) on 19 October 1995, *Official Report*, column 352.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence from which supplier his Department has decided to procure the vehicle-launched scatterable mine system. [1078]

Mr. Arbuthnot: A final decision has yet to be taken.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what is the current progress of the "mines in the new century" programme; [1070]

(2) what is the entry into service date for the Barmine replacement. [1075]

Mr. Arbuthnot: Current plans are to introduce a pattern anti-tank mine system—"mines in the new century"—that will replace the Barmine system in the first decade of the next century. However, we are currently considering our future requirements for this nature of weapon and no firm decisions have been taken. Any new mines introduced into service would have a self-neutralising or self-destruct capability and would fully meet the requirements of the international laws of armed conflict.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if his Department intends to order the aimed controlled effect anti-tank mine. [1077]

Mr. Arbuthnot: We are currently engaged in a development programme with France and Germany for the aimed controlled effect anti-tank mine. A decision concerning a production order will be made at the end of this phase and in the light of our continuing review of requirements for anti-tank mines.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the British armed forces last deployed anti-personnel mines in a tactical role; if this minefield was marked; when was it neutralised; and by whom. [1069]

Mr. Soames: It is not our practice to comment on the operational deployment of mines. The armed forces use all mines responsibly and in accordance with the laws of armed conflict to minimise the danger both to civilians and our own forces. In particular, all minefields are recorded and they are marked when appropriate. Wherever practicable, the UK armed forces have cleared mines which they have laid, once they were no longer needed.

Arms Exports (Iraq)

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on what dates his Department was informed of contracts relating to *(a)* Project Babylon, *(b)* Baby Babylon and *(c)* super-gun propellant; and what was the response of his Department. [997]

Mr. Arbuthnot: I refer the hon. Member to the memorandum presented by the Ministry of Defence to the Trade and Industry Select Committee in February 1992, HC86-xv. These are matters which are under investigation by Sir Richard Scott's inquiry. It would not be appropriate for me to comment further until Sir Richard has reported.

Ministerial Transport, London

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many times in the last year he used *(a)* the London Underground and *(b)* London Buses while on official business. [417]

Mr. Portillo: None on Ministry of Defence business.

Jordan Defence Package

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on what date his Department was made aware of allegations of fraud, involving *(a)* Royal Ordnance, *(b)* BMARC and *(c)* Astra in the Jordan defence package; and what response was made by his Department to these allegations. [1031]

Mr. Arbuthnot: Allegations of corruption involving Royal Ordnance and the Astra group of companies were made to the Ministry of Defence police in early 1990 and investigations began on 1 February 1990. They were not linked to the Jordan defence package. Any investigation into breaches of export control is a matter for HM Customs and Excise.

Harrier GR7

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Harrier GR7s are presently available in service to the RAF. [366]

Mr. Soames: The RAF's Harrier GR7 operational fleet comprises 45 aircraft establishment and two in-use reserve.

Private Finance Unit

Mr. John Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the cost of the MOD private finance unit in the last year; and how many staff are employed in the unit. [52]

Mr. Arbuthnot: It is expected that the cost of the MOD private finance unit will be about £240,000 in 1995–96. Seven staff are employed in the unit: five civil servants and two private sector appointees.

Operation Deliberate Force

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many of the *(a)* laser-guided bombs and *(b)* 1,000 lb free fall bombs dropped by the RAF during Operation Deliberate Force hit their targets; how many of each type of bomb hit each of the targets which were hit by RAF aircraft; and how many of each type of bomb failed to hit a target. [369]

Mr. Soames: The information is not available in the form requested. Nineteen targets were assigned to be attacked with laser-guided bombs, and 43 of the 48 bombs which were dropped are assessed to have been successful. All 19 targets were either destroyed or severely damaged. Eight targets were assigned to be attacked with 30 1,000 lb free-fall bombs, but it is more difficult to assess the success of these weapons as other NATO aircraft attacked the same targets. However, it is assessed that there were three direct hits.

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the definition of hitting a target and the circular error probable for each of the types of munition used in Operation Deliberate Force. [370]

Mr. Soames: The definition of hitting a target varies with the objective of a mission, the type of weapon and the nature of the target. Information about the circular error probable for the weapons used in Operation Deliberate Force is classified.

Jaguar GR1B Aircraft

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Jaguar GR1B aircraft are presently available in service to the RAF. [364]

Mr. Soames: Seven Jaguar GR1B aircraft are currently in RAF service.

Royal Ordnance (Police)

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what employer or contractual relationship exists between British Aerospace Royal Ordnance and the Ministry of Defence police. [988]

Mr. Soames: This matter is under review. The Ministry of Defence police are employed at five British Aerospace-owned Royal Ordnance plc sites. The greater part of the cost of their services is repaid to the Ministry by the company under the terms of an agreement made in 1985.

Racism

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent allegations of racism within the armed forces have been communicated to his Department; what action he has taken in respect of them; and if he will make a statement. [318]

Mr. Soames: Since 1 January 1995, three incidents of alleged racism have been reported in the Army and three in the Royal Air Force. Disciplinary action has been recommended in one case; the remaining five cases are still under investigation. There have been no cases reported in the Royal Navy.

Racial abuse or discrimination is not tolerated in the armed forces. Complaints of racial discrimination are investigated and, if proven, appropriate action is taken against the offenders.

A code of practice on race relations in the armed forces has been enforced throughout the services since December 1993.

International Military Services Ltd

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which members of his Department are on the board of International Military Services. [1022]

Mr. Arbuthnot: International Military Services Ltd. is a company wholly owned by the Secretary of State for Defence. No serving member of his Department is on the board of that company.

Low Flying

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if military aircraft are permitted to exceed the speed limits for the United Kingdom low flying system when within weapons range danger areas. [424]

Mr. Soames: No.

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many complaints about low flying have been received from the area formerly covered by the southern part of the Prestwick-Glasgow avoidance area since 7 November 1994. [1282]

Mr. Soames: My Department has received approximately 40 complaints and inquiries about military low flying since 7 November 1994 from the area formerly covered by the southern part of the Glasgow-Prestwick avoidance area.

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the minimum permitted altitude for air combat manoeuvring raining over the United Kingdom. [1284]

Mr. Soames: The minimum permitted altitude for air combat manoeuvring training over the United Kingdom is 5,000 ft above ground level.

Former Yugoslavia

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many British military personnel have been killed or wounded in the course of military operations in the former Yugoslavia; and how many of those casualties were as a result of blue on blue incidents relating to non-hostile troops. [1503]

Mr. Soames: Eighteen British service personnel have been killed and a further 39 have sustained serious injuries in the course of military operations in the former Yugoslavia None of these casualties resulted from "blue on blue" incidents.

RAF (Total Quality Management)

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to introduce the total quality management system to Royal Air Force flying operations. [1278]

Mr. Soames: The RAF continually strives for excellence in all its flying operations, and in doing so embraces and keeps under review relevant aspects of the philosophy associated with total quality management systems.

Danger Areas

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the military activities permitted in each of the danger areas D411, D509, D606, D608 and D609. [1302]

Mr. Soames: The danger areas specified are used for the following purposes:

Danger Area	*Location*	*Usage*
D411	Port Patrick	Trials of Sonobuoy Equipment
D509	Campbeltown	Anti-Air and Surface Shoots
D606	Forth Area	Live Anti-Submarine Warfare Depth Charge and Mortar firings
D607	Forth Middle	Surface firings; sleeve shoots; radar trials and air to air firings
D608	Forth Outer	Surface firings; sleeve shoots; radar trials and air to air firings
D609	St. Andrews	Radar training buoy

Trident

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what research is being undertaken into the feasibility of adapting the Trident system to carry conventionally armed missiles; and what has been the expenditure on this research in the last three years. [1291]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The UK has conducted no such research.

Sliac Air Base, Slovakia

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many United Kingdom personnel visited Sliac air base in Slovakia in September 1995. [1307]

Mr. Soames: Two United Kingdom service personnel visited the Sliac air base in September 1995, under the auspices of the Vienna document of 1994.

Exercise Purple Star

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on plans for Exercise Purple Star in 1996. [1299]

Mr. Soames: This exercise will take place in spring next year on the eastern seaboard of America. It is the UK's major field training exercise for 1996 and involves over 15,000 personnel from all three services.

RAF (Self-authorising Status)

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what instructions are given to Royal Air Force commanders concerning the frequency with which the self-authorising status of aircrew under their command must be reviewed; and what formal examination or test is conducted to assess the suitability of aircrew to retain self-authorising status. [1279]

Mr. Soames: The self-authorising status of aircrew is approved by the station commander of each flying unit. There are no specific instructions concerning the frequency with which this must be reviewed, nor is any formal test conducted specifically to assess the aircrew's suitability to retain the status. However, all aircrew undergo a continual assessment of their ability to perform their duties including, where appropriate, their suitability to retain self-authorising status.

Nuclear Weapons Safety Adviser

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about the work of the nuclear weapons safety adviser since his appointment. [1567]

Mr. Soames: Details of the nuclear weapons safety adviser's current and planned programme of work have been provided to the Select Committee on Defence and are contained in its 1995 report on progress of the Trident programme, pages 24 and 25, a copy of which is available in the Library of the House.

Chemical and Biological Defence Agreements

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will place in the Library copies of the annexes which have been added to the 1980 memorandum of understanding on chemical and biological defence between the United States of America, the United Kingdom and Canada in November 1988, October 1989, October 1991 and June 1994. [1584]

Mr. Arbuthnot: It is not our practice to place copies of memoranda of understanding or their annexes in the Library.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on what dates amendments to the 1980 memorandum of understanding on chemical and biological defence between the United States of America, the United Kingdom and Canada were first notified to Parliament; and on what date the memorandum was last amended. [1585]

Mr. Arbuthnot: It is not our practice routinely to notify amendments to memoranda of understanding to Parliament. The memorandum of understanding on chemical and biological defence between the United States of America, the United Kingdom and Canada was last amended on 21 November 1994.

Flying Training, Slovakia

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what communications he has received from the Slovak authorities concerning the use of Slovak airspace for Royal Air Force training; and what response he has made to the Slovak authorities. [1306]

Mr. Soames: None since the meeting in February 1995 between my right hon. and learned Friend the then Secretary of State for Defence and the Slovakian Defence Minister, referred to in my answer of 8 March to the hon. Member for Don Valley (Mr. Redmond), *Official Report*, column *254*. However, we continue to explore with the Slovak authorities military training opportunities for the United Kingdom in the region.

Overseas Training Costs

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the additional cost to the defence budget, other than direct payments to the Canadian authorities, of training Tornado crews at Canadian forces base, Goose Bay in each year since 1990. [1310]

Mr. Soames: The total costs in £millions of running the RAF unit at CFB Goose Bay since 1991 are in the table. Figures for 1990 are not readily available.

Year	*RAF unit running cost*
1991–92	2.096
1992–93	2.456
1993–94	3.103
1994–95	3.453
1995–96	3.292

Any other costs to the defence budget, other than direct payments to the Canadian authorities, are not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what payments have been made to the United States and Canadian authorities for Royal Air Force use of training facilities centred on *(a)* Nellis air force base, Nevada, *(b)* Cold Lake, Alberta and *(c)* Eielson air force base, Alaska, in each year since 1990. [1309]

Mr. Soames: Payments to the United States authorities for use of training facilities at Nellis air force base, Nevada and Eielson air force base, Alaska are as follows:

	Nellis $	Eielson $
FY 1991–92	25,000.00	—
FY 1992–93	111,684.65	143,175.75
FY 1993–94[1]	365,609.92	354,308.33
FY 1994–95[1]	462,127.82	907,402.00
FY 1995–96[1]	130,441.85	417,011.43

[1] Because of US billing procedures, the accounts for these years remain open and further payments may be made against them.

The figures for 1990–91 are no longer available for either of the US locations, nor are the 1991–92 figures for Eielson air force base. No payments have been made to the Canadian authorities for use of training facilities at Cold Lake, Alberta.

British American Community Relations Committees

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the functions and budgets of the Anglo/Scottish/Welsh-American community relations committees; what is the current membership of each; and what is the process by which individuals are appointed to these bodies. [1297]

Mr. Soames: The function of these committees, now known as British American community relations committees, is to promote friendship and understanding between the US service personnel and civilian components, their dependants, and the British communities amongst whom they live. The only cost to the Department of these committees are certain out-of-pocket expenses for chairmen and administrative support provided by MOD-employed community relations advisers. Membership of the committees includes a chairman, who is appointed by my noble Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Defence, the US commander who acts as co-chairman, and, where applicable, a community relations adviser and an RAF commander. Also serving on the committees are a number of British civilians and US service personnel, selected by the chairman and co-chairman respectively.

Area Defence Weapon

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the area defence weapon is due to enter service. [1074]

Mr. Arbuthnot: Current plans are to introduce an area defence weapon in the first decade of the next century. However, we are currently considering our future requirements for this nature of weapon and no firm decisions have been taken. Any such weapon introduced into service would have a self-destruct or self-neutralising capability and would fully meet the requirements of the international laws of armed conflict.

Multiple-Launch Rockets

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the multiple-launch rocket system phase 2 warheads, ordered by Germany in August 1991, are due to be delivered to his Department. [1076]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The British Army is currently taking delivery of the multiple launch rocket system phase 2—AT2—rocket ordered by Germany and the United Kingdom in August 1991. Deliveries of the United Kingdom's offtake of phase 2 rockets are planned to be completed in early 1996.

Empty Dwellings

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many dwellings owned by his Department are currently unoccupied in the counties of *(a)* Hampshire, *(b)* Lancashire and *(c)* Avon; and how many dwellings owned by his Department have been unoccupied for six months or more in each of these counties. [1222]

Mr. Soames: As at 30 September 1995, my Department owned the following empty dwellings in the counties named:

Hampshire: 1,152

Lancashire: 25

Avon: 93

Information on properties unoccupied for six months or more is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many dwellings owned by his Department are currently unoccupied; and how many dwellings owned by his Department have been occupied for six months or more. [1336]

Mr. Soames: As at 30 September 1995, my Department owned 14,098 vacant dwellings, of which 13,898 were service families quarters and 200 were MOD civilian houses. Of these, 3,202 vacant service quarters and 55 civilian houses were in the process of being sold. The majority of the remainder of the service quarters were either awaiting major maintenance work, held for unit deployments, already allocated to service families due to move in shortly or formed part of the management margin needed to ensure that accommodation is available to house entitled service personnel. The majority of the vacant civilian houses could not be disposed of for security reasons. Information on properties unoccupied for six months or more is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

From the total of 13,898 empty properties, a further number of houses is being identified for future disposal.

European Procurement Co-operation

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to discuss European procurement collaboration with his French and German colleagues; and if he will make a statement. [1340]

Mr. Arbuthnot: Discussions continue with my French and German colleagues in a variety of forums, both on specific projects and on general European equipment collaboration issues. In particular, my Department is currently involved in discussions on the possible establishment of a European armaments agency and on the prospects for participation by the UK in the planned Franco-German armaments co-operation structure.

Arcadia Land Plc

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the Arcadia Land company has expressed an interest in being involved in the privatisation or sale of

surplus defence married quarters; and if he will make a statement. [1341]

Mr. Soames: Dr. David Hart, the independent adviser to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence, is a director of Arcadia Land plc. As I made clear in my answer of 27 January, *Official Report*, column *445*, no independent adviser assisting in the way ahead in a transfer of ownership of the married quarters estate will be permitted to have a financial stake in the outcome of the transaction. Arcadia Land plc has not made any expression of interest in respect of the disposal of surplus married quarters under the existing system.

Army Pay

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the average cost to the public funds per annum for each member of the British Army. [1646]

Mr. Soames: This information can be provided only at disproportionate cost. However, it is possible to quantify the Regular Army's current annual pay bill on an average basis. Including all members of the home service full-time element of the Royal Irish Regiment and the non-regular permanent staff of the Territorial Army, the figure for pay, earnings-related national insurance contributions, allowances and superannuation equates to £23,300 per person. This figure takes no account of variation attributable to rank or other factors and costs.

Ballistic Missiles

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will publish the feasibility study by the Defence Research Agency into a domestically produced ballistic missile interceptor; and if he will make a statement. [1647]

Mr. Arbuthnot: No. The Defence Research Agency is carrying out work related to ballistic missile defence. Its reports are classified and it would not be appropriate to publish them.

Ministry of Defence Police

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will publish the results of his Department's study into the future of the Ministry of Defence police; [1648]

(2) what estimate he has made of the numbers to be employed in the Ministry of Defence police in each of the next five years; and if he will make a statement. [1649]

Mr. Soames: The overall manpower requirements of the Ministry of Defence police are kept under constant review. We will shortly be consulting the staff associations and trade unions concerned about proposals resulting from a number of studies on defence police and guarding requirements. Consultative documents will be put to them. I shall be sending copies to the House of Commons Defence Committee and to the hon. Members with particular consistency interests. I shall also place copies in the Library of the House.

Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether the Government plan at the appropriate time to make available to the public details of the declaration to the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons. [1608]

Mr. Arbuthnot: Yes. Details of UK's declarations required under the chemical weapons convention will be made available to the public when they are passed to the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Student Loans

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is the average debt of students on completion of their studies. [181]

Mr. Forth: The appropriate average debt to the Student Loans Company of borrowers who entered repayment status on 1 April 1995 was £1,415.

Mr. Bryan Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans she has to use the national insurance system to collect repayments of student loans. [1466]

Mr. Forth: The Government have no plans to use the national insurance system for this purpose.

Mr. Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list the financial institutions with which her Department has had discussions regarding reforms of the student loans scheme; and which of these has indicted interest in involvement in any new scheme. [1465]

Mr. Forth: Officials have had, and are continuing to have, discussions with a number of banks and building societies on this subject. Given the commercial nature of these discussions, it is not appropriate to say, at this stage, which institutions officials are talking to, nor which have expressed an interest.

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will estimate for each year since 1992 in constant prices the average level of indebtedness of university and college students; and if she will make a statement. [628]

Mr. Forth: Information on total student indebtedness is not collected centrally.

Public Interest Immunity Certificates

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list all those in her Department who have authority to issue public interest immunity certificates; how many such certificates have been issued in each of the last five years; and what were the main reasons for them. [1391]

Mr. Forth: A claim to public interest immunity relating to departmental documents or information is normally made by the appropriate Minister.

There was one case in 1991 and one in 1992 in which a certificate was used inter partes in proceedings.

The certificates were issued in respect of advice by Her Majesty's inspectorate of schools and officials in the context of appeals under section 8(6) of the Education Act 1981 in order to protect the confidentiality of full and frank advice given to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State.

Youth Training (Accidents)

Mr. Heppell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many accidents and fatalities have occurred involving people placed on youth training schemes each year since youth training began in 1983. [977]

Mr. Paice: The following table gives the total GB fatal, major and minor accident figures for youth training and its predecessor programme6s from 1983–84 to 1994–95.

Total youth training accident statistics (GB) from 1983–84 to 1994–95

	Fatal	*Major*	*Minor*
1983–84	4	100	843
1984–85	5	184	1,748
1985–86	2	222	1,913
1986–87	12	326	1,761
1987–88	8	509	2,541
1988–89	8	573	2,729
1989–90	4	548	2,495
1990–91	4	457	1,925
1991–92	2	344	1,597
1992–93	1	290	1,362
1993–94	4	287	1,579
1994–95	1	283	1,473

Notes:
1. Department for Education and Employment figures for youth trainees are compiled on a similar basis to those prepared by the Health and Safety Executive for employed persons. However, the Department's figures include a number of accidents to trainees in educational establishments and road traffic accidents which would not have been reportable to HSE had the individuals been employed.
2. Major injuries are classified according to the severity criteria laid down in the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrence Regulations 1985 (RIDDOR).
3. The former "Youth Training Scheme" commenced in April 1983 and was succeeded by Youth Training in April 1990.

School Inspections

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what reimbursement is made to schools whose teachers spend time away from their own school while undertaking Ofsted school inspections elsewhere. [22]

Mr. Robin Squire: These are matters for Her Majesty's chief inspector of schools, who heads the Office for Standards in Education. I have asked Mr. Chris Woodhead to write to the hon. Member.

Higher Education Contribution Scheme

Mr. Bryan Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will make an assessment of the Australian Government's higher education contribution scheme. [1582]

Mr. Forth: This Australian scheme requires students in higher education to contribute to the cost of their tuition at university either through cash payments during their study or through repayments over time after graduation.

Physical Education Teachers

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is her estimate of the number of physical education teachers who have been made redundant since 1992. [1470]

Mr. Robin Squire: Data on which to base such an estimate are not available.

Assisted Places Scheme

Mr. Walden: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment to what proportion of places in existing private schools it is her policy to extend the assisted places scheme. [1626]

Mrs. Gillan: We will shortly be announcing our detailed plans for expanding the assisted places scheme, including arrangements for inviting eligible schools to bid for new places.

Invoices

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many orders and firms are represented by the 5 per cent. of invoices not paid by her Department within 30 days or in accordance with contractual agreements in 1994–95; and how many of these are related to firms with fewer than 500 employees. [942]

Mr. Forth: A total of 6,419 invoices were sampled in four separate prompt payment of bills exercises during 1994–95. The result showed that 332 of these invoices were paid late—5 per cent. of the sample. The Department does not hold information on the number of employees in the companies involved.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is the amount owed to those businesses whose invoices were not paid within 30 days in each of the last five years. [1079]

Mr. Forth: The Department does not maintain separate records of the sums involved when invoices were not paid within 30 days. The information could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how her Department publicises payment practices other than as percentages of invoices paid late. [955]

Mr. Forth: The Department publicises information on its prompt payment performance in the departmental report. The Department's contracts branch, leading buying units and purchasing sections, when negotiating contracts, inform suppliers of goods and services of the standard payment terms including the complaint procedure when negotiating contracts if the Department fails to pay on time.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is the average length of time it takes for her Department to pay invoices. [933]

Mr. Forth: The Department does not have statistical information on the average time taken for the payment of invoices. Under an internal service level agreement, invoices are processed within five working days of receipt by the finance directorate. The Department is committed

to meeting the objective of the Confederation of British Industry's prompt payment code to pay all valid invoices within 30 days of their receipt.

Staffing

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many staff her Department employs on a regional basis in each standard English region: what is the cost of running these regional operations: what is the total budget for each region in 1994–95; and what are the main purposes for which each budget is used. [267]

Mr. Paice: The information is not available in the form requested. The new Department for Education and Employment was created on 5 July 1995. The following information relates to the current financial year.

Table 1 gives the information requested for Department for Education and Employment staff working in, and budgets delivered through, Government offices for the regions.

Table 1: Government offices

Region	*Staff in Post*[1]	*Running Costs*[2] *£ million*	*Programme Budgets*[2] *£ million*
South east	54.5	2.2	174.9
London	68	3.2	215.1
Eastern	46.5	1.9	138.5
South west	59.5	2.1	136.7
West Midlands	71.5	2.6	174.2
East Midlands	55.6	1.8	134.4
Yorkshire and Humberside	64.6	2.2	197.7
Merseyside	41	1.4	212.3
North west	78.5	2.9	88.6
North east	62	2.1	146.7

Notes:
[1] As at 1 November 1995.
[2] Provision for 1995–96.

The main purposes for which these budgets are used are adult and youth training programmes, vocational education programmes and the provision of careers advice.

Table 2 gives information for the Employment Service. The ES has different regional boundaries to the Government office network.

Table 2: Employment services

Region	*Staff in Post*[1]	*Running Costs*[2] *£ million*	*Programme Budgets*[2] *£ million*
Northern	2,228	46.3	8.9
Yorkshire and Humberside	3,420	68.6	12.6
East Midlands and eastern	3,520	72.4	14.1
London and South east	11,652	265.8	56.1
South west	3,131	64.6	12.4
West Midlands	3,564	75.1	15.8
North west	4,798	99.2	19.8

Notes:
[1] As at 1 April 1995.
[2] Provision for 1995–96.

The main purposes for which these budgets are used are on employment measures to help people into work, placement and advisory services, employment services for people with disabilities and administering the payment of unemployment benefit.

The Department carries out its headquarters functions in London, Darlington, Sheffield and Runcorn.

Training and Enterprise Councils

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list the members of the board for each TEC stating which members have experience of running small businesses. [948]

Mr. Paice: A list showing private sector board members of each English TEC, and approximate company size, has been placed in the Library. Where the employee figure is shown as 0, the information has not been collected. No information is held about the experience of board members prior to joining their current company.

A complete list of all TEC board members is held in the Library. It is updated quarterly.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how much money each TEC earmarked in each of the last five years for small businesses. [943]

Mr. Page: I have been asked to reply.

Information on how much money each TEC earmarked in each of the last five years for small firms is not available centrally. This is because the funding which TECs use to support small businesses comes from a number of different sources including their own surpluses. Government funding for small businesses is available through TECs and business links from the DTI, Departments for Education and Employment and Environment and TECs can also draw on European funds to assist small firms.

Placing Assessment and Counselling Teams

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list the main locations of the placing assessment and counselling teams which provide employment and advisory services for employers and people with disabilities in Scotland. [298]

Mr. Forth: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from M. E. G. Fogden to Mr. James Wallace, dated 22 November 1995:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question about the main locations of the Placing Assessment and Counselling Teams (PACT) in Scotland.

A list of PACTs in Scotland is attached (Annex A). Orkney and Shetland are covered by the Highlands, Islands and Grampian PACT, each of which has an identified Employment Service member of staff who offers support to disabled people in Jobcentres in Kirkwall and Lerwick. In addition, full time Disability Employment Advisors based in Aberdeen visit employers and clients on the islands.

I hope this is helpful.

Annex 1: PACTs—Office for Scotland

Address	*Telephone and Fax*
Glasgow east, north and Lanarkshire Employment Service Pact 3rd Floor 221 West George Street G2 2ND	Tel: 0141-248 7654 Fax: 0141-248 8388
Glasgow west, south, Renfrew and Dumbarton Employment Service PACT 2nd Floor 221 West George Street Glasgow G2 2ND	Tel: 0141-226 4923 Fax: 0141-248 8312
Edinburgh and South east Scotland Employment Service PACT 5th Floor Torphichen Street Edinburgh EH3 8JP	Tel: 0131-229 9321 Fax: 0131-221 9860
South west Scotland Employment Service PACT 17 Grange Street Kilmarnock KA1 2DF	Tel: 01563 542000 Fax: 01563 573079
Highlands, Islands and Grampian (outstation in Aberdeen) Employment Service PACT 4th Floor Metropolitan House 31–33 Hight Street Inverness IV1 1J	Tel: 01463 239171 Fax: 01463 715699 Outstation Tel: 01224 622050 Outstation Fax: 01224 630644
Central and West Lothian Employment Service PACT 8–14 High Street Falkirk FK1 1EY	Tel: 01324 621444 Fax: 01324 638968
Tayside and Fife Employment Service PACT 132 Seagate Dundee DD1 2HB	Tel: 01382 223222 Fax: 01382 201350

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what information she has on the number of people in *(a)* Orkney and *(b)* Shetland who have made contact through their local job centre with the placing assessment and counselling teams in each year since the establishment of PACTs in 1992. [299]

Mr. Forth: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from M. E. G. Fogden to Mr. James Wallace, dated 22 November 1995:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question about the number of people in Orkney and Shetland who have made contact through their local Jobcentre with the Placing Assessment and Counselling Teams (PACTs).

We do not record the number of people referred by Jobcentres to PACTs. However we do record the number of people, who need and may benefit from specialist help, who are assessed by PACTs.

Assessment is the process through which PACTs help disabled job seekers identify potential occupation or training establish whether they are job-ready, or need further preparation for work. Its purpose is to identify employment potential and needs, and to come to agreement about how to meet the individual needs of clients. It is based mainly on Employment Service (ES) provision supplemented by small numbers of external contracts. An individual action plan is agreed between the client and the ES setting out what work or training a client will look for and include any preparatory action they will need to take.

All clients referred to PACTs have an in-depth assessment interview or interviews with a Disability Employment Adviser (DEA). If this does not result in their being able to identify a suitable occupation or training, they may then be offered additional practical methods to help them decide. This can include functional testing, psychometric testing, an interview with an occupational psychologist or provided with enhanced assessment from specialist contractors.

From the first full year after they were introduced, the number of people assessed by PACTs on Orkney and Shetland were 122 for the 12 months to April 1994 and 156 for the same period to April 1995. The number of people assessed for the first six months of the current financial year was 108. As the introduction of PACTs was a gradual process, the numbers of assessments for 1992/93 were not recorded.

I hope this is helpful.

Kirklees Local Education Authority

Mrs. Peacock: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how much was spent in total on school education in Kirklees in each year since 1974 at constant prices. [1337]

Mr. Robin Squire: The following table shows, at 1993–94 prices, the expenditure on pre-primary, primary and secondary education by Kirklees local education authority from 1974–75 to 1993–94, the latest year for which figures are available. These figures have not been adjusted for any changes of function.

Kirklees: Gross expenditure on school education 1993–94 prices

Year	*£ million*
1974–75	105.95
1975–76	100.88
1976–77	99.35
1977–78	93.43
1978–79	95.29
1979–80	93.30
1980–81	98.50
1981–82	101.25
1982–83	100.95
1983–84	98.98
1984–85	100.83
1985–86	102.70
1986–87	109.63
1987–88	112.72
1988–89	117.55
1989–90	119.37
1990–91	115.73
1991–92	110.90
1992–93	132.76
1993–94	113.55

Mrs. Peacock: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how much was spent in total on education in Kirklees in each year since 1974 at constant prices. [1338]

Mr. Squire: The following table shows, in 1993–94 prices, the expenditure by Kirklees local education authority from 1974–75 to 1993–94, the latest year for which figures are available. These figures have not been adjusted for any changes of function.

Kirklees: Gross Expenditure 1993–94 Prices

Year	*£ million*
1974–75	190.40
1975–76	185.80
1976–77	186.25
1977–78	182.23
1978–79	184.58
1979–80	186.43
1980–81	187.96
1981–82	192.16
1982–83	192.53
1983–84	190.61
1984–85	191.22
1985–86	196.31
1986–87	210.86
1987–88	219.34
1988–89	223.28
1989–90	196.38
1990–91	194.70
1991–92	195.07
1992–93	201.43
1993–94	174.98

Mrs. Peacock: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will set out the changes in real terms for education spending for each sector in Kirklees since 1980. [1339]

Mr. Squire: The increase in expenditure by Kirklees local education authority on pre-primary and primary education and secondary education, between 1979–80 and 1993–94, the latest year for which outturn figures are available, is as follows.

Kirklees LEA: Net recurrent expenditure, real terms

Year	*Pre-Primary and Primary Education £000*	*Secondary Education £000*
1979–80	37,756	46,029
1993–94	63,921	62,046
Increase	26,165 (40.9 per cent.)	16,017 (25.8 per cent.)

Unemployment, Durham

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many people under the age of 25 years in the City of Durham constituency are unemployed and are in receipt of benefit; and how many of these are long-term unemployed. [156]

Mrs. Angela Knight: I have been asked to reply.

In October 1995, there were 937 people aged under 25-year-old claiming unemployment-related benefits—unemployment benefit, income support or national insurance credits. Of these, 168 had been unemployed for over one year.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what were the *(a)* median, *(b)* highest and *(c)* lowest decile earnings of full-time workers on adult rates, distinguishing between male and female and manual and non-manual, in *(i)* Yorkshire and Humberside, *(ii)* the north of England and *(iii)* the United Kingdom in each year since 1993. [1459]

Mrs. Angela Knight: I have been asked to reply.

Information on the median, quartiles and deciles of weekly and hourly earnings of full-time workers in the regions of Great Britain is shown in table 116 of part E of the new earnings survey reports. Copies of these reports are available in the Library.

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what were the current average earnings of part-time workers on adult rates, distinguishing between manual and non-manual in *(a)* Yorkshire and Humberside, *(b)* West Yorkshire, *(c)* South Yorkshire, *(d)* North Yorkshire, *(e)* Humberside, *(f)* the north of England and *(g)* the United Kingdom. [1457]

Mrs. Knight: I have been asked to reply.

Information available from the new earnings survey is provided in the following table.

Average Weekly Earnings for part-time workers on adult rates, pay not affected by absence

Region	*Non manual £*	*Manual £*
Yorkshire and Humberside	112.50	78.70
West Yorkshire	117.80	79.90
South Yorkshire	112.50	74.60
North Yorkshire	[1]	[1]
Humberside	105.10	[1]
North of England	109.50	74.80
Great Britain	118.80	80.80

[1] Not available because sample size too small to give a reliable estimate.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is *(a)* the number and *(b)* the proportion of (i) manual part-time workers and (ii) non-manual part-time workers broken down into men and women working less than eight hours a week and 16 hours a week. [1487]

Mrs. Knight: I have been asked to reply.

Estimates from the labour force survey are shown in the table.

Part-time manual and non-manual workers by the total number of hours they usually work—Great Britain, spring 1995

	Working less than 8 hours a week		*Working less than 16 hours a week*	
	Thousand	*Per cent.*	*Thousand*	*Per cent.*
Men				
Manual part-time	107	20	253	47
Non manual part-time	104	19	292	54
Women				
Manual part-time	319	16	953	48
Non manual part-time	353	12	1,093	36

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Bovine Offals

Mr. Sykes: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the outcome of the State Veterinary Service's surveillance of the handling of special bovine offals in September and October; and if he will make a statement. [2310]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: In September, the State Veterinary Service reported unannounced visits to 193 slaughterhouses and found failings in the handling of specified bovine offals in 92 to 48 per cent.—of them. In October the SVS reported visits to 153 slaughterhouses and found failings in 52 to 34 per cent. Many of the failings found were of a comparatively mild nature, for example reflecting teething troubles with the new stain. There were, however, some more serious problems, for example with the poor separation and storage of SBO material. This risks such material becoming mixed with other waste products which can then enter the animal feed chain. In the most serious cases we found small pieces of spinal cord, ranging in size from 1 cm to one third of the spinal cord, left attached to the carcases after dressing. So far, we have found 17 such instances, including one found during preliminary visits in the summer and five found up to 10 November and one on 20 November in the latest round of visits. Although in each instance the spinal cord was removed before the carcases left the premises, these were potentially serious failings. It is essential that we eliminate any prospect of SBO material entering the human food chain.

I view this most seriously and have therefore taken a number of steps to ensure that slaughterhouses fully comply with the requirements of the Specified Bovine Offal Order 1995. First, I have discussed the situation with the chief executive of the Meat Hygiene Service and he will ensure that his staff enforce the requirements of the order most rigorously. Secondly, where it has sufficient evidence, the Meat Hygiene Service will prosecute any slaughterhouse operator failing to meet his obligations under the SBO order. A number of prosecutions are already under consideration. Thirdly, I have asked the SVS to double the frequency of its unannounced surveillance visits to cattle slaughterhouses and head boning plants. Finally, I met representatives of slaughterhouse operators on 9 November to impress on them the need for full compliance with these controls. They assured me of their commitment to seeing the requirements fully met, and I welcomed their constructive response.

The SVS also visits knackeries and hunt kennels to monitor their compliance with the SBO controls. In September, it made unannounced visits to 212 such premises and found failings in the handling of SBOs in 137 of them—65 per cent. In October, the SVS visited 235 hunt kennels and knackeries and found failings in 70 to 29 per cent. Again, many of the failings found were of a comparatively mild nature. Hunt kennels and knackeries do not handle meat for human consumption; nevertheless, failings in the handling of SBOs at such premises could result in such material entering the animal feed chain. This is of concern. My hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary has, therefore, met representatives of hunt kennels and knackeries to impress on them too the need to comply fully with the controls on SBOs. She welcomed the constructive response from the respective representative organisations.

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

Mr. Sykes: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food which bovine tissues are known to transmit BSE infectivity and at what stages in the animal's life they are infectious; and if he will make a statement. [2311]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: A large number of tissues from cattle known to be naturally infected with BSE have been tested to determine whether they can transmit disease when inoculated intra-cerebrally and intra-peritoneally into susceptible strains of mice. Recent results have shown that two further tissues, the retina and the terminal spinal cord, can transmit BSE infectivity to mice, as well as those tissues already identified that can contain BSE infectivity, the brain and the cervical spinal cord. Infectivity had also been detected in the distal ileum of calces which has been experimentally challenged with BSE; this was first announced in an answer given to my hon. Friend the Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) by my right hon. Friend the Member for Norfolk (Mrs. Shephard) on 30 June 1994, *Official Report*, column *657–58*. These new findings do not require any changes to the regulations concerning BSE. Both the retina and terminal spinal cord are already covered by the Specified Bovine Offal Order 1995. They have to be removed from all cattle over six months at slaughter and are destroyed. Such tissues are thereby prevented from entering the human and animal food chains.

In addition to the above tissues, a large number of other tissues from cattle affected with BSE have been tested to see if they can transmit the disease to mice. Tests on the following tissues have been negative:

- Abomasum
- Bone marrow
- Buffy coat
- Cauda equina
- Cerebrospinal fluid
- Clotted blood
- Distal colon
- Proximal colon
- Epididymis
- Foetal calf blood
- Heart
- Distal small intestine
- Proximal small intestine
- Liver
- Lung
- Kidney
- Lymph nodes:
  - Prefemoral
  - Mesenteric
  - Retropharyngeal
  - Supramammary
- Midrum fat
- Milk
- Muscles:
  - Musculus (M.) semitendinosus

M. diaphragma
M. longissimus
M. masseter
Oesophagus
Omasum
Pancreas
Peripheral nerves:
N. splanchnic
N. sciaticus (proximal)
N. tibialis
Placental cotyledon
Placental fluids:
Allantoic fluid
Amniotic fluid
Prostate
Rectum
Reticulum
Rumen (oesophageal groove)
Rumen (pillar)
Semen
Seminal vesicle
Serum
Skin
Spleen
Testis
Tonsil
Udder
Uterine caruncle (pregnant cow)

We are also carrying out experiments to look at the way in which infectivity develops in different tissues over time. Four-month-old calves were fed infected brain from cattle with BSE. Animals were slaughtered at intervals subsequently and a large number of their tissues tested on each occasion to see if they could transmit the disease in mice. Animals developed clinical signs of BSE from 35 months after challenge onwards.

So far, we have obtained complete results on the tissue assays of animals slaughtered at two, six, 10 and 14 months after challenge. At two months, no tissue showed infectivity. From six months onwards the distal ileum—part of the small intestine—shows BSE infectivity. No other tissue tested, including the brain, spinal cord and thymus, has shown any infectivity in animals up to 14 months after challenge. Infectivity has also been detected in the ileum of animals killed 18 months after challenge, but assays of other tissues from these cattle are not yet complete.

These results support the existing precautionary controls on specified bovine offals. These require the intestines and thymus to be removed from all animals on slaughter and be destroyed. The brain, spinal cord, spleen and tonsils have to be removed from all cattle over six months old on slaughter and destroyed.

Dr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many United Kingdom farms have had at least one case of BSE. [1520]

Mr. Hogg: A total of 34,064 farms have had at least one case of BSE.

Dr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many cases of BSE were confirmed in the United Kingdom in each year from 1986 to the latest available date. [1522]

Mr. Hogg: Bovine spongiform encephalopathy was first identified in November 1986. Information on the incidence of the disease prior to this date is not recorded.

The following is a table of the number of confirmed cases of BSE in the United Kingdom up to 17 November 1995. The cases prior to 21 June 1988 in Great Britain and 29 November 1988 in Northern Ireland when the disease was made notifiable, are recorded by year of clinical onset of disease and the cases thereafter are recorded by year of restriction.

Year	*Number*
1986	7
1987	435
1988 (pre-notification)	286
1988 (post-notification)	2,187
1989	7,166
1990	14,294
1991	25,202
1992	37,057
1993	34,830
1994	24,289
1995	11,031

Dr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, what percentage of *(a)* United Kingdom dairy herds, *(b)* United Kingdom beef suckler herds and *(c)* total United Kingdom herds have experienced at least one case of BSE. [1519]

Mr. Hogg: As at 17 November 1995, 50.5 per cent. of United Kingdom dairy herds and 12.6 per cent. of beef herds have experienced at least one case of BSE. 29.5 per cent. of the total United Kingdom herds have experienced at least one case of BSE.

Dr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how much money was spent by the Government in respect of BSE on *(a)* research, *(b)* slaughter, *(c)* compensation and *(d)* disposal of carcases in (i) 1993, (ii) 1994 and (iii) 1995 to the latest available date. [1521]

Mr. Hogg: The following table shows the amount spent in respect of compensation and disposal for the financial years 1993–1994, 1994–95, and 1995–96 up to 31 October 1995. It is not possible without disproportionate cost to calculate slaughter costs separate from the other costs of field work by the State Veterinary Service. Euthanasia is predominantly carried out by veterinary officers who are already present on farm for the purpose of carrying out clinical examination of suspects, although occasionally it may require a separate visit.

Years	*Compensation*	*Disposal*
1993–94	37,468,085	8,753,603
1994–95	20,138,239	5,552,494
1995–96	6,012,476	1,952,019

Includes estimates for Northern Ireland.

The following amounts were spent on BSE research in the financial years:

1993–94: £5,688,000

1994–95: £5,433,000

1995–96[1]: £2,447,000

1995–96[2]: £5,174,000

[1] To 31 October.
[2] Commitment.

Mink and Arctic Foxes

Mr. Heppell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what provision exists at present for local authorities to protect people and domesticated animals from attacks by mink and arctic fox. [894]

Mrs. Browning: Mink and arctic foxes may be killed or taken by owners and occupiers of land if they feel that this is necessary to prevent damage, provided that the method used does not contravene current legislation, such as the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and the Control of Pesticides Regulations 1986. General advice on pest control is available from the local offices of ADAS, the Ministry's wildlife advisers.

Mr. Heppell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many mink and arctic fox are known to have escaped or been released from fur farms from 1990–91 to 1994–95. [895]

Mrs. Browning: The Ministry has received no reports of any mink or arctic foxes known to have been released or have escaped from fur farms in the period since 1990.

Mr. Heppell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what advice he received from the Farm Animal Welfare Council on the listing of mink and arctic fox under the Dangerous Wild Animals Act 1976. [893]

Mrs. Browning: In 1994, the Farm Animal Welfare Council recommended that consideration be given to the inclusion of American mink, Arctic fox and racoon dog in the schedule to the Dangerous Wild Animals Act 1976. After consulting interested organisations my colleagues and I concluded that this, being a general approach, would not offer any welfare advantages to the species concerned. General protection for the welfare of animals farmed for their fur is already provided by the Agriculture (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1968 and its subordinate regulations. Any more specific requirements must, in our view, be introduced on a European basis.

A copy of the letter sent to interested organisations explaining our views more fully, dated 24 August 1995, has been placed in the Library of the House.

Ostrich Farms

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many prosecutions have been made against owners of ostrich farms in the last three years; and if he will make a statement. [1015]

Mrs. Browning: The information requested is not recorded centrally.

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many live ostrich chicks were imported *(a)* in 1994 and *(b)* to date. [1016]

Mrs. Browning: The only information available to the Ministry on imports from other member states is derived from the ANIMO system—which is provisional and subject to change, and relates to *all* ostriches—adults, chicks and hatching eggs. Information on imports from third countries is derived from quarantine reports and relates to day-old ostrich chicks.

Origin	*1994*	*1995 to date*
Other Member States	620	843
Third Countries	267	193

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many visits the State Veterinary Service has made to ostrich farms to check the condition of ostriches in the last three years. [1014]

Mrs. Browning: The information is not available for the full period requested. Since 1 April 1994, 23 welfare inspections of ostrich farms in Great Britain have been made by the State Veterinary Service.

Fish Quotas

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what proposals he has to introduce transferable quotas for fish. [980]

Mr. Baldry: I have asked the fishing industry to let me have its ideas for alternative quota management arrangements and will consider any suggestions made that appear to be practicable and command widespread support within the industry.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the New Zealand system of fish quota allocation; and if he will make a statement. [981]

Mr. Baldry: The New Zealand system of fisheries quota management was developed to meet a very different set of circumstances from those applying within the European Union. I am nevertheless sure that the United Kingdom industry is aware of arrangements in New Zealand and other countries and will take these into account in formulating its response to my invitation for suggestions for changes in our own arrangements.

Pigs

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) how many piglets have been *(a)* tail docked and *(b)* tooth clipped in the last 12 months; and if he will make a statement. [1019]

(2) what has been the change in the number of piglets which have been *(a)* tail docked and *(b)* tooth clipped since 10 August 1994. [1018]

Mrs. Browning: Figures on the number of piglets which have been tail docked and tooth clipped are not available.

The Welfare and Livestock Regulations 1994 (SI 2126) require that tail docking and tooth clipping of piglets may be carried out only when there is evidence, on the farm, that injuries to sows' teats or to other piglets have occurred or are likely to occur as a result of not carrying

out these procedures. Where tooth clipping appears necessary, this must be carried out within seven days of birth.

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many visits his officials have made to pig farms since 10 August 1994 to ensure compliance with paragraph 3 of part iv of schedule 3 to the Welfare of Livestock Regulations 1994. [1017]

Mrs. Browning: Since 1 July 1994, 1,204 welfare inspections of pig farms in Great Britain have been made by the State Veterinary Service.

In the course of these inspections, an assessment of compliance with all the requirements of schedule 3 to the Welfare of Livestock Regulations will be made. This will include, where appropriate, compliance with part IV of that schedule which relates specifically to piglets.

Barley

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what the levels of United Kingdom intervention stocks of barley were in each month since November 1994; and what the intervention price was in each month. [159]

Mr. Baldry: The information requested is as follows:

Month	*Physical stock of barley at month end '000 tonnes*	*Intervention price £/tonnes*
December 1994	976	103.94
January 1995	820	105.08
February 1995	732	106.23 1st 107.59 17th 108.40 21st
March 1995	559	109.57 1st 109.78 6th 111.66 16th 112.83 26th
April 1995	521	114.04 1st 114.48 15th 114.93 25th
June 1995	477	108.25
July 1995	357	100.59
August 1995	260	100.59
September 1995	195	100.59
October 1995	139	100.59

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what quantities of barley have been supplied to Spain from United Kingdom intervention stocks during 1995; and what costs were paid to the Intervention Board for the movements. [157]

Mr. Baldry: The quantity of United Kingdom intervention barley sold during 1995 for delivery to Spain was 249,996 tonnes. The quantity delivered to Spain is subject to final confirmation by the Spanish authorities after allowing for normal handling and transport losses.

The range of successful bid prices for purchase of the barley ex-store in the UK and delivery into store in Spain was £103.01 to £106.01 per tonne.

Arable Area Payments Scheme

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the average payment made under the arable area payments scheme in England in 1994. [1066]

Mr. Baldry: The average payment made in 1994 was £18,870.

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many payments under the arable area payments scheme were made in England in excess of £1 million in 1994. [1065]

Mr. Baldry: For reasons of confidentiality, it is not possible to identify separately the number of payments above £1 million.

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list by county the number of payments made under the arable area payments scheme in excess of £75,000 in 1994. [1067]

Mr. Baldry: For reasons of confidentiality, it is not possible to identify separately the number of payments above £75,000. However, in England a total of 2,096 claims fell into this category.

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the area, the number and amount paid in each county in England under the set-aside element of the arable area payments scheme in 1994. [1062]

Mr. Baldry: Information is not available for amounts paid relating solely to the set-aside element on a county basis. However, the table gives the total area, number and amount claimed in 1994 for set-aside on land situated in each county of England. The total payment made will have been slightly lower because of reductions for various reasons.

Arable area payments scheme: set-aside element 1994

County	*Area of set-aside (HA)*	*Number of claims including set-aside*	*Amount claimed (£)*
Avon	2,437	190	830,892
Bedfordshire	10,073	459	3,434,375
Berkshire	6,223	227	2,116,950
Buckinghamshire	9,666	508	3,289,813
Cambridgeshire	30,112	1,526	10,251,643
Cheshire	3,477	323	1,183,774
Cleveland	2,419	163	824,755
Cornwall	4,807	480	1,627,689
Cumbria	1,178	110	401,637
Derbyshire	4,610	367	1,563,249
Devon	8,119	795	2,759,979
Dorset	9,207	439	3,133,659
Durham	6,554	438	2,194,686
East Sussex	5,508	289	1,868,057
Essex	29,415	1,261	10,017,752
Gloucestershire	13,218	659	4,482,792
Greater London	835	48	275,827
Greater Manchester	838	69	284,010
Hampshire	17,948	623	6,117,982
Hereford and Worcester	14,257	1,109	4,848,630
Hertfordshire	11,182	431	3,812,146
Humberside	30,857	1,626	10,496,444
Isle of Wight	1,497	86	508,695
Kent	18,212	806	6,162,305
Lancashire	2,283	225	775,999

Arable area payments scheme: set-aside element 1994

County	Area of set-aside (HA)	Number of claims including set-aside	Amount claimed (£)
Leicestershire	15,263	791	5,177,304
Lincolnshire	51,608	2,238	17,558,853
Merseyside	1,496	135	510,059
Norfolk	35,467	1,890	12,062,761
North Yorkshire	32,216	2,150	10,944,791
Northamptonshire	17,169	755	5,809,082
Northumberland	13,798	666	4,701,340
Nottinghamshire	14,343	799	4,871,815
Oxfordshire	18,287	754	6,234,927
Shropshire	11,906	850	4,059,334
Somerset	6,970	569	2,359,705
South Yorkshire	6,647	386	2,244,806
Staffordshire	7,106	479	2,416,303
Suffolk	29,918	1,566	10,153,449
Surrey	2,637	132	899,081
Tyne and Wear	1,439	98	485,511
Warwickshire	12,313	677	4,197,759
West Midlands	816	65	278,214
West Sussex	7,853	370	2,677,469
West Yorkshire	3,756	259	1,277,193
Wiltshire	18,945	771	6,420,744
Total	554,882	29,657	188,604,242

Green Minister

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what were his reasons for deciding not to continue in his predecessor's role as the Green Minister within his Department. [243]

Mr. Hogg: My hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, the Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell) reports to me on all environmental matters. I have allocated the important role of Green Minister to him to ensure that the Ministry's environmental responsibilities receive the fullest possible attention and expertise.

Staffing

Mr. Byers: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many staff his Department employs on a regional basis in each standard English region; what is the cost of running these regional operations; what was the total budget for each region in 1994–95; and what are the main purposes for which the budget is used. [268]

Mr. Boswell: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to him by my hon. Friend the Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack) on 6 February 1995, *Official Report*, column *86*, which provides the latest available relevant information.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

National Engineering Laboratory

Mr. Anthony Coombs: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what financial arrangements have been put in place with ASL consequent upon the transfer of the National Engineering Laboratory. [2273]

Mr. Ian Taylor: Further to my reply to the hon. Member for Dover (Mr. Shaw) of 31 October, *Official Report*, column *211*, the business and staff of the National Engineering Laboratory have now transferred to Assessment Services Ltd. A payment of £1.95 million was made to ASL on completion and there will be a further adjustment as set out in my earlier answer. Overall, these terms represent better value for money for my Department than the other bids received or the sale benchmark.

Approval to this new service will be sought in a winter supplementary estimate for the Department of Trade and Industry's programmes and administration vote—class IV, vote 1. Pending that approval, urgent expenditure of £1.95 million has been met by repayable advances from the Contingencies Fund.

EU Consumers Council

Dr. Spink: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the outcome of the EU Consumers Council held on 9 November. [2231]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: I represented the United Kingdom at the Council. Political agreement was reached on a compromise text on the comparative advertising directive. The text fully meets United Kingdom objectives and concerns.

There was an orientation debate on the Commission's proposals for a new directive on unit-pricing—the requirement for retailers to indicate the price per unit of measurement. While welcoming the general thrust of the proposal as providing the consumer with an accurate and easily understood price comparison mechanism, I strongly argued that national Governments should be given discretionary power to exempt small shops from unit pricing, gaining support from a number of other member states. On grounds of subsidiarity, there was general support for allowing member states to determine on a national basis whether to exempt specific products from unit pricing; and the unit of measurement by which individual products should be unit priced.

The Council passed a resolution welcoming the Commission's report on the operation of the consumer credit directive and inviting the commission to undertake further study before proposing any further initiatives in this area. It was also agreed that the Commission should undertake studies in co-operation with member states on consumer education and information and on miracle products.

The Commission presented its paper on priorities for consumer policy 1996 to 1998, concentrating on financial services, public utilities, measures to enable the consumer to benefit from the information society, measures to improve consumer confidence in foodstuffs and to encourage sustainable consumption. These proposals will be subject to further consideration.

Mr. Barnes: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the outcome of the EU Consumers Council held on 19 November listing all votes, and all decisions which were determined by unanimity or without discussion. [438]

Mr. Evans *[holding answer 20 November 1995]:* My answer today to my hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Dr. Spink) covered the discussion points at the EU Consumers Council held on 9 November.

The following decisions were adopted without discussion.

Invocation of the urgency procedure for consultation of the European Parliament on a Council decision on the fourth medium-term Community action programme on equal opportunities for men and women; procedure for consultation with the European Parliament delaying the review of tasks by two years until the end of 1997, on developing the European Environment Agency's communication network and on participation of central and eastern European countries in agency's work programme; the recommendation for a Council decision on the participation of the EC in the negotiations on the amendments and adaptations of the Vienna convention and the associated protocol—Montreal protocol—on substances that deplete the ozone layer; and confirmation of replacement of various—non-British—members of the Committee of the Regions.

All these decisions were reached by unanimity.

Manufacturing Industry (Energy Use)

Mr. Battle: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the gross domestic product energy ratio for industry for each of the last 10 years. [1449]

Mr. Page: Figures for energy use, output and the energy ratio for the manufacturing industry are as follows:

Indices (1990=100)

	Output of the manufacturing industry (at constant factor cost)[1]	*Energy use by the manufacturing industry*[2]	*Energy ratio (energy use per unit of output)*
1985	84.5	110.5	130.8
1986	85.6	108.4	126.7
1987	89.6	106.3	118.6
1988	95.9	107.9	112.5
1989	100.2	100.9	100.7
1990	100.0	100.0	100.0
1991	94.6	97.2	102.7
1992	94.0	93.9	99.9
1993	95.1	93.8	98.6
1994	99.2	99.3	100.1

Source:

[1] Central Statistical Office.

[2] Excludes energy used by the manufacturing industry for transport.

Electricity Supplies

Mr. Battle: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment he has made of the extent to which electricity suppliers are fulfilling their obligations to maintain the service lead of wiring and equipment in the customer's premises up to the meter; and if he will make a statement. [1448]

Mr. Page: The statutory obligations on public electricity suppliers to maintain their service equipment in consumers' premises are set out in the Electricity Supply Regulations 1988, as amended.

These regulations are administered and enforced by the engineering inspectorate in the Department of Trade and Industry. The inspectorate monitors all incidents and accidents which must be reported to the Secretary of State under regulation 34 of these regulations.

The inspectorate carries out inspections of suppliers' woks including those located on consumer's premises under section 30(2) of the Electricity Act 1989 and regulation 33 of the regulations.

Energy Efficiency

Mr. Battle: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what progress has been made towards cutting energy consumption in Government buildings for which he has responsibility, in each year since 1990. [1451]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The total energy consumption and consumption per square metre, as measured by the Government's published energy targets, of buildings for which DTI is responsible in each year since 1990, are as follows:

			Reduction from base year	
Year	*Total Consumption*	*£/m² Measure*	*Total (Percentage)*	*£/m² (Percentage)*
1990–91	209,559,185 KWh	16.32	—	—
1991–92	194,033,233 KWh	15.63	7	4
1992–93	171,852,414 KWh	15.61	18	4
1993–94	176,834,148 KWh	16.44	16	-1
1994–95	125,754,708 KWh	15.55	40	5

Monopolies and Mergers Commission

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many matters have been referred by him to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission in each of the last 16 years. [1512]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The number of references by category as at 21 November 1995 is as follows:

	Mergers[1]*/Monopoly sections 78 and 79*		*References under section*	
Year	*References under the Fair Trading Act 1973*		*11 of the Competition Act 1980*	
1979	5	2	1	—
1980	6	—	—	3
1981	11	—	—	1
1982	10	—	—	5
1983	8	—	—	3
1984	4	—	—	3
1985	8	—	—	6
1986	14	—	—	3
1987	6	—	—	4
1988	12	—	2	1
1989	16	—	—	1
1990	28	—	—	2
1991	12	—	—	2
1992	13	1	—	—
1993	6	—	—	1
1994	9	—	—	—
1995	9	—	—	—

[1] Including newspaper mergers.

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the President of the Board of Trade on how many occasions in each of the last 16 years the Office of Fair Trading advised reference to the Monopolies

and Mergers Commission; on how many occasions that advice was followed; and if he will list those occasions when that advice was not followed. [1513]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: Under the Fair Trading Act 1973, the Director General of Fair Trading advises my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade whether to refer qualifying mergers to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission. The number of mergers on which the DGFT advised reference is as follows:

1979: 5
1980: 5
1981: 8
1982: 8
1983: 9
1984: 5
1985: 6
1986: 15
1987: 6
1988: 10
1989: 15
1990: 23
1991: 8
1992: 11
1993: 5
1994: 7
1995: 9 (so far)

The DGFT's advice to refer was followed in all cases except those detailed:

1979

Thorn/EMI

Calor Gas Ltd/certain assets of South Western Gas Board (Glogas)

1983

Blue Circle/assets of Bristol Channel (Aberthaw)

Dalgety/certain assets of Rank Hovis McDougall

1984

Nestle/Carnation

1986

Cannon/Screen Entertainment

Owens Corning Fibreglass/certain assets of Pilkington

1991

BPB Industries/certain assets of Poliet Group

1993

GEC/Infra-Red business of Phillips

Airtours/Owners Abroad

1995

Hasbro/Waddington Games

North West Water/NORWEB

Also earlier this year, the DGFT recommended that the Scottish and Newcastle/Courage merger should be referred to the MMC. I asked the DGFT to explore possible enforceable undertakings as an alternative to reference. The DGFT subsequently advised that undertakings should be accepted in lieu or reference; I agreed.

In addition, my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade referred one case each in 1982, and 1983, and four cases in 1990, against the advice of the DGFT not to refer.

Realising Our Potential Awards

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many applications for ROPA were received by the *(a)* Medical Research Council, *(b)* Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council, *(c)* Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council, *(d)* Particle Physics and Astronomy Research Council and *(e)* Economic and Social Research Council; how many were turned down in each case because of ineligibility; and how many were rejected. [20]

Mr. Ian Taylor: The following tables show the number of ROPAs received; the number awarded; the number turned down because of ineligibility; and the number rejected for each of he research councils.

1994 ROPA pilot analysis of applications and awards by research council

Research council	*Number of applications*	*Number of awards*	*Number ineligible*	*Number rejected*
BBSRC	82	44	4	34
EPSRC	351	158	38	155
MRC	134	42	2	90
Total	567	244	44	279

1995 ROPA scheme analysis of applications and awards by research council

Research council	*Number of applications*	*Number of awards*	*Number ineligible*	*Number rejected*
BBSRC	207	116	6	85
EPSRC	398	203	50	145
ESRC	46	18	13	15
MRC	239	100	75	64
NERC	64	38	12	14
PPARC	2	0	1	1
Total	956	475	157	324

British Aerospace Royal Ordnance

Mr. Cohen: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how much the Export Credit Guarantees Department has provided to British Aerospace Royal Ordnance since its privatisation. [994]

Mr. Nelson: On grounds of commercial confidentiality, ECGD does not publicise details of individual firms' business without their prior approval.

Arms Sales (Nigeria)

Mr. Cohen: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how much the Export Credit Guarantees Department has provided for arms sales to Nigeria in the last five years. [995]

Mr. Nelson: The ECGD has provided no guarantees for arms sales to Nigeria during this period.

Working Hours

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment his Department has made of the relative number of hours worked by employees in *(a)* the United Kingdom and *(b)* other EU countries. [1006]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The latest available figures are for 1993. The average usual hours worked a week by employees in the United Kingdom was 37.2, compared to an average of 37.1 for all the states that were members of the European Union at that time.

Environmental Technology Industry

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans he has to support the growth of the environmental technology industry. [1161]

Mr. Page: The Department of Trade and Industry will continue to work with the environmental industry, including technology suppliers, to improve its competitiveness in world markets. In particular, the joint environmental markets unit, established by the DTI and the Department of the Environment, is supporting the industry's efforts to exploit the substantial market opportunities which are being generated by rising environmental standards at home and overseas. It is assisting the industry to identify these opportunities and to raise its profile overseas. The unit is promoting collaboration between the various organisations representing the industry to achieve the co-ordinated response to environmental problems which world markets now demand; and it will work with the industry through the technology foresight process to address technological challenges for the future.

Mr. Cunningham: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what percentage of United Kingdom exports were generated by the environmental technology industry in each year since 1992–93. [1162]

Mr. Ian Taylor: There is no standard definition of "the environmental technology industry". United Kingdom exports of pollution control and monitoring equipment generated 0.4 per cent. of total exports in 1992, and 0.5 per cent. in 1993 and 1994.

Using a definition of the environmental products industries as producing "a product which enhances or prevents the deterioration of the external environment", it is estimated that exports of all environmental products made up 0.8 per cent. of total UK exports in 1992. Estimates have not been made for later years.

Deregulation

Sir Michael Grylls: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the deregulation measures agreed by his Department during the current year. [286]

Mr. Lang: Deregulation encompasses a wide range of activities to minimise burdens on business, including not only amendment and repeal of burdensome regulation but also scrutinising new regulations and encouraging business-friendly enforcement practices. Significant measures agreed by my Department this year can be found in "Deregulation: the Way Forward", presented by my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade, 22 May 1995, and the Government response to the first annual report of the deregulation task force, September 1995. Both publications are available in the Library of the House.

Defence Export Licences

Mr. Harvey: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what applications for export licences to countries in the middle east for defence equipment have *(a)* been granted, *(b)* received and *(c)* discussed over the past year; and if he will make a statement. [627]

Mr. Nelson: Earlier this year, there were placed in the Library of the House detailed statistical analyses of export licences which were granted for military, paramilitary and security equipment in the calendar years 1993 and 1994. These analyses included all countries of destination for which these licences were issued, including middle east countries. Early in 1996, I intend to place in the Library of the House a similar analysis for the calender year 1995. I shall write to the hon. Member when this is done.

As regards "applications received", this total is the sum of those which are granted and which are refused—other than those which lapse during their processing at the instigation of the applicant. Details of licences which were refused in 1993 and in 1994 were included in the Export Control Organisation's annual reports for those two years and copies of which have been placed in the Library of the House. As part of the task of statistical analysis for the year 1995, to which I have referred, I intend to include in the statistical report details of licences which were refused.

I am not clear as to what further information the hon. Member is seeking when he asks which applications have been "discussed".

All military, security and paramilitary goods and arms, ammunition and related material are controlled under the UK's export control legislation and cannot be exported without a licence from the Department of Trade and Industry. The Government observe strict responsibility over arms exports, primarily by means of considering applications for export licences against strict established criteria. These criteria include those which have been agreed with our European Union partners and in other international forums. We consider very carefully the political and military implications of allowing individual arms consignments to go overseas. We pay particular attention to proposed exports of military goods to countries with poor human rights records, where such goods might be used for internal repression, and to countries or regions where the export of arms might contribute to destabilisation of the area.

The UK also observes arms embargoes imposed by the United Nations and the European Union on a number of countries. Individual decisions as to whether specific equipment should be exported to specific markets are therefore taken in the light of these internationally agreed commitments.

Inward Investment

Sir Wyn Roberts: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what has been the value, at current prices, of inward investment to the United Kingdom during the last five years. [1398]

Mr. Eggar: Information on the topics is regularly published in "United Kingdom Balance of Payments—The Pink Book" and "First Release—Balance of Payments", both produced by the Central Statistical Office, copies of which are available in the Library of the House.

Consultancy Brokerage Service

Mrs. Roche: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what alternative uses have been found for the £1.37 million of the expenditure on the Consultancy Brokerage Service referred to in his answer of 23 October 1995, *Official Report,* column *420,* which was spent on information technology hardware. [1125]

Mr. Lang: A number of the items have been redeployed within my Department, thus avoiding the need to purchase such equipment for the projects being set up in those areas. This redeployed equipment has a current book value—that is, cost minus 30 per cent depreciation per year—of £120,316. A small amount of hardware has been sold to the external contractors who were to have delivered the Consultancy Brokerage Service for an aggregate of £43,986. The remainder will now be offered for sale to other Government Departments, which is the normal procedure in the case of disposal of Government assets. Any items not utilised across the government estate will be offered for sale at auction, in line with Government accounting procedures.

On further checking, I would now like to make it clear that the previous answer to which the hon Member refers—23 October 1995, *Official Report,* column *420*—was incorrect. The sum of £1.37 million was the total amount spent on information technology development, of which £395,376 was spent on equipment.

Skills Challenge

Mrs. Roche: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the firms which were awarded the small firms training challenge; and how much they were awarded. [944]

Mr. Page: The panel has selected 14 innovative projects, featuring almost 180 small firms, as award winners of the first stage of bids for the skills challenge, jointly funded by DTI and DFEE. The partnerships are as follows:

3D Design—Marine Technology. Sponsored by Tyneside TEC

Press and Mould Toolmaking. Sponsored by Lancashire Area West TEC (LAWTEC)

"Office Team". Sponsored by Coventry and Warwickshire TEC

"Makeover". 10 Ethnic Minority and Indigenous Independent Retailers. Sponsored by Hertfordshire TEC

Lincolnshire Trainers' Network. Sponsored by Lincolnshire TEC

"Micro-Business". Sponsored by London East TEC

Clothing Companies. Sponsored by North London TEC

Southampton Area Co-operative Development Agency (SACDA). Sponsored by Hampshire TEC

"Forging Ahead". Sponsored by Milton Keynes and North Bucks Chamber of Commerce Training and Enterprise.

"Schematic". Sponsored by Devon and Cornwall TEC

Four sector bids have also received awards. These are:

Engineering Training Authority (ENTRA) (Supplier Chain Performance)

The Confederation of British Wool Textiles

The Academy of Food and Wine

Seafish Training

Projects will receive an average award of around £50,000. Contracts are currently being negotiated with the winning partnerships.

Taxation (Self-assessment)

Mrs. Roche: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what discussions his Department has had with the Inland Revenue regarding the possibility of issuing computer software to aid self-assessment of tax liabilities. [946]

Mr. Page: The Inland Revenue plans to issue computer software to help those who have to prepare and submit a self-assessment tax return. There are two initiatives:

(1) to provide tax software suppliers with the communications products required to enable agents to transmit returns electronically to the Inland Revenue, thus reducing costs and providing prompt, accurate processing of the return; and

(2) to issue, on request, to those taxpayers who have a computer, a floppy disc which will help them prepare and print their return.

The Inland Revenue has consulted widely in preparing these proposals. It has held discussions with the Department of Trade and Industry.

Business Links

Mrs. Roche: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will publish the fee rates for advice given by each business link in the last year. [947]

Mr. Page: As private sector organisations, business links are responsible for determining their own pricing structures for advice and information in response to local customer needs and economic conditions. Fee rates charged by individual business links are not collated centrally, and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Small Firms (British Standard)

Mrs. Roche: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans his Department has for a British standard for small firms. [949]

Mr. Page: This Department has no plans to introduce a British standard specific to small firms.

Telephone Services, Dover

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make it his policy that compensation will be payable to telephone users in respect of delays in the provision of competitive telephony services in the Dover and Deal area as a result of delays in starting and completing work on the Dover and Deal area franchise for cable television. [588]

Mr. Ian Taylor: The Telecommunications Act licence for the Dover cable TV franchise does not provide for financial penalties to be levied for any failure to meet build obligations.

ISDN Services

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) what assessment he has made of the impact of the current pricing policy for ISDN lines in the United

Kingdom on the development of the information super-highways; [594]

(2) if he will discuss with the Director General Telecommunications the current price levels of ISDN lines and the impact that such price levels are having on the development of the information super-highways. [589]

(3) if he will examine the current prices for ISDN lines in the United Kingdom and in other countries; and what assessment he has made of the impact current price levels are having on the United Kingdom's international competitive position. [590]

Mr. Ian Taylor: The pricing of ISDN services and the extent to which they are available are matters for the commercial judgment of service providers. However, both my Department and the Office of Telecommunications are aware of some concerns about the level of relative prices of ISDN services in the UK compared to other countries. In some countries which have cheaper prices than the UK, the markets are not liberalised, so it is impossible to assess whether the prices charged reflect the true cost of providing the service. However, Oftel is considering the inclusion of ISDN services in BT's price cap when it is next reviewed.

The introduction of effective niche competition will also bring prices down. The Government's policy of licensing alternative infrastructure such as radio fixed access systems should contribute to this. Operating at 10 GHz, these systems could provide an alternative ISDN service to that offered by BT and some cable providers.

The provision of telecoms products and services makes a large direct contribution to national competitiveness. Liberalisation has also brought reductions in overall charges and the rapid development of advanced services and facilities, including ISDN, which boost competitiveness across all sectors.

Use of the information super-highway is increasing rapidly, with the commercial sector making the largest contribution to that rate of growth. ISDN capacity at 64,000 bit is an important technology for the development of the information society, but is only one of the technological developments whose availability has encouraged greater exploitation of the Internet.

Cable Television, Dover

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment he has made of the progress of the cable television franchiser in the Dover-Deal area; and to what extent the progress to date meets the requirements of the franchise. [591]

Mr. Ian Taylor: Responsibility for monitoring and enforcing compliance with the build obligations contained in Bell Cablemedia's Telecommunications Act licence for its Dover franchise is a matter for the Director General of Telecommunications. I have therefore asked the director general to write to the hon. Member with details of progress made to date.

Nuclear Energy

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the implications for British Nuclear import and export policy of the extension of the US-Euratom co-operation agreement on the peaceful uses of nuclear energy, signed by the Commission in November, and if he will place in the Library a copy of the text of the extended co-operation agreement. [1576]

Mr. Eggar: The US-Euratom agreement for peaceful nuclear co-operation is intended to provide a secure basis for co-operation and trade between the nuclear industries of the two parties as well as a number of third countries, and provides a framework for this trade to expand in the future. The agreement will now go to the US Congress for its approval.

Copies of the text of the agreement signed on 7 November will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses shortly when these become available from Brussels.

PRIME MINISTER

Lockerbie

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister what response Her Majesty's Government have sent to the Libyan request that a trial takes place in The Hague under a Scottish judge, under Scottish rules of evidence, of the two Libyans accused of the bombing of Pan Am 103 over Lockerbie. [1632]

The Prime Minister: The Government of Libya have made no direct representation to us, but our position remains that there is no acceptable alternative to the trial taking place in Scotland or the United States.

Libya

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will discuss with the UN Security Council the ending of UN sanctions over Libya. [359]

The Prime Minister: The United Nations sanctions committee on Libya is today holding its 11th review of sanctions.

Invoices

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Prime Minister (1) how his Department publicises payment practices other than as percentage of invoices paid late; [964]

(2) what is the average length of time it takes for his Department to pay invoices. [924]

The Prime Minister: For this purpose, my Department is part of the Cabinet Office. I refer the hon. Member to the replies given today by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster.

Energy Efficiency

Mr. Battle: To ask the Prime Minister what progress has been made towards cutting energy consumption in Government buildings for which he has responsibility, in each year since 1990. [1452]

The Prime Minister: For this purpose, my office forms part of the Cabinet Office. I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster today.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Police (Training)

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police officers, and from which countries, have received training by police authorities in this country in the last five years. [225]

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 21 November 1995]:* Information is available only for the period since January 1991. Central records show that 157 training visits to police forces have taken place since then involving officers from the countries listed. The number of officers involved is not recorded.

Country	*Number of visits*
Antigua	1
Argentina	1
Aruba	1
Australia	1
Bahrain	8
Bahamas	1
Bangladesh	2
Barbados	3
Bermuda	4
Bolivia	1
Botswana	5
Brunei	2
Cameroon	1
Canada	1
China	1
Colombia	1
Cyprus	4
Czech Republic	1
Denmark	1
Dubai	1
Ethiopia	1
France	7
Gambia	1
Germany	2
Gibraltar	4
Guatemala	1
Honduras	1
Hungary	1
India	7
Indonesia	3
Italy	2
Jamaica	2
Kenya	3
Lesotho	3
Malawi	4
Malaysia	1
Mauritius	3
Namibia	9
Netherlands	2
Nigeria	3
Norway	2
Oman	2
Pakistan	1
Panama	1
Paraguay	1
Philippines	4
Romania	1
Saudi Arabia	3
Sierra Leone	3
Singapore	6
Slovakia	1
South Africa	4
Sri Lanka	1
St. Helena	3
St. Kitts	1
St. Lucia	1
Swaziland	6
Sweden	1
Thailand	1
Tonga	1
Tristan Da Cunha	1
Uganda	7
United Arab Emirates	1
Zimbabwe	3

Homosexuals (Violence)

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what studies are currently being carried out by his Department on the subject of violence against homosexuals. [604]

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 20 November 1995]:* None.

Invoices

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how his Department publicises payment practices other than as percentages of invoices paid late. [959]

Mr. Howard: My Department publicises information about its payment practices in its annual report, including a commitment to the Confederation of British Industry prompt payment code. Statistics on prompt payment are currently publicised only as a percentage of invoices paid.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the amount owed to those businesses whose invoices were not paid within 30 days in each of the last five years. [1115]

Mr. Howard: Information about the total value of invoices not paid within 30 days in each of the last five years is not available except at disproportionate cost.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the average length of time it takes for his Department to pay invoice.

Mr. Howard: An analysis of invoices paid in October 1995 shows that on average they were paid within 24 days of receipt of a valid invoice.

Correspondence

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will be in a position to reply to the letter from the hon. Member for Oldham, West of 27 October following up the meeting with the former Under-Secretary on 22 August concerning the case of Atia Idrees, J242872. [469]

Mr. Kirkhope: Inquiries into Miss Idrees's case are continuing. I will write to the hon. Member shortly detailing the current situation.

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will be in a position to reply to the letter from the hon. Member for Oldham, West of 1 September, concerning Mr. Inayat Khan, K455873/2 (S), PO 01496/95. [468]

Mr. Kirkhope: I shall write to the hon. Member shortly.

Manslaughter Convictions (Children)

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people sentenced under section 53(2) of the Children and Young Persons Act 1933 during the years of 1974 to 1993 were convicted of manslaughter; and, of those convicted of manslaughter, how many were sentenced to detention for life. [630]

Mr. Maclean: The information requested for the years 1979 to 1994 is given in the table. Information for earlier years is not available centrally.

Persons sentenced under section 53(2) of the Children and Young Persons Act 1933, following conviction for manslaughter, 1979 to 1994

England and Wales

	Total sentenced		*Detention for life*	
	Diminished responsibility[1]	*Other manslaughter*	*Diminished responsibility*	*Other manslaughter*
1979	—	3	—	—
1980	1	3	1	—
1981	—	6	—	—
1982	1	5	1	—
1983	1	5	1	—
1984	—	3	—	—
1985	1	6	1	—
1986	—	7	—	2
1987	—	9	—	1
1988	—	3	—	—
1989[2]	—	8	—	1
1990[2]	—	1	—	—
1991	—	5	—	—
1992[3]	—	4	—	1
1993[3]	1	11	1	—
1994[3]	—	8	—	—

[1] Section 2, Homicide Act 1957.

[2] Comparison with prison receptions suggests that there may have been under recording in 1989 and 1990, although this is less likely in 1990.

[3] Under the Criminal Justice Act 1991, the arrangements for imposing longer sentences also applied to 17 year olds from 1 October 1992.

Mr. Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many tariffs of those convicted of manslaughter under section 53(2) of the Children and Young Persons Act 1933 during the years 1974 to 1993 and sentenced to detention for life were *(a)* under five years, *(b)* six to nine years, *(c)* 10 to 14 years and *(d)* 15 to 20 years. [632]

Miss Widdecombe: There have been 16 prisoners in Prison Service custody convicted between 1974 and 1993 of manslaughter under section 53(2) of the Children and Young Persons Act 1933.

The information about their tariffs is as follows:

(a) under 5 years: 2[1]

(b) 6 to 9 years: 9

(c) 10 to 14 years: 5

(d) 15 to 20 years: 0

[1]Includes one tariff of 5 years.

Mr. Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many young offenders sentenced under section 53(2) of the Children and young Persons Act 1933 from 1974 to 1993 commenced their sentences within local authority secure accommodation; and at what age they were subsequently transferred to prison department custody. [633]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Alex Carlile, dated 22 November 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about young offenders sentenced under section 53(2) of the Children and Young Persons Act 1933.

Records are not available before 1983. The figures since 1983 are set out in the attached table. Records are not kept on the age at which young offenders transfer to custody.

Year	*A*	*B*	*C (Percentage)*
1983	53	13	24.5
1984	52	16	30.8
1985	44	13	29.5
1986	57	9	15.8
1987	56	14	25.0
1988	61	11	18.0
1989	60	11	18.3
1990	71	13	18.3
1991	57	11	19.3
1992	80	11	13.8
1993	116	18	15.5

Notes:

A=Number of section 53(2)s who commenced their sentences in local authority secure accommodation.

B=Number of section 53(2)s who transferred from local authority secure accommodation to Young Offender Institutions.

C=Percentage of the total section 53(2) who transferred.

Commission for Racial Equality

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many and what percentage of the employees of the Commission for Racial Equality are from *(a)* white European, *(b)* Asian, *(c)* black and *(d)* other ethnic minorities. [114]

Mr. Kirkhope: As at 30 June 1995, the breakdown of employees at the Commission for Racial Equality by racial groups was as follows:

	Number	*Per cent.*
White European	62	29
Asian	36	17
Black	97	46
Other ethnic minorities	17	8
	212	100

Mrs. Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the outcome of the Commission for Racial Equality's 1994 restructuring programme, and indicate in particular both the total number of jobs which were shed as a result of that programme and the numbers of *(a)* white European and *(b)* ethnic minority redundancies associated with that total. [116]

Mr. Kirkhope: We welcome action by the Commission for Racial Equality to restructure its organisation to provide greater efficiency. No jobs were lost as a result of this exercise.

Mrs. Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is *(a)* his policy and *(b)* that of the Commission for Racial Equality in respect of the shortlisting and appointment of disproportionately few member of ethnic minorities; and if he will make a statement. [118]

Mr. Kirkhope: Appointments should be on merit and on the ability of the individual to meet the criteria for the post concerned. The Commission for Racial Equality's equal opportunities policy aims to ensure that no job applicant or employee receive less favourable treatment than another on the grounds of race, colour, nationality, ethnic or national origins, or religious beliefs.

Mrs. Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many members currently serve upon the Commission for Racial Equality; and how many of those are of white European background. [115]

Mr. Kirkhope: There are currently 12 commissioners on the Commission for Racial Equality. Two are of white European background.

Mrs. Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he intends to take to ensure that the ethnic representation among members and employees of the Commission for Racial Equality in future reflects that of society as a whole. [117]

Mr. Kirkhope: The Commission for Racial Equality operates an equal opportunities policy. I support this. It advertises vacancies in the mainstream press, and some of the ethnic minority press in order to ensure that all sections of the community are aware of job opportunities with the commission. Appointments should always be made on merit.

Mrs. Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to prosecute the Commission for Racial Equality for discriminatory employment practices; and if he will make it his policy to bring forward legislation to abolish that Commission. [119]

Mr. Kirkhope: We have no plans to do either.

Immigration Officers

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of the total remuneration to immigration officers was based on performance-related pay, for the last five years for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement. [629]

Mr. Kirkhope: Immigration Service grades are currently covered by the national civil service pay settlements and information is not readily available in the form requested.

Exclusion Orders

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many exclusion orders have been *(a)* imposed, *(b)* revoked, *(c)* reimposed at the expiry of a previous order and *(d)* allowed to lapse by him in the last 12 months. [1223]

Mr. Howard: Figures for the number of exclusion orders imposed, revoked, renewed and allowed to lapse over the last year are shown in the below table.

Number of exclusion orders in force, renewed, revoked, or allowed to lapse: November 1994-November 1995

Newly-made orders	*Orders revoked*	*Orders renewed*	*Orders allowed to lapse*
0	20	4	6

Car Crime

Mr. Burden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to collect information on the make and year of manufacture of vehicles affected by theft; and what assessment he has made of the usefulness of such information in tackling car crime. [1197]

Mr. Maclean: The Home Office does not routinely collect information about the make and year of manufacture of stolen vehicles. In 1991, however, information relating to the previous calendar year was used to compile the car theft index which revealed conclusively that certain makes and models of car were more at risk of theft than others. The recently published study by the police research group into the theft of heavy goods vehicles includes information about vehicles stolen during 1994 broken down by make, year of registration and body type, and by location and time at which theft occurred. The findings of the study are being used to encourage vehicle and security device manufacturers and heavy goods vehicles owners and drivers to take specific action to help reduce theft levels.

As the result of an agreement signed earlier this year between the Home Office and the CCN Group Ltd., the National Criminal Intelligence Service is receiving comprehensive data on all stolen vehicles from CCN and using this information, which can be broken down into various categories, in its work against organised crime. We are currently considering what other uses can be made of these data in combating vehicle crime in general.

Mr. Pearson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what was the number of reported burglaries from motor vehicles in the area covering Dudley, West in each year since 1979 and the percentage difference in the number of those reported burglaries between 1979 and the latest year for which figures are available; [586]

(2) what was the number of reported thefts from motor vehicles in the area covering Dudley, West in each year since 1979 and the percentage difference in the number of those reported thefts between 1979 and the latest year for which figures are available; [584]

(3) what was the total number of reported crimes in the area covering Dudley, West in each year since 1979 and the percentage difference in the number of those reported crimes between 1979 and the latest year for which figures are available. [587]

(4) what was the number of reported thefts of motor vehicles in the area covering Dudley, West in each year since 1979 and the percentage difference in the number of those reported thefts between 1979 and the latest year for which figures are available. [585]

Mr. Maclean: The information is not collected centrally.

Eaton Leonard Green

Mr. Heppell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what assessment he has made of the adequacy of compliance with the present Home Office guidelines in relation to police informants; [597]

(2) when he was informed of the entry into the United Kingdom of Eaton Leonard Green; [1048]

(3) what action he proposes to take against Scotland Yard staff in respect of the Eaton Leonard Green case; [1044]

(4) if he will list *(a)* the charges brought against Eaton Leonard Green and *(b)* the charges for which he was prosecuted; and what role his Department played in determining which charges should proceed to prosecution; [1050]

(5) which senior officer or officers had responsibility for the close supervision of Eaton Leonard Green in accordance with Home Office guidelines; [1042]

(6) what factors underlay the admission of Eaton Leonard Green into the United Kingdom on 12 February 1991; [1049]

(7) when he received the first and second internal inquiries carried out by Scotland Yard into the Eaton Green case. [1043]

Mr. Maclean: The use of informants is an operational matter for the police. It is for each chief constable to ensure that there are proper procedures for handling informants in his force. It is also for each chief constable to take whatever action he considers appropriate if he believes one of his officers has acted improperly in handling an informant.

Eaton Green was admitted to the United Kingdom on 13 February 1991. The immigration officer who dealt with him was satisfied that he was coming to this country as a visitor and give him leave to enter for six months. Ministers were not aware of police interest in him or of his role as a police informant until after his conviction was reported in the press.

Eaton Green was charged by Nottinghamshire constabulary of:

(i) conspiracy to commit grievous bodily harm, contrary to section 1(1) of the Criminal Law Act 1977;

(ii) conspiracy to rob, contrary to section 1(1) of the Criminal Law Act 1977;

(iii) possession of a firearm whilst committing an indictable offence—viz; robbery, contrary to section 18(1) of the Firearms Act 1968;

(iv) possession of a firearm with intent to endanger life, contrary to section 16 of the Firearms Act 1968.

Count (i) was varied on the indictment to;

(v) conspiracy to cause actual bodily harm, contrary to section 1(1) of the Criminal Law Act 1977.

Green was acquitted of charge (v) by direction of the judge. He pleaded guilty to charges (ii) and (iv) and also pleaded guilty to causing grievous bodily harm, contrary to section 20 of the Offences Against the Person Act 1861. The prosecution did not proceed with the other charges, given his guilty plea.

The Home Office played no part in determining what charges should be brought against Mr. Green or what charges proceeded to prosecution.

A former detective chief inspector at Brixton police station was the senior officer responsible for controlling Eaton Green as a police informant.

The two initial inquiries in relation to this case were internal to the Metropolitan police. The report of a third inquiry is being prepared, a copy of which will be sent to my right hon. and learned Friend.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people are currently seeking asylum from an address in *(a)* Scotland, *(b)* Wales, *(c)* Northern Ireland and *(d)* by region, within England. [564]

Mr. Kirkhope: Information on the places or residence of people currently seeking asylum is not held centrally.

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what is the average time currently taken to resolve fully an asylum application, including determination of any appeal to the Immigration Appellate Authority; [562]

(2) what is the average time taken by his Department's asylum division to process and despatch to the Immigration Appellate Authority an appeal against a refusal of admission; and what is the average number of working days between the date of the appeal being despatched to the IAA by his Department and the date of its determination; [560]

(3) what is the average time currently taken by his Department to reach an initial decision on *(a)* asylum applications submitted prior to implementation of the Asylum and Immigration Appeals Act 1993, *(b)* asylum applications submitted since the implementation of the Act and *(c)* all asylum applications. [561]

Mr. Kirkhope: Information on the times taken at the various stages of the asylum process are given in the table.

Average times involved in deciding applications for asylum April–September 1995

	Months
Time taken for an initial decision to be made (Pre-Act applications)	34.1
Time taken for an initial decision to be made (Post-Act applications)	8.7
Time taken by the Home Office to process an appeal	4.1
Time taken by the IAA to determine an appeal	5.6

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many asylum applications are currently awaiting an initial decision by the Home Office asylum division; how many appeals against a refusal of asylum are currently being processed by the Home Office;

and how many appeals against a refusal of asylum, having been processed by the Home Office and despatched to the Immigration Appellate Authority, are awaiting determination by the IAA. [558]

Mr. Kirkhope: As at 30 September 1995, 64,415 asylum applications were awaiting initial decisions by the Home Office, 2,705 appeals were being processed by the Home Office from people seeking asylum and 8,925 such appeals were awaiting hearings by the Immigration Appellate Authority.

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to implement paragraphs 17, 22 and 31 of the resolution on minimum guarantees for asylum procedures, signed at the European Union Justice and Home Affairs Council at Luxembourg on 20 and 21 June. [556]

Mr. Kirkhope: Asylum procedures in the United Kingdom are consistent with those paragraphs and this will remain the case after implementation of the asylum proposals announced by my right hon. and learned Friend on 20 November.

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the European countries which operate accelerated asylum procedures which derogate from the general principle that an individual appealing against a refusal of asylum may remain in the country until such time as the appeal is determined. [551]

Mr. Kirkhope: Comprehensive information is not available but our understanding is that France, Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden and Switzerland are all countries where, depending on the circumstances, appeals against removal on safe third country grounds may have no automatic suspensive effect; and that Denmark, Finland, Germany, the Netherlands and Switzerland operate procedures based on identification of countries of origin in which there is considered to be no serious risk of persecution.

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on what date a copy of the resolution on minimum guarantees for asylum procedures, signed at the Justice and Home Affairs Council in June 1995, was placed in the Library. [555]

Miss Widdecombe: A copy is being placed in the Library.

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to implement paragraphs 8 and 12 of the resolution on manifestly unfounded applications for asylum and the conclusions on countries in which there is generally no serious risk of persecution, signed at the Justice and Home Affairs Council in London on 30 November and 1 December 1992. [557]

Mr. Kirkhope: Asylum procedures in the United Kingdom are consistent with these paragraphs and this will remain the case after the implementation of the asylum proposals announced by my right hon. and learned Friend on 20 November.

Mr. Timms: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what guidance his Department gives to failed asylum applicants from Sri Lanka before their return there; what steps are taken to ensure that such applicants are returned to safe areas of Sri Lanka; and which areas of Sri Lanka are considered to be safe for such a purpose. [14]

Mr. Kirkhope: No specific guidance is given to unsuccessful asylum seekers from Sri Lanka before their return there. It is considered safe to return Sri Lankan nationals who have no claim to remain here to Colombo and the south of the country.

Ms Janet Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list, for each year since 1990, the number of applicants who have been refused asylum in the UK and have subsequently suffered *(a)* persecution, *(b)* imprisonment and *(c)* the death penalty in the country to which they have been returned. [148]

Mr. Kirkhope: We have no means of monitoring what happens to people who have been returned to their country of origin. However, no person who has demonstrated that he or she has a well-founded fear of persecution in a particular country for one of the reasons set out in the 1951 United Nations convention relating to the status of refugees would be returned to that country.

Mr. Keen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many applications for political asylum were *(a)* granted and *(b)* refused from applicants in (i) India, (ii) Pakistan and (iii) Nigeria in (1) 1993 and (2) 1994. [1094]

Mr. Kirkhope: Information on decisions relating to asylum applications from nationals of India, Pakistan and Nigeria is published in tables 3.1 and 3.3 of the Home Office statistical bulletin "Asylum Statistics United Kingdom 1994", issue 15–95. A copy of this publication is available in the Library.

European Treaties

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on what dates the EU treaties on simplified extradition procedures, Europol, the customs information system and protection of the communities' financial interests were *(a)* agreed in principle, *(b)* signed, *(c)* ratified and *(d)* came into force; and on what dates copies of the agreed texts were made available to the House. [909]

Miss Widdecombe: The convention on simplified extradition procedures was agreed and signed by Ministers at the Justice and Home Affairs Council on 10 March. The conventions on Europol, the customs information system and protection of the communities' financial interests were agreed by Heads of Government at the Cannes European Council on 26 and 27 June and signed by European Union ambassadors on 26 July. The United Kingdom Government have yet to ratify any of the conventions. In each case, they will enter into force three months after the last member state to ratify a particular instrument has notified the Secretary-General of the Council of the European Union that the necessary domestic procedures have been completed.

In accordance with the arrangements for scrutiny of work under title VI of the treaty on European Union, the Government submitted draft texts of these conventions for examination by the Home Affairs Committee and the Select Committee on European Legislation. A copy of the

extradition convention was sent to the Library on 30 March. I regret that texts of the other conventions were not deposited in the Library at the time of their signature, but this has now been done.

Doncaster Prison

Mr. Goerge Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the incident on 20 September which led to the temporary closure of Doncaster prison and the searching of all prisoners. [390]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A.J. Pearson to Mr. George Howarth dated 22 November 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question about the incident on 20 September which led to the temporary closure of Doncaster prison and the searching of all prisoners.

Information was received from an external source of a possible escape attempt from the prison and that weapons might be used. A full close down search took place on 20 September with the additional support of the South Yorkshire police.

No escape equipment nor any weapons were discovered as a result of the search.

Chimpanzees

Ms Janet Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what was the most recent date when chimpanzees were used in a UK facility designated under the Animals Scientific Procedures Act 1986; [144]

(2) what plans he has to ban the use of chimpanzees in research and testing in the UK; and if he will make a statement. [143]

Mr. Kirkhope: None have been used under the Act in any designated establishment.

We have no plans to ban the use of chimpanzees in research and testing in the United Kingdom. Any application to use chimpanzees in a procedure requiring to be licensed under the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 would be considered in accordance with the requirements of section 5 of the Act, and also referred to the Animal Procedures Committee for advice. Exceptional and specific justification would have to be established to show why chimpanzees, rather than any other protected species, were required.

Police (Self-defence and Restraint)

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make available in the Library *(a)* the guidance on self-defence and restraint of the Association of Chief Police Officers and *(b)* the evidence of the Police Complaints Authority on the effect of neck holds and certain arm locks; and if he will make a statement. [153]

Mr. Maclean: No. The Association of Chief Police Officers guidance on self-defence and restraint, which is currently under review, deals with operational matters which could be of assistance to criminals and is not intended for publication outside the police service. Any evidence on neck holds and arm locks available to the Police Complaints Authority is a matter for the authority itself.

Parole Delays

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners are undergoing parole delays; how long, on average, these delays take; what is the percentage of accepted parole applications; and what is the cost per week per inmate undergoing parole delays. [39]

Miss Widdecombe: For the period August to October 1995, some 800 prisoners were notified of parole decisions after their parole eligibility date or its anniversary. The average delay was just over seven weeks, 46 per cent. of all applications for parole were accepted.

The cost of keeping an inmate in prison varies between establishments. The average cost per inmate per week in category C accommodation is currently about £378.

Internet

Mr. French: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prosecutions there have been in the last year for offences related to the dissemination of illegal material via the Internet. [174]

Mr. Maclean: Court proceedings data held centrally by my Department does not identify this type of offence.

Prison Officers (Drug Offences)

Ms Janet Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prison officers have been given custodial sentences for drugs offences in each year since 1990, broken down by type of offence. [134]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Ms Janet Anderson, dated 22 November 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question asking how many prison officers have been given custodial sentences for drugs offences in each year since 1990, broken down by type of offence.

The Prison Service has no record of any prison officer receiving a custodial sentence for drugs offences in any of the years in question.

Metropolitan Police

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis on the level of staffing in CID offices and other police units involved in extensive detective work; and if he will make a statement. [150]

Mr. Maclean: It is for the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis to deploy his resources as he sees fit.

Elections

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many ballot papers were rejected for want of an official mark in the 1992 general election. [907]

Mr. Kirkhope: Some 2,593 ballot papers were rejected for want of an official mark in the 1992 general election. Statistics concerning the outcome of the 1992 general election, including information on the number of ballot papers rejected on these grounds, are published in the HMSO booklet "Election Expenses".

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many election petitions have been applied for in respect of local government, parliamentary and Euro-elections since 1970. [911]

Mr. Kirkhope: The number of election petitions applied for in respect of local government and parliamentary elections since 1970 is 80 and six, respectively; the comparable figure for European parliamentary elections since 1979 when those elections first took place is three.

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action he took in response to the recommendation of the Home Affairs Committee in the 1982–83 Session that the requirement to stamp the ballot paper with an official mark be ended; and if he will make a statement. [906]

Mr. Kirkhope: The Government considered carefully the recommendation by the Home Affairs Select Committee but decided that the official mark should be retained. The Government concluded that the official mark provided a continuing safeguard against the introduction into the ballot of counterfeit or illegally acquired ballot papers. The Government's full response to the recommendations is available in "The Government Reply to the First Report from the Home Affairs Committee Session 1982–83 HC32–1".

Immigration Rules

Mr. Heppell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he is informed of all decisions of the immigration authorities to allow entry to the United Kingdom outside the normal immigration rules. [1045]

Mr. Kirkhope: It would not be practical for my right hon. and learned Friend to be informed personally of every occasion on which discretion is exercised on his behalf outside the immigration rules.

Mr. Heppell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department in what circumstances *(a)* police and *(b)* immigration officials have the right to instruct immigration officials to allow someone permanent leave to remain in the United Kingdom when that person has no legal right to do so. [1045]

Mr. Kirkhope: Leave to remain is granted under the immigration rules on my right hon. and learned Friend's behalf. The police have no locus in the matter. Discretion to grant indefinite leave to remain outside the rules is exercised sparingly, in accordance with instructions or in exceptional compassionate circumstances.

Premier Prison Services Ltd.

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what special qualifications are required of Premier Prison Services Ltd. staff to deal with immigration detainees; what is the ratio of staff to detainees; and if he will make a statement. [402]

Mr. Kirkhope: Premier Prison Services Ltd. is not responsible for the management of any immigration detention centre. However, people detained under immigration powers may be detained in Doncaster prison, which is managed by the company. Requirements as to the company's performance and staffing are set down in a management contract awarded by the Prison Service.

Police (Patrol Duties)

Ms Janet Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what percentage of police strength is out on patrol duties between *(a)* midnight and 6am, *(b)* 6am and 12 noon, *(c)* 12 noon and 6pm and *(d)* 6pm and midnight. [145]

Mr. Maclean: This information is not available centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Tobacco Project Licences

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the purposes for which project licences have been approved by the Animal Procedures Committee in relation to tobacco in the last five years. [335]

Mr. Kirkhope: The following project licences have been granted:

1991: none

1992: (i) the development of in vitro methods to monitor the genetic damage caused in humans by environmental pollutants; and (ii) the use of tobacco smoke as one experimental tool to study lung disease.

1993: none.

1994: none.

1995:

(i) the evaluation of the role of bacterial toxins in sudden infant death syndrome; and

(ii) the investigation of the role of bacterial toxins in periodontal disease.

It is the practice of the Animal Procedures Committee to set out in its annual reports details of all such applications considered.

Domestic Violence

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the inter-departmental group on domestic violence last met; and what policy decisions arose. [333]

Mr. Maclean: For the policy issues considered at the last meeting of the ministerial group on domestic

violence, held on 17 May 1994, I would refer the hon. Member to the reply given to his question on 17 January, columns *380-81*. A date for the next meeting of the ministerial group has not yet been fixed, but it is likely to meet early in the new year.

The official inter-departmental group on domestic violence met on Wednesday 15 November 1995. The group reviewed the Government-funded domestic violence public awareness campaign and the recent publication of an inter-agency circular designed to promote a more co-ordinated response to domestic violence by local agencies. It also considered possible future areas of work and commissioned further work on the need for a centrally co-ordinated policy on refuge provision.

Parkhurst Prison

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many redundancies will be triggered by the implementation of automated security systems at HM prison Parkhurst; and what redundancy settlements he proposes. [392]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. George Howarth, dated 22 November 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the number of redundancies at Parkhurst prison which may be expected with the implementation of automated security systems there and what redundancy packages have been made.

Automated security systems are an aid to prison security. No staff redundancies at Parkhurst are anticipated from the implementation of such security systems.

Female Prisoners (Maternity Appointments)

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the Director General of the Prison Service regarding its recent instruction that all female prisoners attending for maternity appointments be handcuffed throughout their care; if he will review this instruction in consultation with relevant organisations including the Royal College of Midwives and the National Childbirth Trust; and if he will make a statement. [317]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Harry Cohen, dated 22 November 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the handcuffing of female prisoners on escort.

For several years escapes by women under escort have been disproportionately high when compared with the number of women prisoners and, therefore, in April of this year, it was decided to handcuff female prisoners under escort in the same way as we have always done for men.

Handcuffs are used to improve security and reduce the risk of escape. Initial indications show that the rate of escape of female prisoners is down by 50 per cent since the new policy was introduced.

For both sexes, handcuffs must be removed if there is a medical, surgical or clinical reason for this. Restraints must always be removed from prisoners during labour and childbirth.

EU Third Pillar Procedures

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what procedures are followed by the Government for making available to *(a)* the House and *(b)* the public the texts of treaties under the EU third pillar procedures, after there has been agreement as to their content; and how soon after such agreement it is intended to make them available in printed published form. [910]

Miss Widdecombe: The Government aim to deposit in the Library copies of unclassified documents which have been adopted or agreed by the Council of Ministers. The texts of conventions concluded in the third pillar are available to the public through the *Official Journal* of the European Communities, in which they are published after signature. The Government publish the texts of international agreements as command papers for presentation to Parliament as soon as possible after signature.

Privately Managed Prisons

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the studies which have been commissioned by his Department to evaluate the performance of existing privately managed prisons indicating in each case the research body involved and the dates on which *(a)* each study was commissioned, *(b)* each study was commenced, *(c)* he expects to receive reports, and *(d)* he expects each report to be published; and if he will set out the cost of the studies in each case. [477]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. George Howarth, dated 22 November 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about studies commissioned to evaluate the performance of contractually-managed prisons.

The only such study commissioned to date has been in respect of Wolds prison and was undertaken jointly by the Centre for Criminology and Criminal Justice at Hull University and the Institute of Criminology at the University of Cambridge. This was commissioned on 25 June 1992, and study commenced in July of that year. The research team's formal programme of fieldwork started in January 1993 and was extended to March 1994. The first draft version of the report was received in December 1994, and further revisions to the draft were submitted in April and July of 1995. It is anticipated that the report will be published shortly. The cost of the study was £120,772.

Prisoners (Medical Operations)

Ms Janet Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what guidance is given to prison governors in respect of prisoners awaiting medical operations; how many prisoners are currently awaiting operations and what is the average waiting time for such operations. [131]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Pearson to Ms Janet Anderson, dated 22 November 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question about guidance to prison governors in respect of prisoners awaiting medical operations, the number of prisoners awaiting medical operations and the average waiting time for such operations.

No specific advice on prisoners awaiting operations has been issued to governors as the decision to refer a prisoner for a medical operation is a purely clinical one and therefore the responsibility of the medical officer. Information is not collected centrally on how many prisoners are awaiting operations or the average waiting time.

Secretary of State's Speech

Ms Janet Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when his speech of 12 October to the Conservative party conference was made available to the Home Department press office. [147]

Mr. Howard: On 12 October.

Interception of Communications

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what are the procedures for authorising the tapping into E-mail and Internet communications and mobile telephone conversations; under what legal authority they are operated; and if he will make a statement. [324]

Mr. Howard: Any communication, including an E-mail, Internet or mobile telephone communication, when it is being transmitted by means of a public telecommunication system, may be intercepted in pursuance of a warrant issued in accordance with the provisions of the Interception of Communications Act 1985.

Suicides

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list for *(a)* England and *(b)* the United Kingdom the number of suicides; and if he will express this number as a percentage of the overall population for (i) 1971, (ii) 1981, (iii) 1991 and (iv) for each of the last available three years. [998]

Mr. Bowis: I have been asked to reply.

The table shows the number of deaths and death rates per 100,000 population from suicide—ICD 'E950–E959, E980–E989—in England and the United Kingdom in 1971, 1981, 1990, 1991 and 1992.

	England		*United Kingdom*	
	Number	*Rater per 100,000*	*Number*	*Rate per 100,000*
1971	3,739	8.1	5,760	10.3
1981	5,988	12.8	7,192	12.8
1990	5,594	11.7	6,863	11.9
1991	5,567	11.5	6,801	11.8
1992	5,541	11.5	6,863	11.8

The codes E950-E959 refer to deaths where suicide is the underlying cause of death, whereas E980–E989 relate to deaths where it is undetermined whether the injury was accidentally or purposefully inflicted. The majority of these, however, turn out to be suicide.

The deaths for England in 1971 are only those coded to E950–E959, since deaths coded to E980–E989 are not available for England. Deaths coded to E980–E989 are included in the figures for the United Kingdom 1971.

The coding of deaths in England, and Wales was changed in 1993 to an automated system. Though the results from this are generally satisfactory, the OPCS have identified significant problems in the coding of external causes of death. Certifications of deaths in 1993 and 1994 which could have been due to external causes are all being examined and re-coded as necessary. More reliable data, comparable to that for previous years, will be available in the first quarter of 1996.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 23 November 1995

SOCIAL SECURITY

Social Security Payments

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what would be the total cost to public funds of increasing in line with earnings all social security payments that have never been upgraded from the date when they were announced. [704]

Mr. Burt: The estimated gross cost is around £1.8 billion at April 1995 prices, rounded to the nearest £100 million.

Fraud

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what assessment he has made of the contribution to the decline in detected savings in tackling organised methods of payment fraud of *(a)* a real reduction in fraud and *(b)* a decline in the detection of fraud. [1105]

Mr. Heald: I refer the hon. Member to the answer that I gave on 26 October 1995, *Official Report*, column *800*.

There is no evidence that investigation work is less successful, and we believe that the reduction in savings is directly attributable to the preventive measures that we have put in place to prevent and deter instrument of payment fraud.

Child Support Agency

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will update his answer of 13 June 1995, *Official Report*, column *492*, in respect of benefit savings achieved by the Child Support Agency. [1093]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the chief executive, Miss Ann Chant. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Miss Ann Chant to Ms Liz Lynne, dated 22 November 1995:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about benefit savings.

The table attached covers April to September this year. It shows that the Agency has recorded savings of approximately £195.03 million. The total does not cover Housing Benefit and Council Tax benefit savings which will be calculated later in the year.

Category of benefit savings	*Amount £ million*
Resulting from pre-CSA assessments:	
Paid through Agency collection service to Secretary of State	1.57
Resulting from CSA and pre-CSA assessments:	
Paid direct by Absent Parent to Parent with Care	65.69
Resulting from CSA assessments:	
Paid through Agency collection service to Secretary of State	30.16
Deductions from Absent Parents' Income support payments	4.18
Income Support claim cessations:	
Income Support exceeded rate of benefit	4.30
Income Support claim withdrawn within four weeks of CSA action	80.99
Reductions in Family credit or Disability Working Allowance resulting from CSA assessments	8.14
Housing Benefit/Council tax reductions resulting from CSA assessments	Not available
Total	195.03

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will update the monthly breakdown of requirement to co-operate decisions contained in his answer of 26 October 1995, *Official Report*, columns *805–6*, in respect of the Child Support Agency, to include the figures from April 1995 to the most recent month for which figures are available. [1098]

Mr. Mitchell: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the chief executive, Miss Ann Chant. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Miss Ann Chant to Ms Liz Lynne, dated 22 November 1995:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about requirement to co-operate decisions.

You asked for an update of the monthly breakdown of requirement to co-operate decisions contained in his Answer of 26th October 1995, Official Report, columns 805–6, in respect of the Child Support Agency, to include the figures from April 1995 to the most recent month for which figures are available.

The table below provides a breakdown of the outcome of requirement to co-operate investigations completed during each month between April and September 1995. From April 1995, information is now available on the number of reduced benefit directions actually implemented by Benefits Agency rather than the number issued for implementation. We have included this in the table and hope that you will find it more meaningful.

You may wish to know that the majority of the figures shown in the table are contained in the Child Support Agency Statistical Information which is placed in the Library of the House of Commons each month.

Month	*Good Cause Accepted*	*Absent Parent Named*	*Good cause not Accepted*	*Reduced Benefit Direction Implemented*	*Investigations Completed*
April	2,172	490	3,035	2,361	5,697
May	3,119	862	4,212	2,868	8,193
June	3,133	1,584	4,573	2,346	9,290
July	3,289	1,986	4,018	2,011	9,293
August	3,341	2,004	4,331	2,363	9,676
September	3,523	2,312	4,024	2,367	9,859
Total	18,577	9,238	24,193	14,316	52,008

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many telephone calls have been received on the Child Support Agency MP hotline since it started. [1064]

Mr. Mitchell: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the chief executive, Miss Ann Chant. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Miss Ann Chant to Mr. Paddy Tipping, dated 22 November 1995:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about the Child Support Agency MP Hotline.

From its launch on 12 December 1993 to 30 September 1995, 5,230 telephone calls have been answered on the Hotline.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the largest back-dated payment required by the Child Support Agency. [122]

Mr. Mitchell: The information requested could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Asylum Seekers

Ms Abbott: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what research his Department has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated in respect of the effect of the changes to be made on 8 January 1996 on the claiming of benefit by asylum seekers with particular reference to access to housing. [1230]

Mr. Roger Evans: Proposals on social security payments to asylum seekers and other persons from abroad were presented to the Social Security Advisory Committee on 11 October. The committee has carried out a public consultation on these proposals and has received representations from many individuals and organisations, including housing associations and local authorities. The committee is now evaluating those responses and we expect to receive its report in December.

Ms Abbott: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many sponsored immigrants are subject to a signed undertaking as defined in the Immigration Act 1971 given by another person or persons; how many of them are now receiving *(a)* income support, *(b)* housing benefit *(c)* council tax benefit *(d)* family credit *(e)* attendance allowance *(f)* disability living allowance *(g)* disability working allowance *(h)* invalid care allowance and *(i)* severe disablement allowance, indicating in each case the cost to public funds. [1228]

Mr. Evans: The information is not available in the format requested. Separate details of claims to social security benefits by sponsored immigrants are not collected due to the relatively small size of this group.

It is estimated that nearly a half of sponsored immigrants claim income support and that two-thirds of these may also claim housing benefit and council tax benefit.

Sponsorship undertakings are obtained by the Home Office and copies forwarded to the Benefits Agency. The numbers received in the last three years are set out in the table.

Year	*Sponsorship undertakings received*
1993	2,121
1994	1,925
1995 (to 20 November 1995)	1,847

Ms Abbott: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security in respect of those who have claimed income support our the last seven years, in how many cases *(a)* this was due to the death of the sponsor *(b)* this was due to the sponsor being made bankrupt and *(c)* this was because the sponsor had become unemployed. [1229]

Mr. Evans: The information is not available.

Interim Payments

Ms Abbott: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many interim payments have been paid under the Social Security (Payments on Account, Overpayments and Recovery) Regulations 1988 over the last seven years; and how many of these were pending the outcome of an appeal against a benefit refusal. [1231]

Mr. Evans: The information is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Civil Service Code

Mr. Spring: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what progress has been made towards introduction of the proposed civil service code. [2469]

Mr. Freeman: Her Majesty in Council today approved an order extending the functions of the Civil Service Commissioners, empowering them to hear appeals under a civil service code, and to make reports on them.

I shall place a copy of the order in the Libraries of the House as soon as it is available.

Commissioner for Public Appointments

Mr. Spring: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what progress has been made towards the implementation of the Nolan committee's recommendation that a Commissioner for Public Appointments should be appointed. [2470]

Mr. Freeman: Her Majesty in Council today approved orders setting up the office of the Commissioner for Public Appointments and appointing the first office holder.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister today announced the appointment of Sir Leonard Peach, currently chairman of the Police Complaints Authority, as the first Commissioner for Public Appointments. Sir Leonard will take up this part-time appointment on 18 December 1995.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has also appointed Sir Leonard Peach as the Commissioner for Public Appointments in Northern Ireland.

Sir Leonard has also been appointed a Civil Service Commissioner.

I shall arrange for copies of the relevant orders to be placed in the Libraries of the House as soon as they are available.

Central Office of Information

Mr. Butler: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what his plans are for the future of the Central Office of Information. [2767]

Mr. Freeman: I am satisfied that the Central Office of Information should continue as a next steps agency. I have asked the chief executive to make proposals for improving the efficiency of the agency, with the aim of maximising the value that it adds to the procurement of publicity by Government. The outcome should be to streamline COI so as to concentrate on the procurement of services for customer departments, rather than the direct provision of services. The proposals, which will draw on assistance from consultants, will take full account of the views of customer departments and the availability of alternative means of obtaining the services provided by COI. As a first stage, I have decided that from 1 January 1996 the presumption that departments should use COI for advertisement procurement should cease, and departments will be free to make alternative arrangements direct with the industry if they so wish.

I recognise that these changes will result in some reduction in the number of staff employed by COI, which is currently about 470, but I am convinced that a more sharply focused COI will be better able to provide a service to departments which will both meet the needs of Government Departments and secure the best interests of the taxpayer.

Occupational Health and Safety Agency

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster when the Government completed their exploration of how to increase private sector involvement in the Occupational Health and Safety Agency and Recruitment and Assessment Services; and if he will make a statement. [2795]

Mr. Horam: After further consideration in the light of advice from Coopers and Lybrand, the Government have decided to transfer to the private sector both the Occupational Health and Safety Agency and Recruitment and Assessment Services as single viable businesses and in a way that will ensure that they retain their reputation for the provision of high-quality occupational health services and recruitments services respectively. The sale of RAS will include a contract for the fast-stream selection process for future civil servants, specifying the services required. The civil service will retain control over its recruitment.

These agencies have developed well in the last few years, but they are subject to various constraints from having to operate within Government. Privatisation of OHSA and RAS is the best way to secure the long-term interests of the staff and customers of these two businesses, as well as the taxpayer. Once they are freed from these constraints they will be better able to improve their services to existing customers, and to extend their businesses by making their services available to new customers in wider markets.

Formal expressions of interest for these businesses will be sought early in the new year. Financial advisers are being appointed.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Nursery Facilities

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, as representing the House of Commons Commission, what financial provision has been made for the construction of nursery facilities in the Palace of Westminster; and if he will make a statement. [1021]

Mr. Beith: No financial provision has been made for the construction of nursery facilities in the Palace of Westminster. The Commission has from time to time examined the possibilities of establishing an in-House child care facility. However, the Commission has been advised by the Accommodation and Works Committee that the main obstacle is the lack of unallocated accommodation on the Parliamentary estate which is suitable or could be made suitable to comply with the provisions of the Nurseries and Childminders Regulation Act 1948 (as amended 1968).

Telephone and Information Services

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, as representing the House of Commons Commission, if he will make financial provision for hon. Members to be provided with modern telephone and information services to the level of that available to directors and senior managers in leading British and international corporations. [175]

Mr. Beith: The infrastructure for Members' telephone and information services is provided by the House and Members can augment this by means of the office costs allowance. If the hon. Member has a specific suggestion, he should inform the Chairman of the Administration Committee or the Chairman of the Information Committee.

ENVIRONMENT

Building Regulations

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he proposes to introduce new standards under part M of the building regulations, relating to access for people with disabilities. [316]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Over 1,000 responses have been received to the consultation paper on possible changes to part M of the building regulations issued earlier this year. These are being analysed. The Building Regulations

Advisory Committee will consider this analysis in due course and will make recommendations to Ministers on the way forward.

Environmental Technology Industry

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how often he holds meetings with ministerial colleagues at the Department of Trade and Industry with the specific intention of promoting the growth of the environmental industry. [1167]

Mr. Clappison: The Secretary of State and the President of the Board of Trade established the joint environmental markets unit following a meeting they held with the Advisory Committee on Business and the Environment. This DTI-DOE unit assists and encourages United Kingdom firms to exploit growing markets for environmental goods and services, on an on-going basis, and Ministers discuss the issues that arise as a result of the unit's work as and when required.

Mr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how often he has met his European counterparts to discuss the environmental technology industry across Europe in the last 12 months. [1155]

Mr. Clappison: My right hon. Friend has frequent meetings with his European counterparts to discuss a wide range of measures to improve environmental standards. The improvement of such standards will tend to create market opportunities for suppliers of environmental technology and services. Among the many matters discussed at Environment Councils attended by my right hon. Friend in the past 12 months has been the proposed amendment of the LIFE regulation, part of which the aim is to provide financial support for projects demonstrating an innovative use of environmental technology.

Mr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received regarding the level of tax revenue the environmental technology industry has contributed to the Treasury in the past five years. [1166]

Mr. Clappison: My right hon. Friend has received no such representations.

Mr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what formal arrangements exist to assist co-operation between his Department and the Department for Education and Employment in relation to the environment technology industry. [1156]

Mr. Clappison: There are no such arrangements specifically related to the environmental technology industry. However, there is close co-operation between the Departments on improvement of the environmental content of education at all levels from primary school to university, and on development of environmental national vocational qualifications. This will promote greater environmental awareness among today's and tomorrow's industrial management and work force, and so in turn improve the climate for the environmental supply industry.

Temporary Accommodation

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of Start for the Environment what is the average annual cost to a local authority of keeping a family of four in *(a)* local authority accommodation and *(b)* temporary bed and breakfast accommodation. [1196]

Mr. Curry: The information requested is not available.

Coal Mining Accidents

Mr. Clapham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the number of *(a)* fatal and *(b)* serious reportable accidents per 100.000 manshifts recorded by companies contracted to the main deep coal mining operators. [1176]

Sir Paul Beresford: This information is not available. The Health and Safety Executive does not compile accident rates for comparing contractors to the main deep coal mine operators.

Mr. Clapham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the number of *(a)* fatal and *(b)* serious reportable accidents per 100.000 manshifts in the deep coal mining industry in the fist 10 months of (i) 1995 and (ii) 1994. [1174]

Sir Paul Beresford: The information is not yet available for 1995.

Information for 1994 is as follows:

	Fatal	*Major injury*
1 January 1994–31 December 1994	0.05	3.01

Health and Safety Laboratory

Mr. Marland: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if the Health and Safety Executive has begun its review of the health and safety laboratory. [2401]

Sir Paul Beresford: Following the efficiency scrutiny of public sector research establishments and the Government response, Cm 2991, a prior options review of the health and safety laboratory is now under way. The review is being led by HSE's chief scientist, Dr. J. McQuaid. It is due to be completed by March 1996.

Empty Government Property

Mr. John Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what targets have been set to reduce the number of empty Government homes. [2797]

Mr. Curry: The Government are determined to cut the number of empty homes, whether they are owned by local councils, housing associations, private individuals or Whitehall Departments. An empty home is a wasted asset.

Last year nearly 4,000 empty Government homes were brought back into use or sold. We are now building on the progress already made by setting targets for 1995–96 that aim to reduce the number of empty properties and the length of time that they remain empty.

The targets are as follows:

Department	Total stock (1 April 1995)	Empty (1 April 1995)	Empty as percentage (1 April 1995)	Target for percentage empty (1 April 1996)	Target for percentage empty for more than six months that could be lived in or made habitable[1] (1 April 1996)
Department of Transport	3,511	1,028	29.7	[2]<25	<9
Home Office	4,023	455	11.3	<11	<3
Scottish Office	1,481 [3]251	162 [3]44	10.9 [3]17.5	— [2, 3]<10	— [3]<3
Welsh Office	239	62	25.9	<3	<3
Ministry of Defence	70,586	12,699	18	By 1 April 1996 to dispose of 1,500 homes	By summer 1996 to dispose of 4,000 homes

Notes:
[1] Properties that "could be lived in or made habitable" includes all properties except:
(a) derelict properties that await demolition (e.g. to make way for road schemes);
(b) those that are expected to be demolished in the near future where the expenditure required to make them habitable would be disproportionate to their expected life (e.g. where substantial investment would be required to connect essential services, such as water, sewage or electricity);
(c) those that cannot be made accessible (e.g. due to adjacent construction work).
[2] The Department of Transport target for percentage empty that could be lived in or made habitable (as defined in note [1] above) is <15 per cent. On the same basis, the target for Scottish Office is <3 per cent.
[3] Excludes NHS properties in England and Scotland. These are surveyed every two or three years. A survey in England is in progress now, and when the results are available targets will be set to cover the period until the next surveys.

Central Manchester Development Corporation

Mr. Dover: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when Central Manchester development corporation will be wound up; and if he will make a statement. [2799]

Mr. Curry: Statutory orders will be laid before Parliament early next year to effect the wind up and dissolution of Central Manchester development corporation. Subject to parliamentary approval, the corporation will cease to act from 1 April 1996, except for the purpose of preparing its final accounts and report and winding up its affairs. The corporation will be dissolved on 1 July 1996.

Urban development corporations were set up, with finite lifetimes, to regenerate their designated areas. Since designation on 30 June 1988, Central Manchester development corporation has encouraged and grant aided private sector development and undertaken substantial environmental improvements, which have helped to stimulate new jobs and new life in the city.

By the end of its lifetime, the corporation expects to have reclaimed 39 hectares of land, created 194,000 sqm of commercial floor space, 2,730 housing units, 6,400 permanent jobs and attracted £370 million of private sector investment. The corporation has transformed large parts of the city, which will continue to benefit well into the next century.

Council Tax

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what would be the effect of a 4 per cent. increase in council tax on *(a)* the total yield of council tax in Great Britain, *(b)* the total yield of council tax in England, *(c)* the average bill in England, *(d)* council tax benefit, *(e)* the retail prices index and *(f)* index linked benefits. [1478]

Mr. Gummer *[holding answer 21 November 1995]:* The information relating to Wales and Scotland is the responsibility of my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Wales and Scotland.

If council taxes in England had increased in 1995–96 by an additional 4 per cent. compared with actual levels, the approximate effect is estimated as follows:

(b) Gross yield of council tax: increase of £890 million.

(c) Average Band C bill, before Council Tax Benefit or Transitional Relief: increase from £541 to £563.

(d) Council tax benefit: increase of £85 million.

(e) The increase would add around 0.1 percentage points to the percentage change over 12 months in the all items retail prices index.

(f) The precise effect on those benefits linked to the retail prices index would depend on whether this marginal change was sufficient to trigger an increase in benefit levels. As an approximate guide, an additional 0.1 percentage points on the rate of inflation would add around £40 million to the cost of those benefits in a full year. There would be no effect on those income related benefits which are usually linked to the Rossi index.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Research Establishments

Mr. Hawkins: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement about the forthcoming prior options reviews of MAFF research establishments. [2474]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The Government announced on 29 September 1995 that all public sector research establishments would be subject to prior options reviews, and that a timetable would be made available shortly.

The Central Science Laboratory, Horticulture Research International and the Directorate of Fisheries Research will be reviewed immediately. The R and D conducted

by ADAS will be reviewed on the same timetable. The Veterinary Laboratories Agency will be reviewed between early next year and July 1996.

MAFF establishments will be reviewed alongside establishments parented or sponsored by other Government Departments which are carrying out work in similar or related fields.

Comments from interested parties would be welcome. These should be sent to:

T. D. Rossington
Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food
Room 806
Nobel House
17 Smith Square
London
SW1P 3JR

Comments on the Central Science Laboratory, Horticulture Research International, the Directorate of Fisheries Research and ADAS research and development should be sent by 8 January 1996. Comments on the Veterinary Laboratories Agency should be sent by 1 April 1996.

Animal Species

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to make a report on his consultations with legal experts and scientists about Torry research and development projects, and the Bartlett-Davidson patent relating to patenting of DNA nucleotides sequencing for identification of animal species; and if he will make a statement. [59]

Mrs. Browning: I am still not in a position to make a statement.

Valley Factory, Rhydymwyn

Mr. Hanson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was his Department's financial contribution to the Drivers Jonas report and the joint report with Delyn borough council and the Welsh Development Agency on the valley factory at Rhydymwyn, Clwyd. [595]

Mr. Boswell: The Ministry's financial contribution to Dames and Moore and Drivers Jonas for the preparation of the environmental assessment was approximately £65,000. The current site remediation study with Delyn borough council and the Welsh Development Agency will be jointly funded by the Ministry and the WDA. It has been agreed that the Ministry and the WDA will each bear one half of the total cost of the assessment. The Ministry's share is likely to amount to around £50,000. It has further been agreed that the Ministry and the WDA will each recompense one half of Delyn borough council's reasonable staff costs incurred in this study. Estimated costs are not yet available.

Farmers' Wives

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will commission a study into the social and economic role played by farmers' wives; and if he will make a statement. [58]

Mr. Boswell: The important role played by farmers' spouses in farming enterprises is widely and very fully acknowledged within the industry and elsewhere. We doubt that a study of the kind suggested would do other than reinforce that view and have no plans for one at present.

Grant Payments (Fraud)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list, to date and by region, the number of farmers who have been prosecuted for alleged criminal fraud in respect of payments of grants for renovating hedgerows and banks; what has been the result of the prosecutions; what effect unsuccessful prosecutions have had on subsequent grant payments; and if he will make a statement. [60]

Mr. Boswell: Earlier this year, a group of 19 cases in the south-west involving false claims for grant on hedges under the farm and conservation grant scheme were listed for prosecution. Two of these cases were heard by the Crown court. They resulted in acquittals. In the second of these cases, it was held that there was insufficient evidence to prove criminal dishonesty. In the light of this, the remaining 17 cases were withdrawn. However, where, as in these cases, grant has been claimed in breach of the scheme's rules, we will seek to recover grant to which farmers are not entitled. We are taking action to do so. Other grant claims from the farmers concerned will be dealt with on their own merits in the usual way.

Live Animal Exports

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many sheep and lambs have been exported to date this year to *(a)* the Netherlands and *(b)* Belgium; and how many sheep and lambs were exported to each of these two countries in (i) 1993 and (ii) 1994. [1604]

Mr. Boswell: For the purposes of trade statistics, Belgium and Luxembourg are treated as one single entity. Official overseas trade statistics for the number of live sheep and lambs exported from the United Kingdom to the Netherlands and Belgium-Luxembourg are as follows:

Thousand head

	1993	*[1]1994*	*1995 January to July* [1,2]
Netherlands	41	95	12
Belgium-Luxembourg	109	128	17

[1] Provisional.
[2] Exports of live sheep and lambs to the Netherlands and Belgium-Luxembourg are highly seasonal. Therefore January to July figures, the best available, should not be considered indicative of the eventual annual totals for 1995.

Energy Efficiency

Mr. Battle: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what progress has been made towards cutting energy consumption in Government buildings for which he has responsibility in each year since 1990. [1442]

Mr. Boswell: For the Department's performance for the years 1990–91 to 1993–94, I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer given on 17 May 1995, *Official Report*,

column 260. In 1994–95 MAFF's energy costs per square metre for the main estate rose by 3 per cent. above the 1990–91 base year figure, compared with an increase of 5 per cent. in 1993–94. Energy costs for laboratories increased by 29 per cent. and those for the depots decreased by 26 per cent. from the base year figures.

Under the returns for Government's energy campaign, the Department cannot discount the IT equipment that has been installed throughout MAFF since 1990–91; or the new research buildings—which are high energy users—required to meet statutory requirements at our laboratories, replacing rudimentary predecessors; or the growth in business activities.

The Department continues to take steps aimed at reducing energy consumption through the investment of energy schemes and the promotion of awareness campaigns for staff.

Potato Imports (Brown Rot)

Mr. Harris: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, if he will make a statement on Government action to be taken to deal with imports of potatoes infected with brown rot. [2389]

Mr. Boswell: Measures have been adopted at Community level to deal with the reported outbreak of brown rot in the Netherlands. They place stringent requirements on the Dutch authorities to ensure the safe disposal of potatoes from infected farms. To supplement these measures, the Government have introduced a statutory requirement for prior notification of all intended imports of Dutch potatoes—including seed, ware and potatoes for processing—in order to ensure that this trade can be monitored effectively. The legislation has also been strengthened to give wider powers to inspectors to control the disposal of Dutch potatoes, and we will be maintaining a high level of surveillance on this trade through inspections of consignments and laboratory testing.

Deregulation

Sir Michael Grylls: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the deregulation measures agreed by his Department during 1995. [284]

Mr. Boswell *[holding answer 22 November 1995]:* The Ministry has a positive and long-standing commitment to deregulation, which has been developed during 1995. The Agricultural Tenancies Act 1995 greatly simplified the rules relating to agricultural tenancies and now enables landlords and tenants to agree terms which reflect their own particular needs. Two draft deregulation orders, under the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act 1994, have been laid to lift reporting burdens under the Corn Returns Act 1882 and in relation to slaughterhouses legislation. Other deregulatory measures include reducing the requirements relating to marking of pigs and simplifying the arrangements for licensing of poultry slaughtermen. Steps have also been taken to exempt cold stores handling packaged meat from meat inspection regulations. By 1 January 1996, we expect to repeal or simplify a significant series of national measures relating to food composition and food additives.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 23 November. [1490]

The Prime Minister: This morning I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Lockerbie

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will discuss with President Clinton on his forthcoming visit to Britain, the issue of supporting a trial, in the Hague, under Scottish rules of evidence, under a Scottish judge, of the Libyan suspects accused of the bombing of Pan Am 103 over Lockerbie. [1633]

The Prime Minister: I have no plans to do so.

National Lottery

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Prime Minister what considerations led him to commit national lottery funds to the development of competitive sport. [1795]

The Prime Minister: National lottery funds are not committed or distributed by the Government. Parliament decided that 20 per cent. of the funds for good causes should go to sport. The sports councils decide how much of that should go to the development of competitive sport.

French Nuclear Tests

Mr. Cox: To ask the Prime Minister how many letters he has received *(a)* supporting and *(b)* opposing his views on the French Government's nuclear tests which are currently taking place. [1667]

The Prime Minister: I have nothing further to add to the answer that I gave to the hon. Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn) on 20 November, *Official Report*, column 25.

TRANSPORT

Oil Spillages

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what action he is taking to reduce oil spillages at sea. [120]

Mr. Norris: My Department devotes considerable resources to reducing oil discharges at sea through the enforcement of international discharge regulations, the detection of vessels which breach those regulations and the deterrence of illegal discharges. We are also working with the International Maritime Organisation to make the discharge requirements more stringent.

Driving Licences

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the possibility of including photographs on the driving licence; and what plans he has to do so. [1488]

Mr. Norris: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave the hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Bar (Mr. Rooker) on 16 October, *Official Report*, column *73*.

Railways (Expenditure)

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list for each of the last five years the total amount of subsidy to the rail system; and what is his projection for each of the next five years. [50]

Mr. Watts: Regarding the total amount of subsidy in the last five years. I refer the hon. Member to the answer that I gave the hon. Member for Truro (Mr. Taylor) on 7 November 1995 *Official Report*, column *769*.

The level of public funding needed for the railways in the next five years will depend on the bids for franchises received by the franchising director. The Government believe that privatisation will bring improvements to efficiency and services. All these factors will affect the level of funding required by the railways.

Truck Access Grants

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the number of applications he has received for track access grants for services in *(a)* England, *(b)* Scotland and *(c)* Wales; and if he will indicate what number he has approved. [1227]

Mr. Watts: We have received 14 track access grant applications. Five were for traffic in England, four for Scotland and five for Wales. One has been approved. Two applications have been rejected and one withdrawn.

Light Rail Funding

Mr. Sheldon: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on light rail funding; and what assessment he has made of the benefits of Greater Manchester passenger transport authority's plans to extend Metrolink to Ashton under Lyne via the proposed national stadium site. [1746]

Mr. Norris: The Government fund light rail schemes out of the budget for local transport schemes, through the package approach. A separate budget for light rail does not exist, and such schemes can proceed only at the expense of other transport projects, both in the same area and in other parts of the country.

My support of light rail schemes is dependent on the following: whether the scheme can be demonstrated to be the right and most cost-effective solution to a particular urban transport problem; whether it has been planned within the context of a strategy or transport package to achieve mode shift away from the private car; and whether it will attract private sector investment. It should be remembered, however, that light rail is not the only solution to urban transport problems, and the difficulties and costs associated with developing schemes should not be underestimated.

We have not yet seen the economic case for the Metrolink extension to Ashton under Lyne, and I understand that Greater Manchester passenger transport executive has yet to apply for powers for this scheme under the Transport and Works Act 1992. Any progress with this extension will depend on the priority attached to it by the Greater Manchester local authorities and the availability of resources.

Railfreight Distribution

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he is considering a joint public-private venture for Railfreight Distribution as an alternative to privatisation; and if he will make a statement. [1463]

Mr. Watts: No.

Railway Timetables

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what provisions exist for ensuring that local bus operators are informed as early as possible of changes to railway timetables. [383]

Mr. Watts: The provision of railway timetable information to bus operators is a matter for train operators and Railtrack. The railway industry is planning the development of a comprehensive national train information service intended to deliver accurate, consistent and impartial information services which will be available to third parties.

Passenger Rail Services

Ms Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what studies his Department has commissioned into the relative costs of operating passenger railway services *(a)* by the franchises, *(b)* by the British Railways Board. [1273]

Mr. Watts: No studies have been commissioned. The franchising director has statutory responsibility for awarding franchises. In doing so he must satisfy a number of statutory duties and objectives, including the requirements to ensure good value for money in the provision of franchised services and to encourage competition in the railway industry.

Severn Bridge (Tolls)

Mr. Charles Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will express the average toll charge per mile for a car in respect of the new Severn bridge crossing; and if he will make a statement. [236]

Mr. Watts *[holding answer 21 November 1995]:* I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. Charles Kennedy, dated 23 November 1995:

As you know, the Minister for Railways and Roads, Mr. John Watts, has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about average toll charges per mile for a car in respect of the new Severn bridge crossing.

The toll charges for the new Severn crossing will be the same as for the existing Severn bridge. For Category 1 Vehicles, that is motor cars and motor caravans, the toll charge per vehicle is at present £3.70. From 1 January 1996 the toll charge for motor cars will increase to £3.80 per vehicle.

The toll level is not generally expressed as a charge per mile. However, the new Severn crossing, which is due to open in 1996, will be approximately 3 miles long and the average charge per mile for cars will therefore be about £1.27.

I hope this is helpful.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

Aid for Trade Provisions

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the impact on the British economy of that overseas aid which is tied to purchase of British goods; and if he will make a statement. [1540]

Mr. Hanley: We have recently conducted an assessment of the impact on the British economy of that overseas aid procurement which is tied to purchase of British goods. The assessment concluded that the overall impact was very small. The United Kingdom will remain at the forefront of efforts to encourage untying on a multilateral basis.

Least Developed Countries

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what percentage of *(a)* bilateral and *(b)* multilateral aid the United Kingdom allocates to those least developed countries which have a per capita gross national product of less than $750 US per year. [1550]

Mr. Hanley: It is not practicable to allocate aid channelled through multilateral agencies, nor some bilateral aid—notably block grants to NGOs and other agencies—to specific recipient countries.

Of United Kingdom 1994–95 bilateral aid which can be allocated to countries, for all recipients, both developing and transitional:

36 per cent. went to countries on the UN's list of Least developed countries (LLDCs)

69 per cent. went to low income countries (defined as those with per capita incomes of less than US$676 in 1992)

For developing country recipients only the equivalent figures are 38 per cent. and 73 per cent. respectively.

GDP (Overseas Aid)

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what percentage of annual gross domestic product the United Kingdom spent on overseas aid in each year since 1985. [1547]

Mr. Hanley: The ratio normally used to relate aid to the size of the economy is net official development assistance as a percentage of gross national product. Figures for the United Kingdom since 1985 are as follows:

Year	*UK net oda as a percentage of GNP*
1985	0.33
1986	0.31
1987	0.28
1988	0.32
1989	0.31
1990	0.27
1991	0.32
1992	0.31
1993	0.31
1994	0.31

Sri Lanka

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what measures have been taken by the international community to provide humanitarian assistance to Tamil people in the Jaffna peninsula of Sri Lanka. [1618]

Mr. Hanley: The international community is supporting the efforts of those relief agencies providing emergency shelter, health, water and sanitation, and supplementing food rations to those affected by the conflict. With regard to the United Kingdom's contribution, I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Ilford, South (Mr. Gapes) on 22 November *Official Report*, column *111*. In addition, the UK share of recent European Community emergency aid is some £138,000.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Energy Efficiency

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress has been made towards cutting energy consumption in Government buildings for which he has responsibility in each year since 1990. [1443]

Mr. Hanley: We are actively pursuing an energy efficiency implementation programme with a view to meeting the Government's aim to reduce energy consumption by 15 per cent. by March 1996. Measured by input over output, a reduction of 11.85 per cent. of electricity consumption and 15 per cent. of gas consumption has been achieved from 1990 to March 1995.

European Court of Human Rights

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many judgments handed down by the European Court of Human Rights have gone *(a)* in favour of and *(b)* against each member country; and if he will make a statement. [1525]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: A list containing the information requested follows:

European court of human rights—comparative table of violations

State party	*Cases where violations found at 6 October 1995*	*Cases where no violations found (Council of Europe Reference Charts published for 1995)*
Austria	28	12
Belgium	20	7
Bulgaria	0	0
Cyprus	1	0
Czech Republic	0	0
Denmark	2	3
Finland	2	1
France	33	10
Germany	12	16
Greece	7	0
Hungary	0	0
Iceland	2	0
Ireland	6	1

European court of human rights—comparative table of violations

State party	*Cases where violations found at 6 October 1995*	*Cases where no violations found (Council of Europe Reference Charts published for 1995)*
Italy	84	11
Liechtenstein	0	0
Luxembourg	1	0
Malta	1	0
Netherlands	23	4
Norway	1	0
Poland	0	0
Portugal	6	1
Romania	0	0
San Marino	0	0
Slovakia	0	0
Slovenia	0	0
Spain	7	2
Sweden	21	1
Switzerland	14	8
Turkey	2	0
United Kingdom	37	19

Guatemala

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the British contribution to the MINUGUA UN mission in Guatemala; and what is his policy towards the future of this mission. [1623]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: The MINUGUA mission is funded from the UN regular budget. The United Kingdom contribution to MINUGUA, based on our assessed contributions, will be approximately US$ 1.4 million for the period 1 October 1994 to 31 December 1995.

The UK co-sponsored a resolution at the UN General Assembly on 14 September 1995 to extend MINUGUA by six months, until 18 March 1996.

Sri Lanka

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent meetings diplomatic officials have held with human rights and political groupings in Sri Lanka. [1620]

Mr. Hanley: British diplomatic officials in London and Colombo have frequent contacts with human rights organisations and a wide range of political parties and groups.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Royal Ordnance

Mr. Cohen: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what investigation his Department has made into the allegation made in a German court that Royal Ordnance staff provided false end-user certificates for the German company Heckler and Koch, prior to its purchase of the company, and re-exported the guns abroad; and if he will make a statement. [1143]

Mr. Oppenheim: The allegations made during the court case, including that referred to by the hon. Member, were pursued with Royal Ordnance and assurances were received from the company to the satisfaction of my Department.

Public Interest Immunity Certificates

Mr. Cohen: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list all those in his Department who have authority to issue public interest immunity certificates; how many such certificates have been issued in each of the last five years; and what were the main reasons for them. [1395]

Mr. Lang: A claim to public interest immunity relating to departmental documents or information is normally made by the appropriate Minister.

My Department's records show that, since April 1992, 22 public interest immunity certificates have been signed by Ministers of this Department, five of which did not need to be deployed. The annual breakdown is as follows:

1992: 4 (from April)

1993: 8

1994: 6

1995: 4 (to date)

No central record is kept of certificates issued before April 1992.

The certificates were issued to protect a range of classes of information, in particular the formulation of Government policy, the internal dealings of Government Departments, the operation of the Security and Intelligence Services, and confidential information and advice obtained in connection with the Department's regulatory or statutory functions.

Sustainable Energy

Mr. Frank Cook: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if it is his policy to require companies taking over regional electricity companies' assurances in respect of the protection of small companies generating electricity by sustainable means; and what assurances have so far been given. [1606]

Mr. Eggar: The five-year transitional arrangements for those generators which supplied regional electricity companies under extended Energy Act terms ended in March 1995. A public electricity supplier's obligation under the non-fossil fuel obligation are not affected by changes in the ownership of that public electricity supplier.

Mr. Frank Cook: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what measures he is taking to protect small independent companies generating electricity by sustainable means following the opening up of the electricity market. [1605]

Mr. Eggar: Those renewable generating stations with NFFO contracts will not be affected by the liberalisation of the electricity market until their NFFO contracts with the regional electricity companies end. Renewable generating stations without NFFO contracts will have the opportunity to benefit from the freedom to supply end-users in small niche markets, at a price that may be related to the electricity retail price as opposed to the

wholesale price at which licensed electricity suppliers purchase electricity. I understand that OFFER and the electricity pool are considering the possibility of simplified arrangements to enable embedded generators to sell electricity without the requirement to become pool members.

Insider Dealing

Mr. Cousins: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the number of potential insider dealing offences *(a)* considered by the stock exchange surveillance group, *(b)* referred by that group to his Department, *(c)* investigated or prosecuted by his Department or by the stock exchange and *(d)* resulting in a conviction in each year since 1988. [541]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The information sought by the hon. Member is contained in my Department's report on companies published annually by HMSO. For convenience I provide a compendium of information derived from reports from 1988–89 to 1994–95. The stock exchange reviews transactions ahead of all price-sensitive announcements on a routine basis. Where evidence of insider dealing is suspected a referral is made to the Department. The tables include such referrals.

Prosecutions for contraventions of the company securities (insider dealing) Act 1985

	1989–89	*1989–90*	*1990–91*	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*
Prosecutions pending at beginning of year							
Following S177 enquiry	2	5	1	12	9	[1]—	[1]—
Total	6	10	2	13	9	—	—
Prosecutions started							
Following S177 enquiry	3	4	11	2	6	[1]—	[1]—
Total	6	7	13	2	6	—	—
Convictions							
Following S177 enquiry	—	3	—	3	[2]4	2	—
Total	—	4	2	3	[3]5+	2	—
Acquittals							
Following S177 enquiry	—	2	—	2	2	5	—
Total	1	9	—	5	2	6	—
Prosecutions pending at end of year							
Following S177 enquiry	5	1	12	9	1	[1]—	[1]—
Total	10	2	13	9	1	—	—

[1] This information was not included in the 1993–94 Companies Annual Report or subsequently.
[2] Includes three convictions acquitted on appeal in 1994–95.
[3] Includes one conviction acquitted on appeal in 1993–94.

Investigations under section 177 of the financial services act 1986

	1988–89	*1989–90*	*1990–91*	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*
Cases referred by the London stock exchange for consideration	33	21	8	11	5	17	13
Cases in hand at the beginning of the year	15	14	16	9	4	2	6
Appointment of inspectors	12	12	4	3	1	5	6
Final reports submitted by inspectors	13	10	11	8	3	1	7
Cases in hand at the end of the year	14	16	9	4	2	6	5

Chemical Weapons Bill

Mr. Cousins: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the names of those individuals or organisations making representations to his Department on the draft Chemical Weapons Bill; and if he will place all such representations except for parts that may be commercially confidential in the Library. [538]

Mr. Oppenheim: On 19 July my Department circulated 500 copies of a draft Bill, and invited comments. A revised draft Bill, taking account of all the views received, was published on 2 November.

In general, industry representatives indicated that they were in agreement with the provisions of the Bill. Other views emphasised the need for the operations of the DTI as national authority to be transparent, that it should be accountable, and that the Crown should be bound by the provisions of the Bill. However, those people and organisations who responded had no reason to expect that their names, or individual views, would be made public. In view of this it would not be proper to place their representations in the Library of the House.

Environmental Research

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what his Department has spent on research and development within the environmental industry in each year since 1992–93. [1160]

Mr. Ian Taylor: The Department has supported research and development on technologies with a specific environmental function as follows:

	£ million
1992–93	2.09
1993–94	2.05
1994–95	1.49
Total	5.63

In the same period my Department spent £69.9 million on new and renewable technologies and £19.7 million on clean coal technologies.

Some of the research and development supported under general DTI programmes, such as SMART—small firms merit award for research and technology—SPUR—support for products under research—Link and EUREKA, and through the OST's funding of the research councils, will also be relevant to the environmental technology industries.

National Phoneday

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what discussions officials of his Department have had with British Telecom relating to the impact of national phoneday on the service being delivered to users of the telephone network. [1743]

Mr. Ian Taylor: Numbering issues are the responsibility of the Director General of Telecommunications. My officials have not met BT to discuss the impact of the phoneday changes.

Telephone Dialling Codes

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what figures his Department has received from British Telecom relating to the number of users of the telephone network making calls erroneously using the old national dialling codes; and if he will make it his policy for these figures to be published. [1742]

Mr. Taylor: My Department has not received any figures from BT relating to the number of wrongly dialled calls. Any decision on a policy of publishing such figures would be a matter for the Director General of Telecommunications. However, OFTEL has conducted a customer survey which revealed that the vast majority, 85 per cent. of those surveyed, did not find the changes a significant problem.

Poppy Appeal

Mr. Harvey: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the prevention of sub-post offices from selling British Legion scratchcards for the poppy appeal. [1002]

Mr. Oppenheim: This is an operational matter for the Post Office.

Pearl Assurance

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what investigations his Department is carrying out into complaints made against Pearl Assurance's handling of insurance claims. [123]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The Department does not comment on matters relating to individual companies.

Exports

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what Government financial assistance is available to exporters of *(a)* civilian goods and *(b)* military equipment. [1568]

Mr. Oppenheim: My Department, together with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, offers a full range of assistance of all types to exporting companies through Overseas Trade Services. Details of these services are contained in the British Overseas Trade Board's annual report and forward plan, a copy of which is available in the Library of the House. In addition, support to civil and military exporters is available through the Export Credits Guarantee Department.

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if it is the practice of his Department to make an assessment of the loss of earnings by British exporters, excluding military equipment, which may be caused as a result of war or internal conflict. [1569]

Mr. Oppenheim: My Department, together with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, alerts British exporters to potential difficulties in repatriation of export earnings that may occur as a result of war or internal conflicts abroad. Further action is then a matter for the individual companies. We have no central figures for the total amount involved in loss of earnings as a result of such actions.

Regional Selective Assistance

Mr. Pearson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many awards of regional selective assistance, and of what value, have been made to firms in the Dudley metropolitan borough in each of the past five years. [581]

Mr. Oppenheim: The number of offers, and value of regional selective assistance made to businesses in the Dudley metropolitan borough over the past five years is shown in the table:

Local authority district—Dudley	*Number of approvals*	*Grant approved £ thousands*
1 April 1990–31 March 1991	30	1,325
1 April 1991–31 March 1992	19	693
1 April 1992–31 March 1993	16	616
1 April 1993–31 March 1994	22	1,175
1 April 1994–31 March 1995	33	1,253

In the current year the number of offers and value of assistance has been:

Local authority district—Dudley	*Number of approvals*	*Grant approved £ thousands*
1 April 1995 to 31 October 1995	31	1,184

Mr. Morgan: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what sum was originally provided for regional selective assistance in 1994–95; and what was the eventual figure. [1327]

Mr. Oppenheim *[holding answer 21 November 1995]:* The estimate for regional selective assistance in 1994–95 was £101.2 million. Actual expenditure was £113.1 million.

The figures are available respectively in the Government's expenditure plans 1995–96 to 1997–98 and the Industrial Development Act annual report.

Local Government

Mr. Vaz: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the Acts of Parliament and Consolidation Acts that affect local government that have been introduced by his Department since January 1994. [41]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The following Acts of Parliament that affect local government have been introduced by this Department since January 1994:

The Deregulation and Contracting Out Act 1994

The Coal Industry Act 1994

The Trade Marks Act 1994

The Gas Act 1995

Nigeria

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the dates and location of conferences supported by the British Government to encourage British investment and trade with Nigeria since 18 November 1993; what plans his Department has to support further events in Nigeria or in Britain; and if he will make a statement on his Department's support for such ventures in the future. [1207]

Mr. Oppenheim *[holding answer 21 November 1995]:* Officials of my Department have taken part in seminars on trading with Nigeria since 18 November 1993 that have been organised by the following:

February 1994: Bristol Chamber of Commerce

May 1994: Kent Export Forum

August 1994: Sheffield Mining Forum

October 1994: London Chamber of Commerce/BEAMA

November 1994: Thames Valley Export Forum

June 1995: Thames Valley Export Forum

July 1995: Energy Council

October 1995: Nigeria-British Chamber of Commerce.

My Department has also organised within this time five general "Opportunity Africa" seminars which have featured presentations on Nigeria.

Support has been offered to the London, Bristol and Kent chambers of commerce for outward missions to Nigeria planned for next year.

My Department has scaled down the level of its promotional activity in recent years because of the political and economic situation in Nigeria. We will continue to keep the level of activity under review. However, it remains our policy to support UK companies in their efforts to secure business in what remains an important market.

Patent Office

Mr. Ingram: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the consultants currently engaged in examining the work of the Patent Office indicating the cost of each of the studies involved. [1202]

Mr. Ian Taylor *[holding answer 21 November 1995]:* Two firms of consultants are engaged by the Patent Office to help on possible contractorisation projects. They are Marketing Improvements Group plc and Coopers and Lybrand. The total cost of this work to date is £108,945 plus expenses. The three projects are the Office's information technology services, its marketing and awareness programmes, and the operations of its London front office. The overall annual costs of these are £5.888 million, £1.608 million and £1.125 million respectively.

EU Industry Council

Mr. Barnes: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the outcome of the European Union Industry Council, held on 6 to 7 November listing all votes and all decisions which were determined by unanimity or without dissension. [439]

Mr. Eggar *[holding answer 20 November 1995]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North (Mr. Thompson) on 21 November 1995, *Official Report*, column *71*.

Manufacturing Employment

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what percentage of total manufacturing employment in the United Kingdom was in foreign-owned companies in each year since 1974. [1516]

Mr. Oppenheim *[holding answer 22 November 1995]:* The information required is given in the following list:

Percentage of United Kingdom manufacturing employment in foreign-owned companies:

1975: 13.0

1977: 14.7

1979: 15.0

1981: 14.9

1983: 14.5

1884: 14.8

1985: 14.0

1986: 13.0

1987: 13.4

1988: 13.1

1989: 14.9
1990: 16.1
1991: 17.2
1992: 18.1

Note:
1992 figures are the latest available.
Prior to 1983 figures were only collected bi-annually.

Source
Annual Census of Production: CSO Business Monitor PA1002.

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what percentage of total manufacturing employment was in foreign-owned companies in each of the EU and OECD countries in the latest available year. [1517]

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 22 November 1995]:* According to the annual census of production 18 per cent. of United Kingdom manufacturing employment was attributed to foreign-owned companies in 1992, the latest year for which data are available. No comparable data are available for other EU and OECD countries.

Departmental Staffing

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many staff employed in his Department are *(a)* on short-term contracts, *(b)* employed for less than a year, *(c)* employed in the press office and *(d)* employed in his private offices. [1514]

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 22 November 1995]:* On 1 October 1995 my Department employed 435 staff on short-term contracts—employed on a casual basis for up to a period of 12 months, but exceptionally up to two years. There are currently 243 staff who have been employed for less than a year, including staff on loan from other Government Departments but excluding staff in this category who transferred from the Department of Employment and Cabinet Office as part of the machinery of Government changes announced on 5 July 1995. There are currently 28 staff employed in the press office and 53 staff employed in Ministers' private offices.

Mr. Byers: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many staff his Department employs on a regional basis in each standard English region, what is the cost of running these regional operations, what was the total budget for each region in 1994–95; and what are the main purposes for which the budget is used. [269]

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 22 November 1995]:* Disaggregated information on the basis of standard English regions is not available. However, information on the Department of Trade and Industry's regional staff in Government offices for the regions and related budgets and activities is provided in GO MINIS 1, copies of which were placed in the Library of the House in July 1995.

Coal Mines (Accidents)

Mr. Clapham: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the number of *(a)* fatal and *(b)* serious reportable accidents per 100,000 manshifts recorded by each of the coal companies operating deep mines which were previously publicly owned in the first 10 months of 1995. [1175]

Sir Paul Beresford: I have been asked to reply.

The Health and Safety Executive does not compile accident rates for individual companies or mines.

Temazepam

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what requirements a pharmaceutical wholesaler must fulfil in order to obtain an export licence for Temazepam. [1538]

Mr. Maclean: I have been asked to reply.

Additional controls to prevent diversion from the legitimate trade in Temazepam will be introduced shortly. These will include a requirement for import and export licences.

Emergency Admissions

Mr. Cohen: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what change has occurred in respect of the level of emergency admissions to hospitals in the current year; and if he will make a statement. [1152]

Mr. Sackville: I have been asked to reply.

The latest year for which figures are available is 1993–94. In that year, total admissions were 8,286,515, of which 3,833,498—46.3 per cent.—were emergency admissions. In 1992–93, total admissions were 7,873,219, of which 3,640,896—46.2 per cent.—were emergency admissions.

DEFENCE

Army Training

Mr. Sweeney: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about his plans for the support and administration of the Army's training areas and ranges. [2476]

Mr. Soames: As part of the Government's competing for quality programme, the Commander-in-Chief Land Command has initiated a study into the way in which administration and support services are provided to the 100 or so Army training areas and ranges in England, Scotland and Wales for which he is responsible. The aim of the study is to explore the extent to which these support services might be provided more efficiently and at a reduced cost as a result of being exposed to competition. The study will last for about six months and its results will be reported to the House.

HMS Renown

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what is the current cost per annum of maintaining HMS Renown; and if he will make a statement on her future; [2057]

(2) where HMS Renown is currently stationed. [2058]

Mr. Soames: The cost of operating HMS Renown in 1994–95, the last year for which figures are available, was approximately £29 million. This figure includes the cost of manpower, maintenance and stores. Renown is no longer required to form part of our deterrent force and will in due course move from her current berth at Faslane to Rosyth to await decommissioning.

Army Surgeons

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what estimate he has made of the number of regular Army surgeons required to meet current commitments; [2056]

(2) what is his estimate for the total number of Army surgeons who will be employed by his Department in each of the next five years. [2055]

Mr. Soames: The number of trained deployable Regular Army surgeons—comprising the disciplines of general surgery, opthalmics, burns and plastics, maxillo-facial and ear, nose and throat—oto-rhino-laryngology—required to meet current commitments is 55. Although it is not possible to predict the precise number of surgeons who will be employed in each of the next five years, all practicable steps will be taken to ensure that our requirements are fully met.

Ships (Target Practice)

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the ships which are currently being considered for target practice. [1825]

Mr. Soames: All vessels on the disposal lists are available to be considered for use as a target. Decisions on whether ships will be used for target practice are made in the light of all relevant factors, including the operational requirement for such trials and the costs involved.

Dr. Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will name the ships which have been used for target practice in each of the last five years. [1824]

Mr. Soames: I refer the hon. Member to my reply of 16 December 1994, *Official Report*, column *816*. I can confirm that no vessels have been used for target practice since then.

Ship Deployments

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the latest deployment of *(a)* HMS Kent, *(b)* HMS Hermione and *(c)* HMS Jupiter. [1826]

Mr. Soames: HMS Kent's last operational deployment was in an exercise in the eastern Atlantic in the spring of 1980. She then became the fleet training ship (static) in Portsmouth harbour from June 1980 to March 1983. Following that she became the cadet forces accommodation and training ship from March 1983 until March 1993. She was then placed on the disposal list.

HMS Jupiter's last operational deployment was in the south Atlantic from October 1991 to February 1992. She returned to the UK via the West Indies, arriving on 31 March 1992. She was placed on the disposal list on 1 May 1992.

HMS Hermione's last operational deployment was on Armilla patrol from October 1991 to February 1992. She returned to the UK via the Mediterranean, arriving on 26 March 1992. She was decommissioned on 30 June 1992 and then placed on the disposal list.

All three vessels remain on the disposal list.

Military Assistance (Guatemala)

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which Guatemalan officers are being trained in Britain; what courses they are following; and at what establishment the courses are based. [1342]

Mr. Soames: Details of the military assistance provided to other countries are confidential between Governments.

Jaguar Aircraft

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Jaguar aircraft are to be upgraded to GR.1B standard; and if he will list the additional capabilities of the GR.1B aircraft. [1289]

Mr. Arbuthnot: We plan to have upgraded all 65 Jaguar GR aircraft to GR1B standard by mid-1997. This upgrade improves the operational effectiveness of Jaguar, and provides a TIALD—thermal imaging and laser designation—capability.

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many RAF Jaguar aircraft are to be upgraded with the Adour 804 engine; what is the cost of the programme; and what is the planned service entry date for *(a)* the first and *(b)* the last such upgraded aircraft. [1290]

Mr. Arbuthnot: A proposal to upgrade the Jaguar Adour Mk 104 engine is being considered.

Nuclear-free Zone (South Pacific)

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is Her Majesty's Government's policy in respect of the verification regime to police the South Pacific nuclear-free zone treaty. [1504]

Mr. Arbuthnot: We have announced our intention to sign the protocols to the treaty of Raratonga which was drawn up by the South Pacific states. The treaty's control regime provides for information exchanges, consultations, a complaints procedure and the conclusion of safeguards agreements with the International Atomic Energy Authority in respect of peaceful nuclear activities. The Government have full confidence in the effectiveness of the IAEA safeguards system and its ability to detect diversion of nuclear material from the purposes declared for it.

Technical Co-operation Programme

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many technical panels and action groups currently exist within sub-group E of the technical co-operation programme between Britain, the United States of America, Australia, New Zealand and Canada; and what is the remit of each of these technical panels and action groups. [1559]

Mr. Arbuthnot: Sub-group E of the technical co-operation programme currently contains four technical panels and three action groups. The titles, which describe the remits of each panel and action group are as follows:

ETP4—Medical Countermeasures against biological agents

ETP9—Hazard Assessment

ETP10—Detection of biological agents

ETP11—Low burden, integrated protective clothing

EAG38—Gene Probes

EAG39—Medical Countermeasures against vesicant agents

EAG40—Adsorbents.

Air Crews (Secondment)

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on plans to provide Tornado aircraft, with Royal Air Force crews on secondment, to the United Arab Emirates. [1303]

Mr. Arbuthnot: My department has no current plans to provide Tornado aircraft, with Royal Air Force crews on secondment, to the United Arab Emirates.

However, British Aerospace is among the competitors to meet the United Arab Emirates' next combat aircraft requirement and its bid has the full and active support of Her Majesty's Government.

Harrier Aircraft

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Royal Air Force Harrier GR.7 aircraft have had their inertial navigation system modified to 1075G standard; what plans he has to apply this modification to the entire Harrier GR.7 fleet; and what is the total cost of the programme. [1287]

Mr. Arbuthnot: Twenty-nine of the 1075 standard inertial navigation system sets, as fitted to the Harrier GR7, were converted to the 1075G standard at a total cost of approximately £600,000. There are no plans to convert any more sets to the 1075G standard.

Nuclear Tests (Nevada)

Mr. Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he expects to receive information from his United States counterpart on the hydronuclear tests announced by the United States administration to be ordered at the Nevada test site in 1996. [1586]

Mr. Arbuthnot: I assume the hon. Member is referring to US plans to conduct hydrodynamic tests which do not involve any nuclear yield. There are long-standing arrangements allowing for the exchange of nuclear weapons—related information between the US and UK where the two parties believe that it would be mutually beneficial.

Defence Contractors

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the Royal Ordnance having an office in the procurement division of his Department and a stand with exhibits on permanent exhibition in his Department's main building; and if he will make a statement. [1047]

Mr. Arbuthnot: In certain circumstances, main defence contractors may be allocated office space within MoD buildings; any such requests are considered on their merits. Royal Ordnance has an office on the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency site at Fort Halstead, but it does not have an office within the procurement executive, and there are no plans to provide one.

There is no permanent exhibition of Royal Ordnance products within my Department's main building.

Written Questions

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence for what reason parliamentary written questions 8851G, 8854G–56G, 8863G, 8869G, 8874G, 8876G, 8878G–8886G, 8888G–8889G; from the hon. Member for Don Valley were not published in the *Official Report* on 23 October as advised; on what date they will be published in the *Official Report*; and if he will make a statement. [404]

Mr. Soames: The written answers referred to by the hon. Member were given on 24 October and passed to the *Official Report* in the usual way but I am informed by the Editor that there is no record of them having been received. The answers were published as an addendum to the *Official Report* on 22 November 1995.

Territorial Army Volunteer Reserve

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a further statement on recruitment to the TAVR. [471]

Mr. Soames: An active programme of recruitment is being undertaken to provide the annual intake necessary to meet the Territorial Army's establishment of 59,000 personnel. This programme includes national advertising campaigns on television and in the national press, and regional campaigns geared to local circumstances.

Army Technical Support Agency

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about Defence Agency status for the Army's technical branches and authorities. [2475]

Mr. Soames: The Army's technical branches and authorities—aircraft branch REME, electronics branch REME, vehicles and weapons branch REME, Army scaling and cataloguing authority and the land systems technical publications authority—were subject to an internal management study in 1993. The study concluded the Army's technical branches and authorities, which provide a range of technical support services for the Army and other services, would operate more effectively as a defence agency. In the period since the study a chief executive (designate) has been appointed and a detailed analysis of technical support business has been undertaken to determine how the agency would operate.

On 16 October 1995 I agreed to the formation of the Army Technical Support Agency as a defence agency from the former technical branches and authorities. ATSA will remain part of MOD but the chief executive will have delegated executive powers to discharge his responsibilities.

ATSA comprises a headquarters in Andover and currently occupies six main sites at Middle Wallop, Malvern, Chertsey, Woolwich—two sites and Chilwell. It employs some 1,250 staff, 900 of which are civil servants, with the balance being military. A major strategy within the ATSA initiative is to reduce the number of main sites and a study is now examining the options for collation. I will be making a further announcement in due course to advise the hon. Member of developments.

ATSA contributes to the operational capability of the armed forces by providing technical advice and services, which promote efficiency in equipment support and enhance availability and supportability in the design of front-line military equipment.

ATSA has been set demanding targets. These are largely based on satisfying the customer requirement, whether it be for MOD's integrated logistic support managers working in the procurement executive, equipment support managers or the field force. The targets for the first 18 months to March 1997 are:

Key target 1—Be effective in influencing the design of an equipment through its life.

By 31 March 1996 establish a baseline and develop the target to measure ATSA's effectiveness in influencing equipment design.

By 31 March 1997 meet the target set.

Key target 2—Produce effective scales of spare parts.

By 31 March 1996 develop a methodology to measure effectiveness of scales covering range, depth and cost.

By 31 March 1997 meet the target set.

Key target 3—Be responsive to ad hoc (help line) technical queries.

By 31 March 1996 achieve 80 per cent. of queries resolved on receipt or within 2 working days with the remaining 20 per cent. acknowledged with a plan on how the query will be resolved.

By 31 March 1997 achieve 82 per cent.

Key target 4—Be responsive to demands for technical publications (between receipt of a demand and despatch of a publication).

By 31 March 1996 achieve an average of 10 days.

By 31 March 1997 achieve an average of 9 days.

Key target 5—Deliver a timely ATSA technical project service.

By 31 March 1996 establish a baseline and develop the target to measure the timeliness of ATSA's work.

By 31 March 1997 meet the target set.

Key target 6—Deliver a timely ATSA service by reducing the administrative lead time (ALT) to complete initial spares provisioning lists.

By 31 March 1996 achieve an average ALT of 11 months.

By 31 March 1997 achieve an average ALT of 10 months.

Key target 7—Satisfy the customer when undertaking technical projects.

By 31 March 1996 establish a baseline and develop the target to measure customer satisfaction.

By 31 March 1997 meet the target set.

Key Target 8—Increase efficiency by managing additional commitments within a declining budget while maintaining the programme by volume with no degradation in the quality of the service.

Improve efficiency by 4 per cent. in 1996–97 over previous year.

All the targets will encourage continuous improvement in ATSA services or efficiency which will be achieved by rationalisation and by improving processes.

Additionally, milestone key targets will drive ATSA to achieve restructuring; competing the technical publications activity as part of the ATSA competing for quality programme; the development of business systems and collocation, of the land systems elements, on a single site by mid-1998.

Explosives, Propellants and Related End Products Agreement

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how the explosives, propellants and end products agreement applied to defence contracts with *(a)* Saudi Arabia, *(b)* Jordan, *(c)* Oman and *(d)* Malaysia; and what was the financial benefit to Royal Ordnance of the relevant contracts with these countries; [992]

(2) what *(a)* was and *(b)* are the objectives and purposes of the explosives, propellants and related end products agreement; [1035]

(3) what has been Royal Ordnance's record under the explosives, propellants and related end products agreement in respect of *(a)* timeliness of delivery, *(b)* quality and *(c)* pricing; and if he will make a statement; [989]

(4) over what period the explosives, propellants and related end products agreement is applicable; [1037]

(5) what is the successor arrangement to the explosives, propellants and related end products agreement which expired in March 1993; [1029]

(6) what other companies, other than Royal Ordnance, were or are party to the explosives, propellants and related end products agreement; [1036]

(7) what plans he has to introduce competition for the supply of certain products under the explosives, propellants and related end products agreement; what factors have inhibited competition to date; and if he will make a statement; [990]

(8) what joint ventures with foreign companies have been considered, or entered into, under the explosives, propellants and related end products agreement; [991]

(9) if he will list the agreements made between Her Majesty's Government and British Aerospace Royal Ordnance prior to the signing of the explosives, propellants and related end products agreement; and if he will make a statement; [1034]

(10) what current orders and supply of products *(a)* did and *(b)* does the explosives, propellants and related end products agreement apply to; [1038]

(11) if he will list those aspects of the explosives, propellants and related end products agreement which expired in March 1993 which *(a)* remain commercial-in-confidence and *(b)* are no longer commercial-in-confidence; and if he will make a statement. [1030]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The explosives, propellants and related end products agreement had two main objectives: first, to secure the supply of the majority of the Ministry of Defence's ammunition requirements of the five-year period following the privatisation of the Royal Ordnance factories; and secondly, to guarantee a core work load for the newly established Royal Ordnance plc, allowing the company to develop into an efficient competitor.

The EPREP agreement subsumed two earlier agreements—the explosives and propellants agreement of August 1986 and the small arms agreement of September 1986.

The EPREP agreement ran from 1 April 1988 to 31 March 1993 and covered 42 different types of ammunition including tank, field gun, mortar, small arms and Navy ammunition. RO's performance under the agreement was satisfactory in terms of timely delivery, quality and price. Although all the work is now completed, the terms and conditions of the agreement remain "commercial-in-confidence" until both the signatories agree otherwise.

The only parties to the EPREP agreement were RO and the Ministry of Defence. No other companies were involved. The agreement was not concerned with exports.

All the orders placed under the agreement were awarded non-competitively. During the period of the agreement, the Ministry of Defence assessed and trialled alternative products from other suppliers so that, in the future, more ammunition orders could be subjected to competition.

There was no successor arrangement to the EPREP agreement. However, the success of the agreement in helping to make RO an efficient competitor was shown in 1993 when RO secured, largely in competition, a major long-term Ministry of Defence contract for ammunition. This contract covered much of the armed forces' requirement for small arms ammunition between 1993 and 2000 and for larger calibres between 1993 and 1998.

HMS Andromeda

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement concerning his Department's ships *(a)* HMS Andromeda and *(b)* HMS Sirius. [1823]

Mr. Arbuthnot: Regarding the former HMS Andromeda, I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 6 July 1995, *Official Report,* column *371.* The former HMS Sirius has been decommissioned, and awaits disposal. We are considering a number of disposal options for her. No final decision has yet been made concerning her future sale, or use for other purposes.

Upholder Submarines

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the total original cost of purchasing the four Upholder class submarines. [1822]

Mr. Arbuthnot: I refer the hon. Member to the answer my predecessor gave him on 21 April 1995, *Official Report*, column *308.*

Porton Down

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the titles of each of the unclassified technical papers known as Porton notes produced by the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment Porton Down between 1965 and 1968. [1583]

Mr. Arbuthnot: This is a matter for the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive, DERA, to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from John Chisholm to Mr. Ken Livingstone, dated 23 November 1995:

Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking if he will list the titles of the unclassified technical papers known as Porton Notes produced by the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment, Porton Down between 1965 and 1968 has been passed to me to reply as the Chief Executive of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency which includes CBDE as one of its divisions.

I have listed below the titles of each of the unclassified technical papers known as Porton Notes produced by the Chemical Defence Experimental Establishment, a fore-runner of CBDE, between 1965 and 1968.

Porton Note-288—Preliminary studies on an anagram test for use in performance assessment.

Porton Note-374—Development of spray equipment. Hand-held training.

Porton Note-378—Ministry of Labour approval scheme for dust respirators. Report on the protector dust respirator Q/R2000.

Porton Note-393—HM factory inspectorate approval scheme for dust respirators. Report on the Safirmatic dust respirator.

Porton Note-376—Construction of a radio transmitter for the short range telemetry of cat electroencephalograms.

Porton Note-375—Report on the Martindale positive powered respirator unit.

Porton Note-373—Certification mark scheme for dust respirators. Report on the Protector dust respirator Q/R. 1000.

Porton Note-371—Ministry of Labour approval scheme for canister respirators. Report on the Baxter canisters.

Porton Note-368—Certification mark scheme for dust respirators. Report on the Baxter pneuseal dust respirator.

Porton Note-367—Polarographic estimation of enzyme activity.

Porton Note-359—Vapour source for the calibration of automatic alarms in the field.

Porton Note-358—Humidity control system for a small chamber.

Porton Note-353—Radio-controlled rotorod aerosol sampler.

Porton Note-349—Sodium flame test for respirator canisters.

Porton Note-347—Estimation of diffusion at short range in stable conditions.

Porton Note-346—Determination of quantitative values for various categories of vertical stability of the atmosphere.

Porton Note-343—Concept attainment test.

Porton Note-341—Improvements to the sodium flame penetrometer.

Porton Note-340—Electrical measurement of respiration and heart rate.

Porton Note-336—Blood cholinesterase levels and symptoms in anticholinesterase poisoning.

Porton Note-335—Use of polybutadiene synthetic rubber in respirator rubbers.

Porton Note-334—Dispenser for the CS pellet for use in testing the AFU Mk 2.

Porton Note-333—Certification mark scheme for dust respirators. Report on the British American optical companys Safline dust respirator.

Porton Note-332—Device for automatically aligning a particle sampler into the wind.

Porton Note-331—Review of recent research on aerosol filtration.

Porton Note-329—Removal of simulated particulate fallout from a vehicle using the Porton exhaust powered vacuum cleaner.

Porton Note-328—Normative data for a test battery used to assess human performance following drugs.

Porton Note-327—Comparison of the smoke performances of the British 81mm and 3 inch WP mortar bombs.

Porton Note-326—Report on the Martindale-fumex respirator.

Porton Note-325 Comparison between the sodium chloride and nitrogen meter respirator leakage tests.

Porton Note-323—Certification mark scheme for dust respirators. Report on the British American optical company's Sure-guard dust respirator.

Porton Note-321—Critical assessment of the claims made for toxogonin, An antidote for organophosphorus poisoning.

Porton Note-320—Some tests of the Mullard automatic particle analyser type L188.

Porton Note-319—Ministry of Labour approval scheme for canister respirators. Report on the Angus canister respirator.

Porton Note-319A—Ministry of Labour approval scheme for canister respirators. Gas tests of industrial containers for Geo. Angus and Company.

Porton Note-318—High Speed gas-liquid chromatography: Column evaluation.

Porton Note-317—Sampling efficiency of millipore filter sampler design CD 6895.

Porton Note-316—Correlation of filter penetrations by different particulate test clouds.

Porton Note-314—Regeneration of used charcoal from air purification filters.

Porton Note-313—Gaseous atmospheric pollutants. A literature survey.

Porton Note-311—Assessment of used charcoals from air purification units by heat of wetting measurements.

Porton Note-310—Spectroscopic studies on ricin. The quantitative determination of sodium sulphate content and an apparent correlation of infrared absorption with toxicity.

Porton Note-303—Swelling of rubber in vapour and liquid:-Literature and theory.

Porton Note-296—Certification mark scheme for duct respirators. Report on the MSA Comfo ideal dust respirator.

Porton Note-293—Effect of water on G and V agents. A review of work carried out in the UK.

Porton Note-289—Devices for the teaching of expired air resuscitation.

Porton Note-378—Ministry of Labour approval scheme for dust respirators: Report on the protector dust respirator Q/R 2000.

Porton Note-374—Development of spray equipment. Hand-held training.

Porton Note-388—Permeability characteristics of the skin: A literature survey.

Porton Note-392—Effect of water vapour on the responses of a micro-argon ionisation detector.

Porton Note-395—Vertical diffusivity profiles for diffusion to range 1Km.

Porton Note-394—HM factory inspectorate approval scheme for dust respirators: Report on the Martindale dust respirators types W and Y.

Porton Note-383—Ministry of Labour approval scheme for dust respirators report on the Pirelli dust respirators type BN9C1.

Porton Note-391—Estimate of the metabolic cost of decontamination for two teams of men using two different techniques.

Porton Note 385—Australian Finger Cherry, Rhodomyrtus Macrocarpa Benth. Toxicological study of some fruit extracts.

In my letter to you of the 26 July I said that 57 of the Porton Notes were unclassified. Whilst compiling this list it was discovered that the original Library listing contained duplicate entries for Porton Notes 383 and 393. This is why the above list only includes 55 titles. I am sorry about this.

I hope this information is helpful.

Sea Dumping Operations

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list all coastal or sea disposal sites used for the dumping of *(a)* surplus chemical weapons, *(b)* chemical weapons recovered from enemy forces, *(c)* surplus conventional explosives, *(d)* toxic wastes and *(e)* radioactive waste since 1965; and what quantity of the waste materials of each category is dumped at each site. [1581]

Mr. Soames: Complete records of MoD sea dumping operations undertaken are no longer available. Accordingly, it is not possible to identify the total tonnages or precise nature of defence-related materials or waste products disposed of by this means. Records show that sea dumping of chemical weapons ended in 1957. Beaufort's dyke was the Departments's main conventional munitions disposal site in the north channel, where over 1 million tonnes of munitions were dumped between 1945 and 1973. An emergency MoD disposal took place in 1976 involving two cases of heavily corroded 40mm shells. Hurd Deep, situated in the English channel some 50 miles south of Prawle Point near Plymouth was also a conventional weapon dump site but no complete record appears to have survived of dumping operations at this site after the immediate post-war period until its use was discontinued in 1973. Between 1973 and 1985, up to 2,000 tonnes of conventional munitions were disposed of annually at the deep water dump site situated approximately 400 miles south-west of Lands End, off the continental shelf. From 1985 until October 1992, when the sea dumping of munitions was terminated, the annual disposals were as follows: 904 tonnes; 1,882 tonnes, 1,565 tonnes; 3,244 tonnes; 1,544 tonnes; 1,775 tonnes; 1,093 tonnes and 8,764 tonnes. There are a number of other explosive dumping grounds charted in British waters but these were not routinely used. Details of the UK's sea disposal programme for low and intermediate level radioactive wastes, including wastes generated by MoD establishments, are contained in a report commissioned by the Department of the Environment, "Report of the Independent Review of Disposal of Radioactive Waste in the Northeast Atlantic", published in November 1984.

Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the climatic chamber in the human factors section at the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment, Porton Down was built; and what this chamber is used for. [1562]

Mr. Arbuthnot: This is a matter for the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive, DERA, to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from John Chisholm to Mr. Ken Livingstone, dated 23 November 1995:

Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking when the climatic chamber in the Human Factors section at the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment was built and what it is used for has been passed to me to reply as the Chief Executive of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency which includes CBDE as one of its divisions.

This facility, which is used to assess the effects of wearing protective equipment on personnel in a variety of ambient temperatures and humidities, was built in the early 1950s.

I hope this information is helpful.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many staff at the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment, Porton Down have been exposed to chemical warfare agents in experiments since 1965; what was the purpose of these experiments; when these experiments took place; and what were the conclusions of these experiments. [1560]

Mr. Arbuthnot: This is a matter for the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive, DERA, to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from John Chisholm to Mr. Ken Livingstone, dated 23 November 1995:

Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking how many staff at the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment have been exposed to chemical warfare agents in experiments since 1965 has been passed to me to reply as the Chief Executive of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency which includes CBDE as one of its divisions.

No members of staff have been exposed to chemical warfare agents as part of experiments since 1965.

I hope this information is helpful.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many scientific and biological papers were published between 1969 and 1991 under the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment technical paper series; and how many of these papers are now unclassified. [1609]

Mr. Arbuthnot: This is a matter for the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive, DERA, to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from John Chisholm to Mr. Ken Livingstone, dated 23 November 1995:

Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking how many papers were published between 1969 and 1991 in the Chemical Defence Establishment Technical Paper series and how many of them are now unclassified has been passed to me to reply as the Chief Executive of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency which includes CBDE as one of its divisions.

A total of 610 technical papers in the CDE Technical Series were published between 1969 and 1991. These reports are now held in a variety of places and it would involve disproportionate effort to check on the current security classification of all of them, bearing in mind that classification is reviewed from time to time. I can, however, tell you that of the total 610 technical papers, 193 were produced as unclassified documents.

I am sorry I cannot be more helpful.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what experiments have been carried out in the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment's new facility for testing equipment and volunteers since the facility was opened in February 1994; and how many years this new facility is projected to be in service. [1563]

Mr. Arbuthnot: This is a matter for the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive, DERA, to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from John Chisholm to Mr. Ken Livingstone, dated 23 November 1995:

Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking what experiments have been conducted in the new facility opened in February 1994 at the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment, Porton Down has been passed to me to reply as the Chief Executive of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency which includes CBDE as one of its divisions.

The new facility opened in February 1994 replaced the exposure chambers previously used to conduct studies involving equipment and service volunteers. To date the new facility has been used to carry out evaluations of collective and individual protection equipment and chemical agent detection systems. No studies involving service volunteers have taken place in this facility so far. The fitting and testing of respirators routinely issued to personnel at CBDE is also carried out in this facility. The lifetime of the facility is projected to be at least twenty years.

I hope this information is helpful.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will place in the Library a copy of section 6 No. 5 of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment's range safety regulation issued in 1984 which relates to the use of exposure chambers. [1564]

Mr. Arbuthnot: This is a matter for the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive, DERA, to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from John Chisholm to Mr. Ken Livingstone, dated 23 November 1995:

Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking if copies of Section 6 No. 5 of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment's Range of Safety Regulations issued in 1984 can be placed in the Library of the House of Commons has been passed to me to reply as the Chief Executive of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency which includes CBDE as one of its divisions.

I have made arrangements for a copy of this section of the Range Safety Regulations to be placed in the Library. You should be aware however that the procedures set out in this section refer exclusively to the now disused exposure chambers and not to the facility opened in February 1994.

I hope this information is helpful.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what new buildings are planned to be built at the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment, Porton Down, as part of its building replacement programme. [1610]

Mr. Arbuthnot: This is a matter for the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive, DERA, to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from John Chisholm to Mr. Ken Livingstone, dated 23 November 1995:

Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking what new buildings are planned to be built at the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment, Porton Down as part of the building replacement plan has been passed to me to reply as the Chief Executive of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency which includes CBDE as one of its divisions.

CBDE are currently undertaking an investment appraisal into the possibility and viability of replacing a number of the ageing buildings with more modern, cost effective structures. The scheme being considered provides for replacement buildings for the Medical Countermeasures, Detection, Protection and Hazard Assessment Sections together with their support facilities in a floor area considerably smaller than that presently occupied. The scheme has yet to receive permission to proceed to the design stage.

CBDE are about to award a design commission for a new Containment Building for work with microbiological organisms. If constructed this building will replace some of the old Microbiological building which will then be demolished. The scheme does not currently have permission to proceed beyond the design stage.

I hope this information is helpful.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the conclusion of the research work at Nancekuke to investigate the storage of GB referred to in his answer of 16 March, *Official Report*, column *709*; and when this work was carried out. [1616]

Mr. Arbuthnot: This is a matter for the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive, DERA, to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from John Chisholm to Mr. Ken Livingstone, dated 23 November 1995:

Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking what the conclusions of the research carried out at Nancekuke to investigate the storage of GB has been passed to me to reply as the Chief Executive of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency which includes the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment as one of its divisions.

The work carried out at Nancekuke on the long term storage of the nerve gas GB took place from 1957 until the late 1970s and concluded that, suitably stabilised, the agent would have a shelf life in excess of twenty years.

I hope this information is helpful.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) when the Health and Safety Executive last conducted a safety inspection at the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment, Porton Down; and when the next Health and Safety Executive inspection of the establishment is scheduled; [1561]

(2) if he will place in the Library copies of reports arising out of the Health and Safety Executive inspections of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment, Porton Down, in 1983 and 1988. [1615]

Mr. Arbuthnot: This is a matter for the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive, DERA, to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from John Chisholm to Mr. Ken Livingstone, dated 23 November 1995:

Your Parliamentary Questions to the Secretary of State for Defence asking when the Health and Safety Executive last inspected the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment, Porton Down and if copies of the reports of the inspections carried out in 1983 and 1988 can be placed in the Library of the House of Commons has been passed to me to reply as the Chief Executive of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency which includes CBDE as one of its divisions.

The Health and Safety Executive last carried out a full safety inspection at CBDE in 1988. The next inspection is scheduled to take place early in 1996. Requests for placing copies of the reports of the Health and Safety Executive inspections in the House of Commons Library should be made to the Director General of the Health and Safety Executive.

I hope this information is helpful.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the 21 safety audits referred to in his answer of 18 July, *Official Report*, columns 175–76 reviewed the arrangements for carrying out tests and studies in the service volunteer programme. [1611]

Mr. Soames: This is a matter for the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive, DERA, to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from John Chisholm to Mr. Ken Livingstone, dated 23 November 1995:

Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking if the safety audits referred to in the answer of 18 July, Official Report, column 175–6 reviewed the arrangements for carrying out tests and studies in the service volunteer programme has been passed to me to reply as the Chief Executive of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency which includes CBDE as one of its divisions.

The safety audits referred to in the reply of 18th July were not concerned with the Service Volunteer programme. All protocols for conducting studies which involve the use of Service volunteers are reviewed by the Independent Ethics Committee.

I hope this information is helpful.

Damages Claim (Tornado Aircraft)

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to make progress in recovering compensation from Bricom Securum in relation to damage done by Airwork Ltd. to the F-3 Tornado squadron at RAF St Athans. [1326]

Mr. Arbuthnot *[holding answer 21 November 1995]:* My Department has presented the extent and nature of its claim to Bricom and is continuing to pursue it.

TREASURY

Economic and Monetary Union

3. **Mr. Spearing:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement concerning the progress of forecast expenditure towards the convergence targets set for economic and monetary union. [692]

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: There is no convergence target for public expenditure which is a matter for national Governments to decide. I expect the United Kingdom to meet the convergence criteria and to be in a position to decide whether to participate in monetary union when the time comes.

Value Added Tax

17. **Mr. Jon Owen Jones:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what effect VAT extension has had on the economy and on living standards. [708]

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The extension of VAT to domestic fuel and power contributed to the Government's objective of controlling and reducing the PSBR. This is the best way to achieve sustainable growth in the economy and in living standards. There was a generous compensation package to compensate those hit hardest by the change.

18. **Mr. Hall:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the rate and scope of VAT. [709]

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I cannot anticipate my right hon. and learned Friend's Budget statement.

21. **Mr. Gapes:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to extend the scope of VAT. [713]

Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory: The Government's taxation plans are announced in my right hon. and learned Friend's Budget speech and not before.

Budget

19. **Mr. Canavan:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many representations he has received about the contents of his forthcoming Budget statement. [710]

Mr. Jack: My right hon. and learned Friend and the Chancellor of the Exchequer has as usual received a large number of Budget representations.

Social Chapter

20. **Mr. Garel-Jones:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received from business leaders regarding the social chapter. [711]

Mr. Waldegrave: Business leaders have indicated that they consider employment legislation to be one of the most burdensome types of regulation in a recent Union of Industrial and Employers Confederations of Europe, UNICE, survey. A further survey last summer by the European Enterprise Centre showed that two thirds of Europe's smaller companies were worried that higher costs resulting from the social chapter would make them less competitive.

Gross National Product

22. **Mr. Congdon:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the relationship between the percentage of GNP taken up by public spending and economic performance. [714]

Mr. Waldegrave: Lower public spending, lower taxes and lower borrowing are essential to building a dynamic thriving economy which can compete in world markets.

Inheritance Tax

23. **Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the cost to the Exchequer of the abolition of inheritance tax. [715]

Mr. Jack: I refer to the answer I gave the hon. Member for Edinburgh, South (Mr. Griffiths) on 1 November 1995, *Official Report*, column 259.

Disposable Income

24. **Mr. Mackinlay:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer in what areas and by which method the Government have ensured an increase in the disposable income of the average family since April 1992. [716]

Mr. Jack: The Government have consistently sought rising living standards through a combination of prudent monetary and fiscal policies and continuing supply-side reforms to boost the real productive capacity of the economy. Real personal disposable income has grown by over 6 per cent. since early 1992. Unemployment has fallen by over 700,000 since its peak at the end of 1992.

Investment

25. **Mr. Mudie:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on investment levels in the United Kingdom. [718]

Mr. Waldegrave: OECD figures show that United Kingdom investment has grown significantly faster than the EC average rate since 1980, having grown at less than the EC average rate in the 1960s and 1970s.

Mr. Cann: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what were the investment rates in *(a)* the United Kingdom and *(b)* Japan (i) 1979 and (ii) the last year for which figures are available. [1628]

Mrs. Angela Knight: Information on investment is set out in the OECD publication "National Accounts", available in the House of Commons Library.

Betting Duty

26. **Mr. John Greenway:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent representations he has received on the level of general betting duty. [719]

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: My right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer has received many representations on the level of general betting duty. In addition I have met representatives of the British Horseracing Board, the Horserace Betting Levy Board, the Bookmaker's Committee, the British Greyhound Racing Board, the British Betting Office Association and the Betting Office Licensees Association over the last few weeks.

Public Expenditure

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what priority he gives to cutting public spending as a proportion of GDP. [701]

Mr. Waldegrave: It is a central part of the Government's economic strategy to reduce public spending as a share of national output below 40 per cent. This is essential to enable the private sector to generate the jobs, investment and wealth that make our economy prosperous and competitive in world markets.

Income Tax

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much income tax was raised in the financial year 1994–95; and what percentage came from the present top rate. [127]

Mr. Jack: It is estimated that the total income tax liability after tax credits in 1994–95 is £66.9 billion, of which about 9 per cent. is the liability in excess of the basic rate.

Consultants

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will update the information contained in his answer of 7 February 1991, *Official Report*, column *204*, in respect of the issues and departments for which *(a)* Herbert Smith and Associates, *(b)* Slaughter and May and Kleinwort Benson have been used by the Government. [1095]

Mr. Jack: The tables have been updated to show the issues, sponsoring departments and in which positions the firms of Herbert Smith and Associates, Slaughter and May and Kleinwort Benson were appointed since 1983.

Role of Kleinwort Benson in Privatisations

Issue	*Date*	*Department*	*Position*
British Petroleum	1983	Treasury	Underwriter
British Petroleum	1987	Treasury	Underwriter
British Aerospace	1985	Treasury	Joint Lead Underwriter
Cable and Wireless	983	Treasury	Adviser[1] Lead Underwriter
Cable and Wireless	1985	Treasury	Underwriter
Britoil	1985	Treasury	Underwriter
Associated British Ports	1983	Transport	Advisers[2] Joint Underwriter
Enterprise Oil	1984	Energy	Adviser Underwriter
British Telecom	1984	DTI	Adviser Joint Lead Underwriter
British Gas	1986	Energy	Underwriter
British Airways	1987	Transport	Underwriter
Royal Ordnance	1987	Defence	Adviser[3]
British Steel	1988	DTI	Underwriter
Water and Sewerage Companies	1989	Environment	Underwriter
Regional Electricity Companies	1990	Energy	Adviser
Generating Companies	1991	Energy	Adviser
Generating Companies	1995	Treasury	Joint Global Co-ordinator
Railway Franchising	1995	OPRAF	Adviser

[1] With Bank of England.
[2] Early stages.
[3] Initial study.

Role of Herbert Smith and Associates in privatisations

Issue	*Date*	*Department*	*Position*
Royal Ordnance	1987	Defence	Solicitor
National Seed Development Organisation	1987	DES/MAFF	Solicitor
Ports Act			
Property Clawback Order	1991–92	DoT	Solicitor
Tilbury Debenture	1991–92	DoT	Solicitor
Married Quarters Estate	Current	MoD	Solicitor

Role of Slaughter and May in privatisations

Issue	*Date*	*Department*	*Position*
Jaguar[1]	1984	DTI	Solicitor
British Aerospace	1985	Treasury	Solicitor
Britoil	1985	Treasury	Solicitor
British Gas	1986	Energy	Solicitor
Unipart[1]	1987	DTI	Solicitor
British Airways	1987	Transport	Solicitor
British Petroleum	1987	Treasury	Solicitor
Regional Electricity Companies	1990	Energy	Solicitor
Generating Companies	1991	Energy	Solicitor
.	1995	Treasury	Solicitor

[1] Sale of a subsidiary.

Local Government

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the Acts of Parliament and Consolidation Acts that affect local government which have been introduced by his Department since January 1994. [44]

Mr. Jack: Sections 33, 42 and 96(4) of the Value Added Tax Act 1994 cover local authorities. This Act consolidated existing legislation and therefore did not change the content of the law. The provisions of Finance Acts giving legislative effect to the Budget affect local government in common with other bodies and individuals.

Taxation

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list all the new reliefs from offers against, and exclusion from, inheritance tax and capital gains tax that he has announced since April 1992, in each case indicating the expected number of beneficiaries in a full year and the cost of the relief. [85]

Mr. Jack: There have been no new reliefs from inheritance tax since the answer to a similar question from the hon. Member for Newcastle on Tyne, Central (Mr. Cousins) on 25 November 1994, *Official Report*, column *466*. However, there have been changes/extensions to the inheritance tax threshold and relief for agricultural assets.

The new reliefs from capital gains tax announced since April 1992:

Reinvestment relief (excluding deferral reliefs under venture capital trusts and the Enterprise Investment Scheme);

Venture Capital Trusts;

Enterprise Investment Scheme.

Unfortunately it is not possible to provide a reliable estimate for the number of beneficiaries in a full year. However, estimates for the full-year costs in 1995–96 of the new reliefs are:

Million

	Cost[1]
Reinvestment relief	50
Venture Capital Trusts	10
Enterprise Investment Scheme	10

[1] These estimates are tentative and subject to a wide margin of error.

There have also been changes/extensions to CGT retirement and rollover reliefs and to the CGT annual exemption.

Ministerial Transport, London

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many times in the last year he has used *(a)* London Transport buses and *(b)* London Underground while on official business. [378]

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I have not used London Transport buses or London Underground while on official business in the last year.

Energy Efficiency

Mr. Battle: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what progress has been made towards cutting energy consumption in Government buildings for which he has responsibility in each year since 1990. [1441]

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Figures showing progress between 1990–91 and 1993–94 towards cutting energy consumption in Government departments responsible to the Chancellor of the Exchequer were given by the Minister for Construction, Planning and Energy Efficiency on 17 May, *Official Report*, column *259–60*. Data for 1994–95 are not yet available.

Housing Investment Trusts

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if housing investment trusts will be permitted to take over existing rented properties. [1416]

Mr. Jack: It would not be appropriate for me to comment on tax matters at this stage of the Budget cycle.

Unemployment

Mr. Dobson To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many families contain two or more unemployed people at the latest date for which figures are available [1485]

Mrs. Angela Knight *[holding answer 21 November 1995]:* Estimates from the winter—December 1994 to February 1995—Labour Force Survey show that of 25.4 million families in Great Britain 170,000 families contained two or more ILO unemployed people.

WALES

Temazepam

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what amount of temazepam per capita is distributed annually in Wales; and if he will make a statement. [1507]

Mr. Richards: In 1994, 109 grams of temazepam were dispensed on prescription per 1,000 population in Wales. The figures for the first quarter of 1995–96 show a marked decrease in the prescribing of the soft gel capsule formulations as a result of a voluntary ban by many general practitioners.

Breast Cancer Services

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the breast cancer services available, and what they comprise for each area. [1145]

Mr. Richards: The national breast screening programme, which undertakes routine screening and assessment for women aged 50 to 64 years, is provided on an all-Wales basis by Breast Test Wales. The availability of symptomatic breast caner services, including treatment, is the responsibility of district health authorities and general practitioners and is reflected in contracts with NHS trusts.

Planning Appeals

Mr. Hanson: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many planning appeals to his office have been accepted or rejected in each of the last 10 years. [1157]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The information requested is contained in the "Digest of Welsh Statistics", published annually. Copies are available in the Library of the House.

Inward Investment

Sir Wyn Roberts: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what has been the value, at current prices, of inward investment to Wales in the last five years. [1400]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The forecast capital investment by inward investment projects into Wales from overseas and elsewhere in the United Kingdom over the last five years has been £585 million in 1990–91; £1.1 billion in 1991–92; £949 million in 1992–93; £765 million in 1993–94; and £921 million in 1994–95. These figures are based upon information provided by companies at the time of the decision to invest and take no account of any subsequent decisions.

Energy Efficiency

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what progress has been made towards cutting energy consumption in Government buildings for which he has responsibility. [1450]

Mr. Hague: At the end of 1993–94, the latest year for which figures are available, energy consumption in my Department was 2 per cent. lower than it was in 1990–91, the base year of the Government's energy efficiency campaign. Within this figure a 21 per cent. cut in the use of fossil fuels was achieved. Carbon dioxide emissions were reduced by 26 per cent.

The Welsh Office has continued to increase its efficiency in energy usage and I anticipate that the 1994–95 figures will show further improvement overall.

Suicides

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list for each district council area, county council area and for Wales as a whole the number of suicides recorded; and if he will express this number as a percentage of the overall population for *(a)* 1971, *(b)* 1981, *(c)* 1991 and *(d)* for each of the last available three years for which figures are available. [1081]

Mr. Richards: In view of the large number of figures requested I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Detention of Persons

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list all those hospitals used in Wales for the detention of persons under the Mental Health Acts; and which of those are private hospitals. [1595]

Mr. Hague: The following hospitals can be used for the detention of persons under the Mental Health Act:

NHS hospitals and units

Bodfaen Mental Illness Unit
Bodnant Unit and EMI, Llandudno Hospital
Brecon War Memorial Hospital
Broddyfi Community Hospital
Bronllys Hospital
Bryn Beryl Hospital
Bryn-y-Neuadd Hospital
Brynhyfryd Hospital
Caswell Clinic (Forensic Psychiatry), Glanrhyd Hospital
Cefn Coed Hospital
Cefni Hospital
Dryll-y-Car
Ely Hospital
Garngoch Hospital
Glanrhyd Hospital
Gwynfa Residential Unit
Hensol Hospital
Hergest Acute Mental Illness Unit, Adjacent Ysbyty Gwynedd
Lansdowne Hospital
Lanfrechfa Grange Hospital
Llwyneryr Hospital
Llynfi Hospital
Llys Maldwyn Hospital
Mardy Hospital
Mental Health Services, East Glamorgan General Hospital
Mid Wales Hospital
Minfordd Hospital
Mountain Ash General Hospital
Panteg Acute MI, Talygarn
Pater Close Unit
Pen-y-fal Hospital
Psychiatric Services, Ysbyty Maelor
Royal Alexandra Hospital
Royal Hamadryad Hospital
St. Cadoc's Hospital
St. David's Hospital, Carmarthen
St. Tydfils Hospital
Sully Hospital, Morfa Day Unit
Tonna Hospital
University Hospital of Wales
Whitchurch Hospital
Ysbyty George Thomas
Ystrad Mynach Bungalow Units
Ystrad Mynach Hospital
Ystradgynlais Community Hospital

Private hospital

Llanarth Court Hospital

Mental Health

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many people were detained in Wales during each of the last three years under the provisions of the Mental Health Acts; and what percentage of these were held in private hospitals. [1596]

Mr. Hague: The information is as follows:

Admissions to hospitals and nursing homes of people detained under provisions of the Mental Health Act, 1983, or other acts

	1992–93	*1993–94*	*1994–95*
NHS hospitals	1,208	1,055	1,251
Private hospitals	28	80	124
Private nursing homes	6	1	5
Total	1,242	1,136	1,380
Percentage detained in private hospitals	2	7	9

Dental Practitioners

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much was spent by each family health service authority on payments to dental practitioners for NHS dental work in each year between 1990 and 1994, inclusive in Wales. [2060]

Mr. Richards: The information requested is as follows:

£000

FHSA	*1990–91*	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*
Clwyd	5,235	(424)	64	71	75
Dyfed	4,735	(373)	99	165	142
Gwent	6,667	(617)	127	148	122
Gwynedd	3,032	(252)	26	101	116
Mid Glamorgan	6,671	(655)	69	57	72
Powys	1,456	(127)	62	33	116
South Glamorgan	6,558	(597)	53	68	81
West Glamorgan	6,049	(565)	29	21	19
Dental Practice Board	—	55,564	51,282	48,445	50,123
Wales	40,403	51,954	51,811	49,109	50,866

Notes:

1. Dental Practice Board (DPB) expenditure is shown to give the complete picture of payments to dental practitioners.

2. With effect from 1 April 1991 the majority of payments to dental practitioners became the responsibility of the DPB. However, due to the timetable of scheduling by the DPB, March 1991 schedules were paid in April 1991 by FHSAs. The balance of their opening creditors were met by payments made by the DPB and were recorded by FHSAs as negative expenditure. At national level the aggregate amount (FHSA and DPB consolidated together) reflects actual expenditure which is comparable with the aggregated outturns for other years.

Source:

Annual Accounts of FHSAs and the DPB.

Community Health Councils

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) if he will make a statement on the main aims of the reforms he proposes to the membership of the community health councils. [1728]

(2) if he will place in the Library a copy of the consultation document on amending the membership size and qualification of Welsh community health councils. [1729]

Mr. Hague: In the light of increasing difficulties in maintaining the current membership levels of community health councils, and the reduction in the number of local councillors from next April, I believe that it is appropriate to seek views from a wide range of bodies on the total membership of community health councils in Wales.

The review in no way challenges the special status of community health councils in representing the public and patient interest in relation to the NHS in Wales.

I have arranged for copies of the consultation letter to be placed in the Library of the House.

Jobseeker's Allowance

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if the current 21-hour rule enabling unemployed people to study while receiving benefit will be reduced to 16 guided learning hours when the jobseeker's allowance is introduced in Wales; what distinction will be made in respect of the treatment of unemployed people who take up places in *(a)* further and *(b)* higher education courses; and if he will make a statement. [1138]

Mr. Forth: I have been asked to reply.

Full-time students will not be able to receive jobseeker's allowance. People receiving JSA will, however, will be able to study part time, as long as they meet the entitlement conditions, which include being available for actively seeking employment. This carries forward existing arrangements.

In higher education, courses continue to be classed as either full-time or part-time and so the existing rules distinguishing between people on such courses can—and consequently will—be carried forward into JSA. In further education, however, courses are no longer defined as full-time or part-time, and the rules under JSA will reflect this. Courses funded, in whole or in part, by the Further Education Funding Councils for Wales and England will be considered to be part-time if they are of no more than 16 guided learning hours per week. While those courses in Wales are not, as they are in England, defined by the number of guided learning hours, further education colleges in Wales will nevertheless be able to provide statements of the number of guided learning hours attributed to their courses using the same definition.

These rules are designed to allow the same number of people to study part time while unemployed and receiving benefit as do so under the current rules.

Training for Work

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list for each training and enterprise council in Wales the number of training for work starts for *(a)* 1993–94 and *(b)* 1994–95; what is the estimated number in 1995–96; and what is the total budget for training for work in each TEC for the same years. [1927]

Mr. Richards: The information requested is set out in the following tables: Outturn figures are given for 1993–94 and 1994–95 and planned provision for 1995–96.

Training for Work

	1993–94	*1994–95*	*1995–96*[1]
TFW starts			
Gwent	4,065	3,234	3,400
Mid Glamorgan	4,061	4,283	3,400
North-east Wales	779	1,558	1,537
Powys	628	597	703
South Glamorgan	2,653	2,614	2,500
Targed	1,950	2,384	1,500
West Wales	4,858	4,769	3,568
TFW spend (£ million)			
Gwent	4.952	4.162	4.113
Mid Glamorgan	5.245	4.230	3.636
North-east Wales	2.139	1.506	1.410
Powys	0.757	0.722	0.926
South Glamorgan	3.217	2.855	2.996
Targed	3.040	3.111	2.702
West Wales	6.900	5.913	6.160

[1] Planned figures.

Allied Medical Services

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received in relation to the registration of Allied Medical Services as an agency for temporary nursing staff with respect to vetting procedures in respect of the hiring out of auxiliary nurses. [1731]

Mr. Hague: None. The licensing of nursing agencies is the responsibility of local authorities.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

BBC

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what discussions her Department has had with the British Broadcasting Corporation in relation to the delays in completing NICAM coverage of their broadcast network. [1712]

Mr. Sproat: None. It is for the BBC to determine the rate at which this programme proceeds in the light of its resources and other engineering priorities. However, I understand that the BBC remains committed to an extension of NICAM coverage as part of its continuing programme of investment in its transmitter network.

Tourism

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage which of the four options, I, II, III or IV, outlined in the European Commission's Green Paper on Tourism were supported by *(a)* the British Tourist Authority, *(b)* the Welsh tourist board, *(c)* the Northern Ireland tourist board, *(d)* the Scottish tourist board, *(e)* the Confederation of British Industry, *(f)* the National Trust, *(g)* the British Resorts Association, *(h)* the Association of District Councils and *(i)* the Rank Holiday Organisation. [1475]

Mr. Sproat: The tourist boards indicated the following preferred options:

British Tourist Authority/English Tourist Board jointly—Option III

Welsh Tourist Board—Option III

Northern Ireland Tourist Board—No preferred option specified; option III most appealing

Scottish Tourist Board—Option III

Of the other organisations to which the question refers, copies of responses were received from two, and they indicated support for the options indicated below:

Confederation of British Industry—Option III

British Resorts Associations—Option IV

Most of these organisations indicated that they wanted a higher profile for the tourist industry in Europe, but did not want more regulation.

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will list all the organisations which were consulted by her Department before the Government published their official response to the European Commission Green Paper on Tourism. [1476]

Mr. Sproat: In considering the Government's response to the Green Paper, my Department sought the views of the following organisations:

Association of British Travel Agents
Association of Leading Visitor Attractions
Association of Recognised English Language Services
British Holiday and Home Parks Association
British Hospitality Association
British Incoming Tour Operators Association
British Resorts Association
British Retail Consortium
British Tourist Authority
Confederation of British Industry
European Tour Operators Association
Hotel and Catering International Management Association
Hotel and Catering Training Company
Joint Hospitality Industry Congress
Restaurateurs Association of Great Britain
World Travel and Tourism Council

Copies of responses or comments were also received from the Automobile Association, the Council for the Protection of Rural England, the Federation of Small Businesses, the National Council of Hotels Associations, the Royal Automobile Club and the World Tourism Organisation.

My right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Northern Ireland, for Scotland and for Wales also consulted a number of organisations, as did the British Tourist Authority and English tourist board.

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage (1) what alternative courses of action from those detailed in "Tourism: Competing with the Best" were considered in any environmental appraisal undertaken by his Department; [254]

(2) what procedures have been put in place by her Department to monitor the environmental impacts arising from the implementation of "Tourism: Competing with the Best"; [255]

(3) if "Tourism: Competing with the Best" was *(a)* subject to and *(b)* modified on account of an environmental appraisal using the guidance contained in "Policy Appraisal and the Environment" produced by the Department of the Environment; and if she will publish the appraisal. [253]

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 22 November 1995]:* In developing tourism policy the Government have been guided by the main conclusion of the tourism and environment task force, namely, that serious environmental problems caused by tourism are limited to a few locations at specific times. The task force also stated that many of these problems could be resolved through improved management; the Government responded by funding guidance publications and pilot projects. The recent report of the Environment Select Committee on the environmental impact of leisure activities agreed with the task force, finding no evidence that tourism and leisure pose a serious, immediate or intrinsic threat to the environment.

"Competing with the Best" sets out a number of measures to help the industry become more competitive, and is part of the Government's overall competitiveness programme. Its aim is not to deliver specific developments with measurable environmental impacts, but to equip the industry to deal with ever-increasing competition in the world marketplace. As "Competing with the Best" states, the Government recognise that tourism growth can be sustainable only if a balance is maintained between the needs of visitors and the needs of visitors and the needs of the environment.

Construction Industry

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what discussions she has had with the Department of the Environment regarding the need for the implementation of the Latham report with particular reference to the British Library contract. [411]

Mr. Sproat: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has not considered it necessary to hold discussions with the Department of the Environment regarding the need for the implementation of the Latham report, following the experience of the British Library construction project.

However, the review by Sir Peter Levene's efficiency unit on Government procurement, which complements the Latham report, did consult the Department and drew upon the experiences of the British Library construction project in formulating its recommendations.

Sports Council

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how many redundancies are forecast through the restructuring of the Great Britain Sports Council; and what estimate she has made as to the effects these are likely to have in the level and quality of service. [1607]

Mr. Sproat: Staff selection is in progress for the new organisations following the restructuring of the Great Britain Sports Council. Until posts within the new structures have been filled, it is not possible to give accurate numbers of staff whose employment will terminate on the grounds of compulsory or voluntary redundancy.

The restructuring I announced in July 1994 will enhance the service provided by the Sports Council. The new United Kingdom and English Sports Councils will have a sharper focus and reduced bureaucracy, which will greatly benefit sport.

Local Government

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will list the Acts of Parliament including Consolidation Acts that affect local government that have been introduced by her Department since January 1994. [28]

Mr. Sproat: My Department has not introduced any Acts affecting local government during this period.

Culture Council

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage, if she will make a statement on the outcome of the Culture Council held on 20 November. [2471]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The Council of the European Union on Audiovisual and Culture matters met formally on 20 November; the UK was represented by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Lord Inglewood.

Agreement was reached between member states on the central elements of an amended version of the television without frontiers directive 1989. In particular, there was agreement satisfactory to the UK that there should be no strengthening of the current articles 4 and 5 on quotas and that a contact committee should be established along with a review after five years. Agreement was also secured on amendments to offer strengthened protection to minors and to clarify jurisdiction.

The Council confirmed its agreement to the MEDIA II training decision having taken into account the European Parliament's second reading amendments. Taken with the previous decision on the development and distribution elements of the MEDIA II programme, this will enable this five-year programme of support for the audiovisual industry to begin in 1996.

The Commission made a brief presentation on a proposed European audiovisual investment guarantee fund to promote cinema and television production.

The Council also discussed a draft common position on a proposal to establish the Raphael programme for European cultural heritage, but was unable to agree due to budgetary concerns. However, the Council was able to agree unanimously to adopt a resolution to encourage work on the promotion of statistics on culture and economic growth. The Council also heard a presentation from the Commission on the cross-border aspects of fixed book pricing systems.

It was agreed that the title of European City of Culture in the year 2000 should be shared by Avignon, Bologna, Prague, Cracow, Reykjavik, Brussels, Bergen, Santiago de Compostela and Helsinki. It was also decided that Valletta and Linz, both candidates to host the European Cultural Month in 1998, would be invited to share the title.

Sporting Events (Broadcasting)

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if her Department has reviewed the sporting events listed under section 182 of the Broadcasting Act 1990. [1656]

Mr. Sproat: The list of sporting events drawn up under section 182 of the Broadcasting Act 1990 is kept under regular review.

Adult Television

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what was the outcome of the case before the European Court of Justice between Her Majesty's Government and the broadcaster Red Hot television. [167]

Mr. Sproat: The case has not yet been concluded.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage which encryption systems have been employed by the television services Rendez Vous and TV Erotica and notified to the Secretary of State by the Independent Television Commission; and what powers she has to ban these systems. [166]

Mr. Sproat: I understand that both the TV Erotica and Rendez Vous channels employ the Eurocrypt encryption system for their broadcasts. An encryption system may be utilised by a number of different channels including, as in this case, by some whose broadcasts are in no way unacceptable. To outlaw an encryption system would not therefore be appropriate.

The order that I made on 14 November 1995 under section 177 of the Broadcasting Act 1990 proscribing TV Erotica, however, makes it a criminal offence to advertise, promote or sell the specific software, or smart cards, required to decode the TV Erotica channel's signal. The order comes into force on 5 December 1995. I am considering what action to take in the case of Rendez Vous.

Broadcasting

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage, if she will make a statement on the EC's proposal to amend the television without frontiers directive in respect of the designating factor in determining which member state has jurisdiction. [164]

Mr. Sproat: The Government welcome the proposal that a revised television without frontiers directive should properly clarify and define the jurisdiction of member states over broadcasters. If, as proposed, establishment of the broadcasting company within a member state is to be the primary test of jurisdiction, it is imperative that a clear definition of establishment, for the purposes of the directive, should be incorporated in an amended text.

Departmental Staffing

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how many staff her Department employs on a regional basis in each standard English region; what is the cost of running these regional operations; what was the total budget for each region in 1994–95; and what are the main purposes for which the budget is used. [264]

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 22 November 1995]:* My Department is based in central London and has no other regional offices. The Department employs 363 staff and its running costs for the current financial year are £17,710 million. A breakdown of the main areas of expenditure can be found in the Department's 1994 annual report (Cm 2511) held in the Library of the House.

Energy Efficiency

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what progress has been made towards cutting energy consumption in Government buildings for which she has responsibility in each year since 1994. [1436]

Mr. Sproat: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my hon. Friend the Minister for Construction, Planning and Energy Efficiency, *Official Report*, columns *260–62*.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Abdul Onibiyo

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what information he has concerning the safety of Abdul Onibiyo since he was removed to Nigeria; [1619]

(2) what representations he has received concerning the proposed removal of the Onibiyo family to Nigeria; and if he will make a statement. [1621]

Mr. Kirkhope: We have no information about Mr. Onibiyo's current situation. As I said in my reply to the hon. Member on 7 November *Official Report*, column *813*, his claim to a well-founded fear of persecution in Nigeria was fully considered and rejected. That decision was upheld by the independent appellate authority.

In addition to representations made by the hon. Member for Islington, North, representations have been received from the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) and from the hon. Members for Vauxhall (Miss Hoey), for Rochdale (Ms Lynne), for Berkshire, East (Mr. MacKay), for Coventry, North-West, (Mr. Robinson), for Leyton (Mr. Cohen), for Hyndburn (Mr. Pope), for Brentford and Isleworth (Mr. Deva), for Feltham and Heston (Mr. Keen), the Bishop of Southwark, the Churches Commission for Racial Justice, the Lambeth branch of Unison, other members of Unison and legal representatives acting for the Onibiyo family. In addition, early-day motions have been signed by the hon. Member for Islington, North and by the hon. Members for Newham, North-west (Mr. Banks), for Nottingham, South (Mr. Allen) and for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours).

Removal Orders

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people *(a)* have been removed to Nigeria (i) before and (ii) after 10 November and *(b)* are currently the subject of removal orders. [1622]

Mr. Kirkhope: The information requested is not available centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. However, the available information shows that in the 12 months prior to 10 November 1995, 339 Nigerian nationals were either removed from the United Kingdom as illegal entrants or deported and that one has been removed since that date.

Stop-and-search Powers

Ms Abbott: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement about the number of people of African descent who are stopped, questioned and searched coming through British ports relative to the average number of people so detained. [1232]

Mr. Kirkhope: The information requested is not available.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his Department's current practice in respect of immigration officials passing on details of the claims of persons seeking asylum to the embassies of countries from which asylum seekers have travelled; and if he will make a statement. [1526]

Mr. Kirkhope: All applications for asylum in the United Kingdom are treated as confidential. No information about an asylum claim is disclosed to the authorities of the applicant's country of origin. However, both the Dublin convention, which is not yet in force, and the European Union resolution on minimum guarantees for asylum procedures provide for information to be disclosed in confidence to the asylum authorities of other member states of the European Union through which the applicant has passed or which may have responsibility for considering the asylum claim.

Mr. Khabra: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many applications for asylum have been rejected on the safe third country ground. [1260]

Mr. Kirkhope: In 1994 865 asylum applications were refused on the safe third country ground and 1,205 in the first nine months of 1995. A nationality split is available in table 4.3 of the Home Office statistical bulletin, "Asylum Statistics United Kingdom 1994", issue 15/95. A copy of this publication is available in the Library.

Ms Janet Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will give details of the pilot scheme adopted by immigration officials to accelerate asylum applications from certain countries. [149]

Mr. Kirkhope: I am placing a short report on the pilot scheme in the Library.

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which countries have undergone events likely to give rise to a well-founded fear of persecution among the nationals since 1988; and which countries are currently undergoing such events. [552]

Mr. Kirkhope: Under proposals on which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security has been consulting for restricting the benefit entitlement of asylum seekers, it is envisaged that the Benefit Agency will be notified in the event of a future fundamental change of circumstances in a country such that persons will not normally be returned to it for the time being.

Probation Services

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the number of *(a)* probation officers and *(b)* probation assistants in post in each of the probation services in England and Wales in (i) 1979, (ii) 1985, (iii) 1990, (iv) 1991, (v) 1992, (vi) 1993 (vii) 1994. [2059]

Mr. Kirkhope: Information is given in the table. Figures for probation services' officers (ancillaries) are not available by individual area for 1979.

(a) Probation officers

Area	1979[1]	1985[1]	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994
Avon	64	70	114	114	117	122	116
Bedfordshire	32	45	66	70	81	80	77
Berkshire	48	50	81	88	98	102	107
Buckinghamshire	24	48	82	80	93	94	94
Cambridgeshire	34	37	69	75	81	87	85
Cheshire	51	62	104	113	118	129	120
Cleveland	52	51	108	108	110	106	109
Cornwall	24	23	35	34	41	45	44
Cumbria	31	38	60	64	69	73	72
Derbyshire	43	59	117	118	121	118	119
Devon	63	62	132	134	139	143	151
Dorset	44	45	88	89	90	88	93
Durham	41	44	89	93	91	96	91
Essex	64	89	143	147	148	154	156
Gloucestershire	32	30	63	64	64	64	69
Hampshire	110	117	191	200	215	207	205
Hereford and Worcester	46	61	94	96	106	110	112
Hertfordshire	58	63	102	104	103	104	105
Humberside	57	78	134	139	141	145	141
Kent	86	101	163	171	189	179	181
Lancashire	101	122	201	201	207	216	217
Leicestershire	57	56	123	124	126	131	142
Lincolnshire	31	37	73	72	78	79	85
Greater Manchester	222	254	426	446	469	486	502
Merseyside	175	188	298	306	331	327	320
Norfolk	32	37	83	83	84	82	91
Northamptonshire	37	48	64	71	70	74	76
Northumbria	119	137	238	238	249	250	262
Nottinghamshire	116	114	180	177	187	190	183
Oxfordshire	35	39	67	66	74	72	77
Shropshire	27	32	51	51	50	52	52
Somerset	24	30	63	68	66	73	76
Staffordshire	90	101	169	170	176	177	172
Suffolk	32	34	84	85	89	89	94
Surrey	44	46	87	90	103	99	101
East Sussex	36	36	68	73	73	77	77
West Sussex	24	34	53	57	62	65	66
Warwickshire	32	37	62	61	65	66	66
West Midlands	261	289	444	459	459	465	482
Wiltshire	27	35	61	63	65	70	71
North Yorkshire	30	36	54	58	57	60	61
South Yorkshire	112	118	205	222	229	239	238
West Yorkshire	199	193	321	319	356	394	389
Dyfed	15	23	31	34	35	40	37
Gwent	30	33	51	54	51	54	58
North Wales	33	44	68	70	70	68	70
Powys	6	8	11	12	12	12	12
South Glamorgan	40	40	73	78	77	76	76
Mid Glamorgan	44	49	69	76	78	84	84
West Glamorgan	25	32	51	53	53	55	54
Inner London	284	327	573	620	614	639	643
North East London	68	83	123	121	141	143	152
South East London	44	53	70	76	85	89	92
South West London	31	42	66	63	71	71	79
Middlesex	151	170	238	247	266	265	275

[1] Figures for 1979 and 1985 are for maingrade probation officers on general duties only. Figures for 1990–1994 are for all probation officer grades.

(b) Probation services' officers (ancillaries)

Area	1985	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994
Avon	25	33	39	36	44	44
Bedfordshire	14	15	15	18	17	16
Berkshire	19	25	28	30	31	33
Buckinghamshire	19	20	17	18	16	16
Cambridgeshire	16	19	20	19	23	22
Cheshire	41	31	34	35	37	40
Cleveland	28	20	18	18	26	31
Cornwall	13	10	14	13	14	16
Cumbria	27	31	33	33	33	32
Derbyshire	19	26	24	23	22	21
Devon	31	35	40	39	38	32
Dorset	16	18	20	21	22	25
Durham	23	29	37	36	30	25
Essex	36	53	58	52	54	53
Gloucestershire	12	20	19	22	22	23
Hampshire	16	44	44	47	42	50
Hereford and Worcestershire	18	15	17	15	14	15
Hertfordshire	14	25	26	24	28	29
Humberside	18	27	29	29	30	34
Kent	45	40	40	43	49	46
Lancashire	45	64	66	69	68	71
Leicestershire	18	22	22	21	21	17
Lincolnshire	23	25	24	23	23	26
Greater Manchester	130	141	137	137	141	153
Merseyside	58	70	79	79	94	100
Norfolk	13	20	25	22	21	22
Northamptonshire	15	15	18	18	17	16
Northumbria	54	52	56	59	61	61
Nottinghamshire	24	28	27	28	28	31
Oxfordshire	18	16	17	17	22	21
Shropshire	8	11	10	9	9	9
Somerset	21	15	15	15	17	16
Staffordshire	29	33	33	35	39	37
Suffolk	11	17	16	17	16	17
Surrey	19	14	21	23	11	13
East Sussex	19	22	24	23	23	22
West Sussex	7	12	14	13	14	15
Warwickshire	14	12	12	15	14	15
West Midlands	71	101	102	113	108	109
Wiltshire	18	19	18	18	19	19
North Yorkshire	10	16	17	17	16	16
South Yorkshire	73	78	80	78	82	80
West Yorkshire	121	119	115	119	123	129
Dyfed	6	8	8	7	7	9
Gwent	8	22	24	19	16	15
North Wales	18	15	16	15	14	19
Powys	2	4	4	4	4	3
South Glamorgan	18	19	18	21	22	22
Mid Glamorgan	17	17	18	18	18	17
West Glamorgan	17	19	21	22	21	20
Inner London	130	116	119	116	135	122
North East London	32	30	32	36	36	36
South East London	23	25	23	24	28	28
South West London	14	13	14	14	15	20
Middlesex	65	51	54	52	57	50

Political Asylum Applications

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many applications for political asylum have been received from people previously resident in *(a)* Nigeria, *(b)* Turkey, *(c)* Iraq, *(d)* Iran and *(e)* China in each of the last five years; and how many of those applications, in each case, have been accepted. [1926]

Mr. Kirkhope: Information on asylum applications and grants of asylum from nationals of Nigeria, Turkey, Iraq, Iran and China are given in tables 2.1 and 3.1 respectively of the Home Office statistical bulletin, "Asylum Statistics United Kingdom 1994, issue 15/95. A copy of this publication is available in the Library. It should be noted that grants of asylum in a particular year do not necessarily relate to applications made in that year.

Carl Bridgewater

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to make an announcement about a referral of the case of the men convicted of the murder of Carl Bridgewater back to the Court of Appeal. [2011]

Mr. Kirkhope: We are very close to completing our consideration of this case.

Migration (Former Yugoslavia)

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many visas he has earmarked for sick or injured children from the former Yugoslavia to be treated in the United Kingdom *(a)* in total and *(b)* by special arrangement with the International Organisation for Migration and the Child Advocacy International charity; [1726]

(2) what arrangements he has made for the provision of special visas earmarked for sick and injured children from the former Yugoslavia to be admitted by arrangement with Child Advocacy International and the International Organisation for Migration for medical treatment in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement. [1727]

Mr. Kirkhope: The United Kingdom has already admitted, under arrangements made by the International Organisation for Migration, 86 people from the former Yugoslavia under the Government's official medical evacuation programme, 28 of whom were under the age of 18. Of the 20 additional medical places announced in September, 14 remain to be filled.

The arrangements between IOM and Child Advocacy International are for the evacuation of Bosnian children for private medical treatment outside the official programme. These children will therefore need to meet the requirements of the immigration rules relating to private medical treatment.

Deportation Procedures

Dame Jill Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will take steps to alter the present rule under which persons served with notice of deportation are free to take up paid employment in Britain. [1172]

Miss Widdecombe: We intend to take appropriate measures in the forthcoming Asylum and Immigration Bill.

Next Steps Agencies

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement about executive agency status for the police scientific development branch. [2713]

Mr. Maclean: We have decided that the police scientific development branch should be considered as a candidate for executive agency status under the next steps initiative. A prior options study will be undertaken to establish whether agency status or some other option is the most appropriate. I would welcome comments from interested parties. Comments should be sent by 2 February 1996 to:

The Assistant Under Secretary of State
Home Office (Room 527)
Horseferry House
Dean Ryle Street
London SW1P 2AW

Police Complaints Authority

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what arrangements have been made to appoint a successor to Sir Leonard Peach as chairman of the Police Complaints Authority. [2712]

Mr. Howard: Mr. Peter Moorhouse has agreed to be acting chairman of the Police Complaints Authority from Sir Leonard Peach's departure to take up the post of Commissioner for Public Appointments on 18 December. Mr. Moorhouse is currently senior deputy chairman of the authority. A substantive appointment will be made through open competition.

Performance-enhancing Drugs

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans the Government has to outlaw the use of anabolic steroids and other performance enhancing drugs. [1473]

Mr. Maclean: The Government announced in November 1994, in line with a recommendation from the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs, its intention to bring anabolic steroids and other similar drugs under the controls of the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971.

Since then, the Government have been taking careful and detailed technical advice from the advisory council on precisely which substances should be controlled. It is planned to lay the necessary draft modification order before Parliament soon.

Ticket Touts (Football Matches)

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many criminal proceedings involving ticket tout offences at football matches contained in section 166 of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 have been pursued to date; how many convictions were secured; and what plans his Department has for tightening the current legislation; [1471]

(2) how many criminal proceedings involving alleged offences contained in sections II, III and IV of the Football (Offences) Act 1991 were pursued in 1994; and how many convictions were secured. [1472]

Mr. Maclean: Information under the Football (Offences) Act 1991 is given in the table.

Information on cautioning and court proceedings data under section 166 of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 will not be available until autumn 1996.

Persons prosecuted at magistrates' courts and convicted at all courts or cautioned for offences under The Football (Offences) Act 1991 England and Wales 1994

Offence code	Description	Act and section	Prosecutions	Convictions	Cautions
125/27	Throwing a missile at or towards the playing area or any area in which spectators or other persons may be present	Football Offences Act 1991, Section 2	20	11	8
125/28	Taking part in indecent or racialist chanting	Football Offences Act 1991, Section 3	18	9	4
125/29	Going onto the playing or adjacent area without lawful authority or lawful excuse	Football Offences Act 1991, Section 4	259	233	70

Source:
S1 Division, Home Office.

Prison Service (Study)

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department who is conducting the study of the relationship between the Prison Service and the Home Office; if he will list their qualifications for carrying out the study; what is the cost of the study; and when he expects to report the findings of the study. [384]

Miss Widdecombe: My right hon. and learned Friend told the House on 16 October that work was under way in response to General Sir John Learmont's recommendation that this should be an in-depth study of the relationship between the Prison Service and the Home Office. The initial work has been assisted by Miss Kate Jenkins, who was one of the three authors of the 1988 efficiency unit report to my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, "Improving Management in Government: The Next Steps", which recommended the establishment of executive agencies. My right hon. and learned Friend has given an undertaking to report to the House when the work is complete. Information on the costs of individual contracts with consultants is commercial in confidence and it is not our practice to disclose these details.

Miss Elaine Connolly

Ms Janet Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what considerations led to the transfer of Miss Elaine Connolly from Styal prison to Holloway prison; [140]

(2) what considerations led to the refusal to transfer Miss Elaine Connolly from Holloway prison to Styal prison. [141]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for these matters has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Pearson to Ms Janet Anderson, dated 23 November 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Questions about Miss Elaine Connolly.

Miss Connolly was transferred from Styal prison to Holloway because information was received suggesting that she was planning to escape. On the basis of the information available to him, the governor considered that Miss Connolly should be transferred to more secure conditions.

Miss Connolly was then told she would be returned to Styal. This advice was given to her in error as a result of a failure in communication between staff at Holloway. I am sorry for this error and for raising Miss Connolly's hopes of returning to a prison nearer her home.

Refugees Convention

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list those countries where circumstances which in the past have justified recourse to the 1951 UN convention on refugees have in the past 12 months ceased to exist. [554]

Mr. Kirkhope: All applications for asylum are considered in accordance with the criteria set out in the 1951 United Nations convention relating to the status of refugees. Decisions are based on all the relevant circumstances of individual cases as well as on an assessment of conditions in the country of origin. There is no question of our refusing to consider, or of our automatically refusing, an application because of the country of origin of the applicant.

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list those countries that are not generating refugees as defined by the 1951 UN convention on refugees at the present time. [553]

Mr. Kirkhope: Information about asylum decisions, broken down by the country of origin of applicants, is contained in table 3 and 4 of the Home Office statistical bulletin "Asylum Statistics United Kingdom 1994", a copy of which is in the Library.

Prisoners (Escapes)

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners have escaped whilst being transported to and from court appearances and hospital visits since 1990; and how many remain uncaptured. [165]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Gerry Steinberg, dated 23 November 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about how many prisoners have escaped while being transported to and from court appearances and hospital visits since 1990 and how many remain uncaptured.

The information is given in the table below:

	Number
Crown Courts	50
Magistrates Courts	137
Hospital visits—outpatients	34
Hospital visits—inpatients	188

The information covers the period 1 January 1990 to 31 October 1995.

Prison Service records show that 26 of the escapers from court appearances and hospital visits remain uncaptured.

Prisons (VAT Payments)

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how much value added tax has been paid in addition to the published contract prices to the companies running *(a)* HMP Wolds, *(b)* HMP Blakenhurst, *(c)* HMP Doncaster and *(d)* HMP Buckley Hall for each financial year since the prisons opened; [388]

(2) how much value added tax has been recovered from the companies running: *(a)* HMP Wolds, *(b)* HMP Blakenhurst, *(c)* HMP Doncaster and *(d)* HMP Buckley Hall for each financial year since the prisons opened. [476]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for these matters has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Pearson to Mr. George Howarth, dated 23 November 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Questions about how much value-added tax has been paid in addition to the published contract prices to the companies running (a) HMP Wolds, (b) HMP Blakenhurst, (c) HMP Doncaster and (d) HMP Buckley Hall for each financial year since the prisons opened and how much has been recovered over the same period.

The Prison Service reclaims all VAT paid in respect of these contracts normally at the end of the subsequent quarter. The figures for the four contracted-out prisons are as follows:

Establishment and year	*VAT paid (£)*	*VAT reclaimed (£)*
HMP Wolds		
1991–92	311,582	134,550
1992–93	862,872	788,658
1993–94	994,827	932,949
1994–95	1,254,501	1,183,715
1995–96	556,983	617,627
HMP Blakenhurst		
1992–93	463,876	115,969
1993–94	1,499,327	1,400,602
1994–95	1,933,333	1,790,378
1995–96	732,443	1,029,053
HMP Doncaster		
1993–94	254,475	0
1994–95	2,038,796	1,679,315
1995–96	966,712	1,137,398
HMP Buckley Hall		
1994–95	294,657	145,250
1995–96	717,499	149,407

Mr. Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how the application and collection of value added tax affects the budgets and accounting procedures of *(a)* Prison Service managed prisons and *(b)* privately managed prisons; and if he will make a statement. [389]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Pearson to Mr. George Howarth, dated 23 November 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question about how the application and collection of value-added tax affects the budgets and accounting procedures of (a) Prison Service managed prisons and (b) privately managed prisons.

Directly managed prisons pay and can reclaim VAT on a wide range of the services they purchase. Sums included in the supply estimate are appropriated-in-aid towards expenditure under the Vote. Prison Service payments to companies running privately managed prisons include VAT, which is subsequently reclaimed. The Prison Service is not involved in VAT payments by those companies for services they purchase.

Sentencing Guidelines

Ms Janet Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will give details of the guidelines governing sentencing for trafficking in class B drugs. [136]

Mr. Maclean: The Government do not issue guidance on sentencing. The Magistrates Association issues sentencing guidelines for its members, which are available in the Library, and guidance is provided by Court of Appeal judgments in individual cases.

Ms Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what are the sentencing guidelines for conspiracy to supply cannabis. [133]

Mr. Maclean: The Government do not issue guidance on sentencing. The Magistrates Association issues sentencing guidelines for its members, which are available in the Library, and guidance is provided by Court of Appeal judgments in individual cases.

Parkhurst Prison

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to decommission Her Majesty's Prison Parkhurst's category A status. [478]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Pearson to Mr. George Howarth, dated 23 November 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question about the plans that are in place to decommission Parkhurst prison's category A status.

The Home Secretary announced on 16 October 1995 that Parkhurst prison was to be removed from the dispersal estate. The Director of Operations with responsibility for Parkhurst has set up

a steering group, headed by the area manager, to manage the process of downgrading Parkhurst prison. The prison service will announce its detailed plans for this process shortly.

Mr. Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much has been spent to date on improving security at Her Majesty's Prison Parkhurst since the escape of three prisoners on 3 January; and how much of this sum is due to additional costs caused by implementing recommendations of the Learmont inquiry. [391]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Pearson to Mr. George Howarth, dated 23 November 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question about how much has been spent to date on improving security at Parkhurst prison since the escape of three prisoners on 3 January 1995 and how much of this sum is due to additional costs caused by implementing recommendations of the Learmont inquiry.

Since the escape on 3 January, perimeter closed circuit television and alarm systems have been installed and modifications made to the emergency control room at a cost of £1.2 million.

Following publication of the Learmont inquiry the Home Secretary announced on 16 October that Parkhurst was to be removed from the dispersal estate. As a result of this announcement further security upgrading work at Parkhurst has been cancelled including two projects which had been let, for which expenditure of £300,000 has been incurred.

Legal Aid

Mr. Boateng: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the total sum expended on providing legal advice assistance and representation under the Immigration and Asylum Act 1993 in each year for which figures are available. [204]

Mr. Kirkhope: The grant paid under section 23 of the Immigration Act 1971 for each year since 1993–94 was as follows:

Refugee Legal Centre

1993–94: £1,890,000
1994–95: £3,000,000
1995–96: £3,100,000

Immigration Advisory Service

1993–94: £2,640,000
1994–95: £2,420,000
1995–96: £2,590,000

These figures do not include expenditure through green form legal aid.

Prison Education

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what mechanisms exist for *(a)* part-time and *(b)* full-time teaching staff (i) to promote new educational services for prisoners and (ii) to propose improvements in prison education. [398]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. George Howarth, dated 23 November 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about what mechanisms exist for *(a)* part-time and *(b)* full-time teaching staff (i) to promote new educational services for prisoners and (ii) to propose improvements in prison education.

In accordance with paragraph 5.3 of the General Terms and Conditions of Contract covering the delivery of education services, the contractor is required to keep the specifications for courses, curriculum and the overall programme of courses at each establishment under continuous review. The way in which full-time and part-time teaching staff can be involved in this process is best determined and managed by the education contractor. Each governor is responsible for determining which courses will run at the establishment concerned and does this by placing orders with the education provider. The governor may obtain advice from an education and training adviser. If the governor agrees to a proposal from the education provider to change the education programme, an amendment to the orders will be issued. Proposals will usually be made known to the governor by the contractor's on-site representative, the education co-ordinator.

In 1994 the Prison Service awarded a contract to the National Prison Education Consortium to undertake a consultancy to develop a national curriculum framework for prison education. The Consortium consulted widely within and outside the Prison Service, and representatives of the education providers were involved in this process. The final report and recommendations of the consultancy have been accepted by the Prisons Board and disseminated to governors, education providers and chief librarians of public library authorities providing a service to prisons.

The steering committee which has been established to oversee implementation includes representatives of education contractors.

Mr. Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what safeguards exist to ensure that part-time Prison Service teaching staff have qualifications of the same calibre as full-time teaching Prison Service staff. [396]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. George Howarth, dated 23 November 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about what safeguards exist to ensure that part-time Prison Service teaching staff have qualifications of the same calibre as full-time teaching Prison Service staff.

The teaching qualifications required of education contractors' staff teaching in prisons depend upon the nature of the subject and the level to which it is taught rather than the employment status of the teacher. In accordance with paragraph 7.1 of the General Terms and Conditions of Contract covering education services, contractors are responsible for recruiting teaching staff who hold qualifications consistent with those held by staff teaching equivalent subjects at colleges of further education or institutes of adult education. Paragraph 7.2 of the General Terms and Conditions of Contract enables a representative of the Prison Service to attend recruitment panels for teachers whom a contractor wishes to use at a prison establishment. Paragraph 7.4 of the General Terms and Conditions requires that a contractor will, if requested by an authorised Prison Service representative, provide details of the qualifications (including copies of certificates if requested) and experience of any person employed by the contractor for the delivery of education services to the establishment.

Prisoners' Telephone Conversations

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department for what reason telephone conversations between solicitors and their clients are tape recorded at

Her Majesty's Prison Whitemoor; when this practice started; and if he will make a statement. [908]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Pearson to Mr. Chris Mullin, dated 23 November 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question about the tape recording of telephone calls between solicitors and their clients at Whitemoor prison.

The policy on the use of cardphones by prisoners is set out in Circular Instruction 21/1992, a copy of which is in the Library of the House. A copy is attached for ease of reference. This states that all calls made by prisoners using the cardphone system will be recorded and are liable to be monitored. Cardphones are provided for use only by those prisoners who consent to this. Cardphones were introduced into most parts of Whitemoor in 1992 and into the special secure unit in June 1995.

Use of a cardphone is a privilege and prisoners are informed that it is not possible to guarantee the confidentiality of conversations with their legal advisers using the system. Prisoners at Whitemoor are advised to communicate legally privileged information either by letter or during a visit.

The arrangements for prisoners' access to the cardphone system at Whitemoor are in accordance with current policy and are the same as those for all closed establishments within the prison estate.

Prison Budgets

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent changes have been made to the budget allocations of prison governors; on what date these were made; to which financial years they refer; and if he will list the changes in allocation for each private prison. [387]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Pearson to Mr. George Howarth, dated 23 November 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question about changes to the budget allocations of prison governors and private prisons.

Budgets for individual prisons are set at the start of each financial year and then changed as necessary in the light of operational requirements. This year there have been a number of adjustments for directly managed prisons. Payments which the Prison Service makes to the privately managed prisons are unchanged as their precise operating budgets are a matter for the companies concerned.

Prisoners

Ms Janet Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners are currently restricted to their cells for up to 18 hours a day as a result of *(a)* staff shortages and *(b)* sickness leave among prison staff. [135]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Pearson to Ms Janet Anderson, dated 23 November 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question about how many prisoners are currently restricted to their cells for up to 18 hours a day as a result of *(a)* staff shortages and *(b)* sickness leave among prison staff:

The information is not available in the form requested. Figures are available, however, on the average time spent unlocked from cells. These figures show that, in the week commencing 13 November 1995, six prisons (Birmingham, Leeds, Liverpool, Winchester, Chelmsford and Feltham) reported average unlocking figures of less than eight hours per week day. The population of these establishments restricted to their cells up to 18 hours a day constitutes 2.9 per cent. of the total prison population.

We do not record centrally the various factors which account for establishment's performance on unlocking.

Young Offenders

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many young offenders sentenced under section 53(2) of the Children and Young Persons Act 1933 were in custody on the last date for which figures are available; and of those in custody, how many were *(a)* in local authority secure accommodation, *(b)* in prison department custody and *(c)* detained under mental health legislation. [631]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 22 November 1995]:* Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Pearson to Mr. Alex Carlile, dated 23 November 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question asking how many young offenders sentenced under section 53(2) of the Children and Young Persons Act 1933 were in custody on the last date for which figures are available; and of those in custody, how many were *(a)* in local authority secure accommodation, *(b)* in prison department custody and *(c)* detained under mental health legislation

On 20 November 1995 114 persons were detained in local authority secure accommodation and 445 in Prison Service establishments in England and Wales under Section 53(2) of the Children and Young Persons Act 1993. None were detained under mental health legislation.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Rough Sleepers

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many people he estimates sleep rough each night in Belfast; and what proportion of these are under 18 years of age. [11]

Mr. Moss: The chief executive of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, which has statutory responsibility to make provision for the homeless, has advised me that he has no evidence from official sources of anyone sleeping rough in Belfast.

Homelessness

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what proportion of Northern Ireland Housing Executive properties have been let to persons classified as homeless in each of the last 10 years. [12]

Mr. Moss: The Northern Ireland Housing Executive has statutory responsibility to deal with the homeless under the provisions of the Housing (NI) Order 1988. While precise figures are not available, it is estimated that the proportion of lettings by the Housing Executive to those accepted as homeless, since 1989–90, the first full year of operation of the homelessness legislation, is as follows:

1989–90: 21 per cent.
1990–91: 32 per cent.
1991–92: 36 per cent.
1992–93: 38 per cent.
1993–94: 37 per cent.
1994–95: 36 per cent.

Divorce

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) if it is his policy that Northern Ireland should be included in the proposed divorce law reform Bill; [71]

(2) if he will indicate the present major differences in the divorce laws as between Northern Ireland and Great Britain, and what work is in hand to draft proposals to bring the two sets of laws in line. [70]

Sir John Wheeler: The Family Law Bill which includes the proposed reforms on divorce does not extend to Northern Ireland. There are at present no major differences in the substantive divorce law as between Northern Ireland and England and Wales; but there are a number of differences in the practice and procedure between the two jurisdictions.

It has therefore been decided to undertake a comprehensive research exercise to examine the operation of divorce law in Northern Ireland. Ministers here will await the outcome of that research before giving careful consideration to the need for reform of the law in Northern Ireland.

Education (Capital Expenditure)

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) if he will describe the system of prioritisation and decision making in the allocation of capital funding for capital expenditure on education in Northern Ireland; [1109]

(2) what proposals he has to introduce medium and long-term planning and greater transparency into the allocation of capital funds for educational purposes. [1108]

Mr. Ancram: There are well-established procedures for the planning of major capital projects in the education service. In the case of the schools sector, which has the majority of building needs, the system of prioritisation places each major works project in one to seven priority categories, based on an objective assessment of need. My Department reviews and updates and updates the capital needs of the education estate each year in consultation with the education and library boards, the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools and other education authorities.

The medium and long-term priorities for the planning of individual major works are determined from these planning systems and the available resources are allocated to the highest priorities based on educational need. The available capital resources are reviewed annually in the public expenditure survey.

Unclaimed Benefits

Rev. Ian Paisley: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) what estimates he has made of the total amount of unclaimed income support in *(a)* Northern Ireland and *(b)* North Antrim; [33]

(2) what estimate he has made of the total amount of unclaimed family credit for *(a)* Northern Ireland and *(b)* North Antrim; [31]

(3) what estimate he has made of the total amount of unclaimed sickness benefit for *(a)* Northern Ireland and *(b)* North Antrim; [35]

(4) what estimate he has made of the total amount of unclaimed disability living allowance for *(a)* Northern Ireland and *(b)* North Antrim; [34]

(5) what estimate he has made of the total amount of unclaimed benefits in *(a)* Northern Ireland and *(b)* North Antrim. [32]

Mr. Moss: The information requested is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Local Government

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the Acts of Parliament and Consolidation Acts that affect local government that have been introduced by his Department since January 1994. [38]

Sir John Wheeler: This Department has introduced no such Acts since January 1994. The following Orders in Council under the Northern Ireland Act 1974, which equate to primary legislation for Northern Ireland during direct rule, have been made in that period and affect local government—

The Airports (Northern Ireland) Order 1994 (management of local airports);

The Litter (Northern Ireland) Order 1994 (litter control powers);

The Rates (Amendment) (Northern Ireland) Order 1994 (rating);

The Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) (Northern Ireland) Order 1995 (miscellaneous amendments to local government law).

Drug and Alcohol Abuse

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will specify where drug and alcohol abuse advice and counselling is presently carried out in the North Down and Ards Community Health trust; and what locations other than Bingham street, Bangor *(a)* have been and *(b)* are being considered for a drug and alcohol abuse advice centre. [69]

Mr. Moss: North Down and Ards Community HSS trust currently provides drug and alcohol addiction services from 52A Church street, Newtownards, Ards hospital, Bangor health centre, Donaghadee health centre and Portaferry health centre.

Premises at 10–14 Victoria road, Bangor, were considered, in addition to those in Bingham street, for a new home for the trust's addiction team.

North Down and Ards Community HSS trust is anxious to find suitable accommodation for this service but, to date, no final decision has been made.

Breast Cancer

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many people have died of breast cancer in Northern Ireland in each of the last five years; and what comparisons his Department has conducted in respect of the incidence of breast cancer in other regions of the United Kingdom. [76]

Mr. Moss: The information requested is as follows:

		Northern Ireland		*England and Wales*		*Scotland*	
Year	*Female or Male*	*Total*	*Rate per 100,000*	*Total*	*Rate per 100,000*	*Total*	*Rate per 100,000*
1990	Female	295	36.5	13,634	52.5	1,250	47
	Male	—	—	107	.43	7	.28
1991	Female	339	41.7	13,786	52.9	1,278	48
	Male	3	0.4	83	.33	4	.16
1992	Female	308	37.2	13,663	52.2	1,250	47
	Male	—	—	92	.37	6	.24
1993	Female	331	40.6	13,026	49.6	1,280	48
	Male	8	1.0	87	.35	5	.20
1994	Female	338	40.2	12,830	48.8	1,275	48
	Male	—	—	88	.35	3	.12

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to improve preventive breast cancer services in Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement. [77]

Mr. Moss: The Northern Ireland breast screening programme is continually monitored in order to modify it as necessary to maintain and improve its effectiveness. In addition Northern Ireland is participating with other United Kingdom Health Departments in research to improve the breast screening programme.

Private Landlords

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the major differences in the law relating to the tenants of private landlords in Northern Ireland and their position in relation to rent, repairs and security of tenure as opposed to those in England and Wales; and to what extent the Government propose to move the Northern Ireland law into line with England and Wales. [72]

Mr. Moss: The legislation governing the private rented sector in Northern Ireland is significantly different than in England and Wales.

In England and Wales there are three main types of tenancy:

(i) regulated—commenced before 15 January 1989 subject to a fair rent with considerable security of tenure and the landlord normally responsible for the repairs;

(ii) assured—from 15 January 1989 landlords could create an assured tenancy with rent charged at open market levels;

(iii) assured shorthold—allows landlords to let their property for a fixed period, which must be for a minimum of 6 months, in the certainty that they can gain possession at the end of it.

In both assured and assured shorthold tenancies, repairing obligations are largely a matter of negotiation between landlord and tenant.

In Northern Ireland there are also three main types of tenancy:

(i) restricted—properties generally in a poor state of repair with Net Annual Value (NAV) less than £60 and rent frozen at the 1978 level (usually less than £1.00 per week). Tenants have few repairing rights unless there is a tenancy agreement stating otherwise.

(ii) regulated—properties in a better state of repair. Rent payable limited to the amount calculated in accordance with statute and registered with the Department of the Environment (NI) and can be appealed to a Rent Assessment Committee. The responsibility for repairs may be set out in the tenancy agreement but will normally be the responsibility of the landlord who can be required to carry out repairs by the 'certificate of disrepair' procedure.

Both regulated and restricted tenants have considerable security of tenure whereby the landlord can gain possession only after obtaining a court order.

(iii) uncontrolled—properties built or converted after 1956, or which have an NAV over £140 or which were not previously let. Rent, repairing obligations and security of tenure are a matter between landlord and tenant to be specified in the tenancy agreement.

The Government have no proposals at present to amend the Northern Ireland law relating to the private rented sector.

Rural Development

Rev. Ian Paisley: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the implementation of the proposals contained in the White

Paper on Rural England (Cm 3016) in respect of Northern Ireland with particular reference to *(a)* business rate release schemes, *(b)* affordable housing in the countryside, *(c)* encouragement for the re-use of rural buildings and *(d)* the introduction a new rural business use class. [51]

Mr. Moss: The Government are currently considering the implications for Northern Ireland of the White Paper on Rural England. These considerations will take account of the different circumstances and the existing methods of support for rural communities in Northern Ireland. I will inform the hon. Gentleman once the consideration has been completed and the decision made on the way forward.

EU Funds (Transfrontier Projects)

Mr. Charles Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the Court of Auditors' report in respect of British misuse of funds in transfrontier projects in Northern Ireland. [1041]

Sir John Wheeler: The Court of Auditors noted that the number of transfrontier projects was relatively low. However, it did not suggest that there was any misuse of funds or that expenditure was undertaken in ineligible areas or projects or that expenditure was undertaken that was at variance with the twin objectives of the Interreg programme. Indeed the independent mid-term evaluation of the programme noted that it had been very effective, particularly given the difficult situation pertaining at that time.

Firearms

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has for reviewing the law on firearms. [2798]

Sir John Wheeler: The Firearms (Northern Ireland) Order 1981 provides for the licensing and control of firearms in the Province. Although it has been amended on a number of occasions, most recently last year when new offences relating to imitation firearms were introduced, the law has been largely unchanged since the 1960s. Indeed its origins can be traced back to the 1920s. This in itself would suggest reasonable cause for a fresh look at the law. However, in addition, developments in firearms technology and design have proceeded apace and we have seen a growth nationally in the recreational and sporting use of firearms. For these reasons therefore, I believe that the time is right to take a new look at the law on firearms, to ensure not only that it is appropriate to today's conditions, but that it strikes the right balance between public and individual safety and the reasonable expectations of shooters who want to use their firearms in a responsible and legitimate manner.

The review will be thorough and painstaking. There is much ground to cover. I will, of course, want to take the views of the shooting organisations as well as public representatives, the RUC and safety groups. To that end, I am writing today to Northern Ireland Members and my officials are similarly writing to the political party organisations and other interest groups inviting comment and proposals on what changes to the law they would like to see.

The review team will work under the direction of a steering committee comprising a senior NIO official, assisted by a senior RUC officer with experience in firearms administration and a person of standing with relevant expertise. I have asked them to complete their work and to let me have their report with proposals for change, by August 1996. Thereafter I will publish the proposals for wider consultation. I do not expect new legislation to be in place before the latter part of 1997.

SCOTLAND

Research

Sir Hector Monro: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement about prior options reviews of the Scottish Crop Research Institute, the Macaulay Land Use Research Institute, the Scottish Agricultural Science Agency, the Fisheries Research Services and the Forestry Commission's Research Establishments. [2561]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: As part of a wider series of prior options reviews of public sector research establishments announced in the Government's response to the report of the multidepartmental efficiency scrutiny of public sector research establishments (Cm 2991), my Department, together with the Forestry Commission, will conduct prior options reviews of the Scottish Crop Research Institute—SCRI—the Macaulay Land Use Research Institute—MLURI—the Scottish Agricultural Science Agency—SASA—the Fisheries Research Services—and the Forestry Commission's Research Establishments.

I would welcome comments from interested parties. They should be sent by 8 January to:

on SCRI, MLURI and SASA:

Dr. A. J. Rushworth
The Scottish Office Agriculture, Environment and Fisheries Department
Pentland House
47 Robb's Loan
EDINBURGH
EH14 1TY

on FRS:

Mr. D. Dickson
The Scottish Office Agriculture, Environment and Fisheries Department
Pentland House
47 Robb's Loan
EDINBURGH
EH14 1TY

on the Forestry Commission's research establishments:

Mr. D. B. Henderson-Howat
Director, Forestry Policy
Forestry Commission
231 Corstorphine Road
EDINBURGH
EH12 7AT

Public Appointments

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the vacancies during the first six months of 1996 on quangos, outside bodies and agencies to which he has the right to make appointments. [570]

Mr. George Kynoch: This information is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Local Government

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the Acts of Parliament and Consolidation Acts that affect local government that have been introduced by his Department since January 1994. [27]

Mr. George Kynoch: The relevant Acts are as follows:

The Local Government etc (Scotland) Act 1994.
Children (Scotland) Act 1995.
Requirements of Writing (Scotland) Act 1995.
Criminal Justice (Scotland) Act 1995.
Criminal Procedure (Scotland) Act 1995.
Criminal Law (Consolidation) (Scotland) Act 1995.
Criminal Procedure (Consequential Provisions) (Scotland) Act 1995.
Proceeds of Crime (Scotland) Act 1995.

Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what is his policy in relation to the application of TUPE in the case of portering staff at the Royal Alexandra hospital in Paisley; how much has been spent by *(a)* his Department, *(b)* Argyll and Clyde health board and *(c)* the Royal Alexandra hospital trust on legal and other fees in opposing the claim by portering staff; and if he will make a statement; [1001]

(2) what is his latest estimate of the total cost to public funds of the dispute between Argyll and Clyde health board or its successor trust and portering staff at the Royal Alexandra hospital trust since 1 December 1992; what is his latest estimate of the amount that would have been required to settle the claim on the terms submitted by the portering staff; and if he will make a statement. [571]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: In any market testing programme it is for the health board or NHS trust concerned to consider the implications of the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 1981—TUPE—in awarding contracts.

Records have not been kept of the management and administrative costs incurred by officers of the Argyll and Clyde health board and the Royal Alexandra hospitals NHS trust in dealing with the claim made by UNISON on behalf of portering staff. Similarly it is not possible to hypothecate the legal costs incurred prior to 1 April 1995. Since that date the Royal Alexandra hospital NHS trust has spent £2,178.60 on legal fees arising from this action.

The claims submitted by the individual porters concerned have yet to be validated and will be the subject of further discussions. It would be misleading to provide any estimate of the value of these claims at this stage.

Bail Statistics

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many defendants in Scotland are annually awarded bail; how many offend on bail; and how many do not offend whilst on bail. [1195]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: During 1994, 35,780 bail orders were issued. In some cases a defendant may have more than one outstanding bail order. No information is available on the number of defendants who did, or did not subsequently offend while on bail although information is available on the number of offences of "offending while on bail" recorded by the police. In 1994, 25,766 such offences were recorded. As several counts of "offending while on bail" can relate to the breach of only one bail order, careful interpretation of this figure is required."

Custodial Sentencing

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to ensure that differences in sentencing in Scotland by individual sheriffs are eliminated in accordance with the Scottish Office research paper, "Patterns of Custodial Sentencing in the Sheriff Court". [1193]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Government invited views on a number of possible changes intended to improve consistency, clarity and predictability to sentencing in the consultation paper, "Sentencing and Appeals" which was published in January 1994. Our conclusions were given in the White Paper, "Firm and Fair" (Cm 2600) which announced our intention to promote a specific statutory power to allow the Appeal Court to issue judgments establishing general sentencing guidelines. The relevant provision is included as section 34 to the Criminal Justice (Scotland) Act 1995.

Prisoner Costs

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the average cost of keeping a prisoner in custody in Scotland; and what are the relative costs of the community disposals available to the courts including each of those programmes provided by *(a)* social work departments, *(b)* Scottish Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders and *(c)* other independent agencies. [1286]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The annual cost per prisoner place at HM prisons in Scotland in 1994–95, calculated as total net expenditure—excluding capital—divided by the average number of places available, was £26,479. The average cost per order in 1994–95 of probation and community service disposals available to the courts in Scotland, were £1,588 and £1,446 respectively. The costs of individual programmes provided by local authorities, either directly or through independent agencies such as SACRO, as components of a court order, are not generally identifiable separately within the grants made available to local authorities for criminal justice social work services. As the duration, objectives and content of the community-based programmes vary considerably, the unit costs of individual programmes are not readily comparable.

Drugs (Exports)

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what controls are placed on pharmaceutical wholesalers to ensure that drugs intended for export are not sold domestically. [1578]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Under medicines legislation, wholesale dealer's licences are required for the export of medicinal products to countries which form part of the European Community or European economic area agreement. It is a condition of such licences that medicinal products are sold only to those who may legally sell or supply them by way of retail in the country concerned or are themselves holders of wholesale dealer's licences.

Wholesale dealer's licences are not required for the export of medicinal products to countries outside the European Community or European economic area agreement.

Any reports that medicinal products sold for export have been subsequently sold in the United Kingdom would be investigated by the Medicines Control Agency.

Local Government Reform

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many appointments to quangos in Scotland he intends to review in response to the reform of local government in Scotland in April 1996; and what plans he has to issue instructions to non-departmental public bodies asking them to review their membership in respect of local government reform. [1189]

Mr. George Kynoch: There are no plans to review appointments made by my right hon. Friend to public bodies as a result of local government reform. As a general rule members of public bodies, i.e. nationalised industries, non-departmental public bodies and NHS bodies listed in the annual Cabinet Office publication "Public Bodies", are appointed as individuals and not as representatives of any particular interest group. Similarly there are no plans to ask non-departmental public bodies to review their membership in the light of local government reform. My right hon. Friend will continue to give full opportunities to members of local authorities to serve on public bodies, as recent experience with the new water and sewerage authorities and Customers Council has demonstrated.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what measures his Department has taken to ensure that financial subsidy from the new unitary councils will be given to facilitate the continuing operation of the rail services operated by ScotRail within Strathclyde following local government reform. [1741]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Scottish Office will continue to provide funding through aggregate external finance for local authorities' current expenditure, including rail services in the Strathclyde area, from 1 April 1996.

Mediation and Reparation Projects

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what funding he intends to make available to procurators fiscal in Glasgow and Edinburgh mediation and reparation projects similar to those operating in Aberdeen and Motherwell/Hamilton as an alternative to the court process for victim and accused. [1264]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Diversion from prosecution projects, including mediation and reparation, are not funded through the procurator fiscal service. In 1995–96, the Scottish Office will make available £52,180 and £75,277 through the urban programme for mediation and reparation projects in Aberdeen and Motherwell/Hamilton respectively. A further £25,680 is provided for the project in Motherwell/Hamilton through 100 per cent. funding of criminal justice social work services. There are a number of additional mediation and reparation programmes, funded through the urban programme, but which are not specifically related to the criminal justice system. Pilot schemes which were provided in Glasgow and Edinburgh by the Scottish Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders, through short-term funding under section 10 of the Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968, are no longer in operation.

The Scottish Office plans to invite local authorities to submit proposals for inclusion in a pilot programme within 100 per cent. funding of criminal justice social work services to assess the costs and effectiveness of diversion from prosecution schemes. This will be pursued in the light of available resources and other priorities. There will be scope for including mediation and reparation projects in such diversion scheme applications.

Kincraig Committee

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when the proposals of the Kincraig committee were implemented; what considerations underlie the timetable for their revocation; and if he will make a statement. [1497]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The changes in the law governing early release of prisoners, which arose from the Government's consideration of the review of parole conducted by the committee chaired by the hon. Lord Kincraig, were enacted in the Prisoners and Criminal Proceedings (Scotland) Act 1993. The early release provisions of that Act came into force on 1 October 1993 and will continue to apply to prisoners sentenced since that date.

In his announcement issued on 12 October 1995 my right hon. Friend outlined proposals for further changes to the law on early release which will be the subject of consultation in the near future. The Government's detailed proposals, including the possible timescale for their implementation, will be contained in a White Paper which we aim to publish next year in the light of the results of consultation. The intention is that changes in legislation on early release arising from these proposals would apply only to those sentenced on or after the date the changes came into effect.

Development Corporations

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement indicating for each of the development corporations in Scotland the results of the ballots so far undertaken in relation to the transfers of housing stock to alternative landlords in advance of the wind up of the corporations; what were the bodies involved in the ballots; what were the

number of votes cast for each body involved in the ballot; what was the percentage of votes cast for each organisation; what was the body to which the properties were transferred following the ballot; and what were the amounts bid successfully in each ballot. [1259]

Mr. George Kynoch: Tenants of Glenrothes and East Kilbride development corporations have been balloted to determine their future landlord. The information requested is set out in the tables.

Glenrothes Development Corporation

Area of the New Town	*Prospective landlords*	*Number of votes cast*	*Percentage of votes for each landlord*[1]
Auchmuty	Kirkcaldy District Council	596	97
	Hillcrest Housing Association	20	3
Balfarg	Kirkcaldy District Council	108	96
	Kingdom Housing Association	4	4
Cadham	Kirkcaldy District Council	190	92
	Kingdom Housing Association	16	8
Caskieberran	Kirkcaldy District Council	212	81
	Glenrothes Community Housing Association	51	19
Collydean	Kirkcaldy District Council	281	63
	Collydean Community Housing Association	162	37
Macedonia	Kirkcaldy District Council	237	78
	Glenrothes Community Housing Association	68	22
Newcastle	Kirkcaldy District Council	45	83
	Glenrothes Community Housing Association	9	17
Pitcoudie	Kirkcaldy District Council	129	91
	Kingdom Housing Asspcaition	12	9
Pitteuchar	Kirkcaldy District Council	349	91
	Hillcrest Housing Association	35	9
Rimbleton	Kirkcaldy District Council	246	84
	Glenrothes Community Housing Association	48	16
South Parks	Kirkcaldy District Council	135	85
	Glenrothes Community Housing Association	24	15
Stenton	Kirkcaldy District Council	108	86
	Hillcrest Housing Association	18	14
Tanshall	Kirkcaldy District Council	204	71
	Glenrothes Community Housing Association	82	29
Woodside	Kirkcaldy District Council	197	97
	Hillcrest Housing Association	6	3
Sheltered Housing	Kirkcaldy District Council	166	98

Notes:
[1] The houses transferred on 28 September 1995 to Kirkcaldy District Council.The Council's bid was £54 million.

East Kilbride Development Corporation

Area of the new town	*Prospective landlords*	*Number of votes cast*	*Percentage of votes for each landlord*[1]
Calderwood	East Kilbride District Council	1,492	99.2
East Mains	East Kilbride District Council	482	99.2
	The Munro Trust	4	0.8
Greenhills	East Kilbride District Council	813	98.5
	The Munro Trust	12	1.5
Murray	East Kilbride District Council	996	99.5
Newlandsmuir	East Kilbride District Council	172	98.3
	The Munro Trust	3	1.7
St Leonards	East Kilbride District Council	719	99.3
West Mains	East Kilbride District Council	484	99.6
	The Munro Trust	2	0.4
Westwood	East Kilbride District Council	1,016	99.8

East Kilbride Development Corporation

Area of the new town	*Prospective landlords*	*Number of votes cast*	*Percentage of votes for each landlord*[1]
Whitehills	East Kilbride District Council	386	99.7
	The Munro Trust	1	0.3
Sheltered Housing	East Kilbride District Council	309	99.4

The houses are due to transfer at the end of November to East Kilbride District Council. The Council's bid was £63 million.
[1] Where there was one prospective landlord the percentage of votes was less than 100 per cent. because a number of tenants voted against that landlord.

NHS Trusts

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland which NHS trusts *(a)* have their trust board meetings open to the public, *(b)* have their board meetings partially open to the public and *(c)* have their board meetings closed to the public as referred to in his answer of 26 October. [1553]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information is as follows:

(a) Open to the public:

Caithness and Sunherland NHS Trust
Edinburgh Sick Children's NHS Trust
Kirkcaldy Acute Hospitals NHS Trust
Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh NHS Trust
Stirling Royal Infirmary NHS Trust
West Lothian NHS Trust

(b) Partially open to the public:

Argyll and Bute NHS Trust
Ayrshire and Arran Community Healthcare NHS Trust
Borders General Hospital NHS Trust
Dundee Healthcare NHS Trust
East and Midlothian NHS Trust
Glasgow Dental Hospital and School NHS Trust
Greater Glasgow Community and Mental Health Services NHS Trust
Hairmyres and Stonehouse Hospital NHS Trust
Moray Health Services NHS Trust
North Ayrshire and Arran NHS Trust
Raigmore Hospital NHS Trust
Royal Alexandra Hospital NHS Trust
Scottish Ambulance Service NHS Trust
South Ayrshire Hospitals NHS Trust
Stobhill NHS Trust
The Victoria Infirmary NHS Trust

(c) Closed to the public:

Aberdeen Royal Hospitals NHS Trust
Angus NHS Trust
Borders Community Health Services NHS Trust
Central Scotland Healthcare NHS Trust
Dumfries and Galloway Acute and Maternity Hospitals NHS Trust
Dumfries and Galloway Community Health NHS Trust
Dundee Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust
Edinburgh Healthcare NHS Trust
Falkirk and District Royal Infirmary NHS Trust
Fife Healthcare NHS Trust
Glasgow Royal Infirmary University NHS Trust
Grampian Healthcare NHS Trust
Highland Communities NHS Trust
Inverclyde Royal NHS Trust
Lanarkshire Healthcare NHS Trust
Law Hospital NHS Trust
Lomond Healthcare NHS Trust
Monklands and Bellshill Hospitals NHS Trust
Perth and Kinross Healthcare NHS Trust
Queen Margaret Hospital NHS Trust
Renfrewshire Healthcare NHS Trust
Southen General Hospital NHS Trust
West Glasgow Hospitals University NHS Trust
Western General Hospitals NHS Trust
The Yorkhill NHS Trust.

Prisoners (Early Release)

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what would be the effect on the average daily population in penal establishments in Scotland if remission were revoked. [1496]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Government will be consulting soon on our proposals for changes to the early release arrangements for prisoners in Scotland. In the light of consultation, the Government will publish a White Paper in the course of next year. As assessment of the effects of the proposals upon the prison population is one of the matters I expect to be included in that paper.

Law and Order

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on his plans for law and order in Scotland, and what is the period time for the consultation process indicated in his announcement of 12 October. [1261]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: In his announcement on 12 October, my right hon. Friend re-affirmed the Government's commitment to law and order in Scotland and highlighted the measures taken in the Criminal Justice (Scotland) Act 1995 which will bring about improvements in the detection, prosecution and conviction of offenders. He also stressed the Government's view that there should be greater honesty in sentencing and outlined his proposals for changes to the early release arrangements for prisoners in Scotland. A consultation paper inviting comments on the range of issues to be considered will be issued soon.

Health Contracts

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the date of the termination of contract in respect of each *(a)* chief executives of NHS trust and *(b)* general managers of health boards in Scotland. [1186]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: This information is not held centrally.

Prisoner Statistics

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what variations exist between the average daily prison population in western states in the Council of Europe; and what assessment he has made of the

reasons for these variations, with particular reference to Scotland. [1414]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Table 1 shows the latest comparable available information on the average daily prison population—and rate per 100,000 population—in the western states in the Council of Europe. Table 2 shows the information for the constituent countries within the United Kingdom.

Table 1: Prison population as at 1 September 1993[1]

	Number	*Rate per 100,000 population*
Austria	7,099	91.0
Belgium	7,203	72.1
Cyprus	188	30.0
Denmark	3,702	71.0
Finland	3,132	61.8
France	51,134	86.3
Germany	65,838	81.0
Greece	6,524	68.0
Iceland	103	38.9
Italy	50,794	89.0
Luxembourg	425	107.5
Netherlands	7,843	51.0
Norway	2,607	60.0
Portugal	10,904	111.0
Republic of Ireland	2,108	59.8
Spain	45,711	114.9
Sweden	5,794	66.0
Switzerland	5,627	81.0
Turkey	31,304	51.6
United Kingdom	53,435	91.8

Source: Council of Europe Sourcebook.

[1] Some countries were unable to provide this information as at 1 September 1993 therefore the exact date used varies between countries.

Table 2: Prison population as at 1 September 1993

	Number	*Rate per 100,000 population*
England and Wales	45,633	89.0
Northern Ireland	1,902	118.0
Scotland	5,900	115.0

The figures in table 1 include all categories of prisoners, that is untried remanded in custody, convicted awaiting sentence, sentenced and civil prisoners. Comparisons of these figures must be treated with caution. There are a number of reasons for variations in the rate per 100,000 population across member states, such as different legal systems, sentencing policies and disposals available, variable use of custodial remand, different ages of criminal responsibility and different ages of entry into the prison system. The Council of Europe "Sourcebook" does not cover these issues in detail.

Temazepam

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many deaths in each of the past five years are attributable to abuse of temazepam in each health board area in Scotland. [1506]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Reliable information on the numbers of such deaths is not available for the years prior to 1994. The figures for 1994 are given in the table:

Deaths in Scotland from drug abuse[1] where temazepam was mentioned, by health board area, 1994.

	1994
Argyll and Clyde	5
Ayrshire and Arran	3
Borders	0
Dumfries and Galloway	2
Fife	0
Forth Valley	0
Grampian	0
Greater Glasgow	36
Highland	0
Lanarkshire	2
Lothian	2
Orkney	0
Shetland	0
Tayside	2
Western Isles	0
Scotland	52

[1] Deaths coded to WHO International Classification of Diseases (9th Revision) codes 304 and 305.

Improvements in the collection of information on such deaths were introduced in 1994. A full description of these changes is given in the report, "Collection of information on drug related deaths by the General Register Office for Scotland", a copy of which is in the Library.

Long-term Care

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the population in long-term care in Scotland, over 65 years of age, each of the years between 1983 and 1993, by residency in all homes, local authority homes, voluntary homes and private homes. [1139]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The table shows the information available:

Number of long-term care residents in residential care homes for the elderly as at 31 March each year

	1983[2]	*1984*[2]	*1985*[2]	*1986*[2]	*1987*[2]	*1988*[2]	*1989*[2,3]	*1989*[3]	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*
Local Authority	8,717	8,901	8,985	9,161	9,302	9,324	9,118	8,576	8,854	8,547	7,494	7,701	7,380
Registered[1]	4,649	4,998	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Private	—	—	910	1,417	1,969	2,737	3,317	3,200	3,236	3,635	3,606	3,690	3,631
Voluntary	—	—	4,266	4,134	4,136	4,032	4,134	3,970	4,139	3,929	3,796	3,720	3,721
Total	13,366	13,899	14,161	14,712	15,407	16,093	16,569	15,746	16,229	16,111	14,896	15,111	14,732

[1] Prior to 1985 it is not possible to separate Registered data into Private and Voluntary Homes.

[2] Figures include short-term care residents (e.g. holiday and respite care).

[3] 1989 data has been given on both the old and new basis to aid comparison.

The 1994 figures have been included in the answer as the 1994 "Community Care Bulletin," which contains this information is published on 22 November 1995.

Criminal Justice Social Work Projects

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment he has made of the *(a)* pilot bail supervision and accommodation project in Lothian region, *(b)* intensive probation project in Falkirk and *(c)* alcohol education probation project in Edinburgh and Midlothian; and what measures he will be taking to ensure that a greater number of courts in Scotland have community disposals available to sheriffs. [1265]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Bail supervision and accommodation projects in Lothian and Strathclyde regions are being funded on a pilot basis by the Scottish Office within 100 per cent. Central Government funding of criminal justice social work services. The projects are currently the subject of a research study by the MVA Consultancy which is due to report in spring 1996.

The intensive probation project in Falkirk is currently funded through the urban programme and the alcohol education probation project in Edinburgh and Midlothian through 100 per cent. funding. The urban programme requires monitoring by the responsible local authority and a concluding report of the Scottish Office. The Falkirk project is due to terminate in 1998. All criminal justice social work projects are subject to annual evaluation as part of local authority planning of these services.

Probation and community service are available in all sheriff courts in Scotland. It is for local authorities, in consultation with sentencers, independent sector providers and other criminal justice interests, to propose, within available resources and national priorities, the range of individual projects and specialist services to be provided as a component of a court order.

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what are the average costs per week in Scotland for *(a)* private nursing homes, *(b)* residential homes, *(c)* NHS care of the elderly, *(d)* NHS long stay people with learning difficulties, *(e)* NHS psychiatric long stay and *(f)* NHS chronic young sick. [1271]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The information for residential homes and NHS specialty groups is set out in the tables. The Scottish Office does not collect information on the average costs of private nursing homes.

Average gross weekly charge per resident in residential care homes (all client groups) in Scotland at 31 March 1994

	£
Local authority	269
Private	254
Voluntary	271
All sectors	266

The gross weekly charge in local authority run homes is the full cost to the local authority for providing accommodation per resident.

For private and voluntary establishments, the gross weekly charge is as specified in contracts with the local authority.

Average cost per inpatient week in Scotland for specified NHS specialty groups, 1994–95

	£
Geriatric long stay	629
Mental handicap	686
Psychiatry long stay	691
Young chronic sick	853

Psychiatry long stay includes geriatric psychiatry, child psychiatry, adolescent psychiatry and mental illness.

Manufacturing and Service Industry

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make an assessment of the contribution of Scottish manufacturing and service industry exports to the balance of payments. [1319]

Mr. George Kynoch: Information on Scottish exports is available from the Scottish Council for Development and Industry.

In 1993 Scottish manufactured exports totalled £11,540 million. The Scottish council estimated that Scottish manufactured exports accounted for 10.3 per cent. of the United Kingdom manufactured exports.

Service sector exports were estimated at £403 million in 1993.

Health Board Budgets

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the surplus or deficit in their budgets at the end of the relevant financial year for each health board in Scotland for each financial year since 1987–88; what percentage this represented of their total budget; and what was their actual expenditure in each of these financial years. [1714]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information is given in the tables. The figures are based on health board annual accounts and those for 1994–95 are provisional.

Health board	*Surplus/(deficit) spend £000*	*Percentage of total budget*	*Expenditure £000*
1994–95			
Argyll and Clyde	85	0.03	250,909
Ayr and Arran	828	0.42	195,513
Borders	816	1.18	68,279
Dumfries and Galloway	1,453	1.59	89,895
Fife	1,197	0.64	185,619
Forth Valley	1,313	0.89	146,266
Grampian	1,373	0.48	284,075
Greater Glasgow	9,880	1.65	589,240
Highland	971	0.78	123,448
Lanarkshire	1,272	0.47	270,435
Lothian	3,057	0.70	431,438
Orkney	(2)	(0.01)	14,052
Shetland	106	0.64	16,449
Tayside	845	0.34	250,664
Western Isles	201	0.71	28,187
Scotland total	23,395	0.79	2,944,469

Health board	Surplus/(deficit) spend £000	Percentage of total budget	Expenditure £000
1993–94			
Argyll and Clyde	525	0.22	237,202
Ayr and Arran	632	0.34	185,531
Borders	595	0.97	60,822
Dumfries and Galloway	874	1.01	85,726
Fife	959	0.53	181,148
Forth Valley	247	0.17	143,667
Grampian	(4)	(0.00)	274,398
Greater Glasgow	3,082	0.50	617,359
Highland	848	0.73	116,068
Lanarkshire	31	0.01	264,935
Lothian	72	0.02	425,067
Orkney	58	0.44	13,216
Shetland	(11)	(0.07)	15,439
Tayside	323	0.13	251,845
Western Isles	(26)	(0.10)	25,906
Scotland total	8,205	0.28	2,898,329

Health board	Surplus/(deficit) £000	Percentage of total budget	Expenditure £000
1990–91			
Argyll and Clyde	929	0.62	149,024
Ayr and Arran	202	0.17	117,716
Borders	430	1.21	35,000
Dumfries and Galloway	227	0.40	56,424
Fife	(29)	(0.03)	107,749
Forth Valley	(13)	(0.01)	103,966
Grampian	(1,483)	(0.76)	197,785
Greater Glasgow	5,227	0.98	525,666
Highland	321	0.38	83,803
Lanarkshire	333	0.19	170,904
Lothian	(1,927)	(0.59)	328,929
Orkney	(6)	(0.09)	6,684
Shetland	627	6.92	8,437
Tayside	1,249	0.65	190,230
Western Isles	101	0.92	10,929
Scotland total	6,188	0.29	2,093,246

Health board	Surplus/(deficit) spend £000	Percentage of total budget	Expenditure £000
1992–93			
Argyll and Clyde	(28)	(0.01)	231,346
Ayr and Arran	751	0.42	178,743
Borders	289	0.50	57,226
Dumfries and Galloway	724	0.88	81,799
Fife	1,663	0.99	166,015
Forth Valley	68	0.05	140,933
Grampian	39	0.01	269,181
Greater Glasgow	3,292	0.54	611,147
Highland	790	0.66	118,234
Lanarkshire	810	0.32	249,096
Lothian	833	0.20	422,652
Orkney	232	1.83	12,413
Shetland	1,216	8.01	13,959
Tayside	91	0.04	254,107
Western Isles	385	1.63	23,240
Scotland total	11,155	0.39	2,830,091

Health board	Surplus/(deficit) £000	Percentage of total budget	Expenditure £000
1989–90			
Argyll and Clyde	79	0.06	141,589
Ayr and Arran	(243)	(0.22)	111,048
Borders	11	0.03	32,714
Dumfries and Galloway	418	0.82	50,851
Fife	(117)	(0.12)	97,748
Forth Valley	99	0.10	94,665
Grampian	(2,481)	(1.39)	180,712
Greater Glasgow	5,425	1.08	496,077
Highland	615	0.82	74,814
Lanarkshire	122	0.08	157,709
Lothian	(15,573)	(5.17)	316,514
Orkney	81	1.25	6,420
Shetland	74	0.92	8,003
Tayside	382	0.22	175,503
Western Isles	78	0.79	9,832
Scotland total	(11,030)	(0.57)	1,954,199

Health board	Surplus/(deficit) spend £000	Percentage of total budget	Expenditure £000
1991–92			
Argyll and Clyde	269	0.15	173,416
Ayr and Arran	420	0.31	136,415
Borders	171	0.42	40,104
Dumfries and Galloway	23	0.03	66,481
Fife	2,852	2.31	120,586
Forth Valley	244	0.21	116,503
Grampian	(213)	(0.10)	219,626
Greater Glasgow	6,926	1.19	574,377
Highland	926	0.99	92,193
Lanarkshire	881	0.44	198,993
Lothian	(36)	(0.01)	373,187
Orkney	1	0.01	7,972
Shetland	95	0.89	10,539
Tayside	505	0.23	214,842
Western Isles	78	0.54	14,411
Scotland total	13,142	0.55	2,359,645

Health board	Surplus/(deficit) £000	Percentage of total budget	Expenditure £000
1988–89			
Argyll and Clyde	604	0.46	131,979
Ayr and Arran	403	0.40	99,546
Borders	14	0.05	30,318
Dumfries and Galloway	(315)	(0.67)	47,521
Fife	212	0.23	90,680
Forth Valley	229	0.26	87,429
Grampian	44	0.03	168,074
Greater Glasgow	4,577	0.96	472,165
Highland	472	0.67	70,281
Lanarkshire	(18)	(0.01)	149,399
Lothian	(77)	(0.03)	290,863
Orkney	(13)	(0.21)	6,286
Shetland	(17)	(0.23)	7,568
Tayside	522	0.31	166,361
Western Isles	41	0.45	9,109
Scotland total	6,678	0.36	1,827,579

Health board	Surplus/(deficit) £000	Percentage of total budget	Expenditure £000
1987–88			
Argyll and Clyde	630	0.52	120,141
Ayr and Arran	(1,153)	(1.27)	91,744
Borders	401	1.30	30,462
Dumfries and Galloway	68	0.16	42,769
Fife	(430)	(0.52)	82,930
Forth Valley	329	0.39	84,366
Grampian	2,667	1.76	148,498
Greater Glasgow	5,397	1.25	425,370
Highland	(85)	(0.13)	65,891
Lanarkshire	1,694	1.24	135,427
Lothian	743	0.27	270,444
Orkney	78	1.53	5,023
Shetland	59	1.00	5,853
Tayside	1,171	0.78	149,825
Western Isles	79	0.91	8,594
Scotland total	11,648	0.69	1,667,337

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what guidance his Department issued to Scottish health boards relating to the retention of a surplus in their budgets at the end of the last financial year. [1715]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Guidance is contained in the Scottish Accounting Manual issued by the Department to all health boards. This states that an underdrawing of up to 1 per cent. of a health board's cash limit may be carried forward from one year to another and that any overdrawing will be carried forward as a first charge against the following year's cash limit.

Ardrossan, Saltcoats, Stevenston Bypass

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on proposals for the Ardrossan, Saltcoats and Stevenston bypass. [1736]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: In my answer to the hon. Member on 8 June 1995, *Official Report*, column 212 I explained that a revised design for a more northerly bypass was being developed. I expect this work to be completed soon.

Health Board Managers

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what guidance has been issued to Scottish health boards relating to the publication of the figures for the performance-related pay element in the salaries of the general managers of these health boards. [1738]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Guidance issued in 1994 by the NHS in Scotland management executive said that any performance-related pay should be included in the total remuneration of the board general manager to be shown in the board annual report.

Scottish Homes

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the current position of Scottish Homes' plans for the transfer of its housing stock within *(a)* the Cunninghame, South constituency and *(b)* Ayrshire as a whole. [1740]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: Scottish Homes local stock strategy sets out its proposals for ballot areas in Ayrshire. A copy was sent to the hon. Member. Since its publication Scottish Homes has received outline proposals and registered the interest of alternative landlords in the following ballot areas:

Cumnock etc—Shire Housing Association Steering Group
Patna, Delmellington—Shire Housing Association Steering Group
Drongan—Shire Housing Association Steering Group
Coylebank Housing Co-op Steering Group
Ardrossan—Cunninghame Housing Association
Saltcoats and Stevenston

Further ballot areas have been identified for Scottish Homes houses at:

Irvine (Cunninghame South Constituency)
Ayr
Dailly, Girvan
Kilmarnock, Stewarton
Crosshouse
Kilbirnie, Beith, Dalry

Outline proposals for these areas will be invited from alternative landlords during 1996.

Ravenspark Hospital, Irvine

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he anticipates approval to be given by his Department to the closure of Ravenspark hospital in Irvine. [1737]

Lord James Douglas Hamilton: Ayrshire and Arran health board's extensive public consultation exercise on the future of Ravenspark hospital ended on 30 October this year. The board expects to discuss its proposals and the outcome of the consultations at its next board meeting on 30 November. I look forward to receiving its proposals in due course.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Assisted Places

Mr. Walden: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if the ownership of a house worth £500,000 renders an individual who has no current income ineligible for an assisted place for his or her child; [1000]

(2) if the ownership of a house worth £700,000 and investments of £140,000 assuming a net interest rate of 6 per cent. but no other current income renders an individual ineligible for an assisted place for his or her child. [999]

Mrs. Gillan: The selection of pupils for assisted places is carried out by participating schools. The amount of assistance available under the scheme is determined by parent's total gross income from all sources. Children would be eligible for assistance from the scheme if their parents had no current income, or if their only income was £8,400 per annum from investments.

Mr. Walden: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) what plans she has to amend the regulations on income in respect of the assisted places scheme; [187]

(2) what plans she has to include capital assets and investments in deciding who should qualify for an assisted place; [177]

(3) what plans she has to raise the income ceiling below which parents qualify for an assisted place. [188]

Mrs. Gillan: Eligibility conditions and means-testing arrangements for assisted places are set out in regulations which are revised annually.

Mr. Walden: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is the average cost of *(a)* an assisted place and *(b)* a place in the state secondary sector. [213]

Mrs. Gillan: The estimated average cost of public funds for an assisted pupil in England in the financial year 1995–96 is about £3,700 for ages 11 to 18. There is no directly comparable figure for the maintained sector. The average standard spending assessment allocation per pupil aged 11 to 16 in England in the financial year 1995–96 is some £2,600; for pupils aged above 16 it is about £3,600. The SSA figures exclude capital and certain other costs which may be subsumed in the assisted pupil figure.

Mr. Walden: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will make a statement on the purpose of the assisted places scheme. [191]

Mrs. Gillan: The assisted places scheme gives able children from less well-off families an opportunity of an excellent academic education at one of England's best independent schools which would not otherwise have been available to them. This helps to promote choice and diversity and to raise standards.

Mr. Walden: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many assisted places there are at Eton college. [211]

Mrs. Gillan: None at present.

Mr. Walden: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans she has to extend the assisted places scheme to preparatory schools. [189]

Mrs. Gillan: We will shortly be announcing our detailed plans for expanding the assisted places scheme as a whole.

Mr. Walden: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) what academic criteria are applied to decide whether a child already at a private school should have an assisted place; [210]

(2) what measures are in place to ensure that the advice of a private school at which an assisted places scheme applicant is already a pupil on that child's academic suitability for an award is accurate. [209]

Mrs. Gillan: The regulations require a school to be satisfied that a pupil selected for an assisted place is likely to benefit from the education provided. Subject to this and other general conditions of eligibility set out in the regulations and to any specific provisions in their participation agreements under the assisted places scheme, it is for each school to select pupils according to its own academic criteria, methods and procedures.

Mr. Walden: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what percentage of pupils in private schools are holders of assisted places. [176]

Mrs. Gillan: Assisted place holders form just over 5 per cent. of pupils in all independent schools.

Mr. Walden: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many private schools receive money from the APS. [212]

Mrs. Gillan: The assisted places scheme provides financial help for parents of pupils at participating schools, rather than for the schools themselves. At present 293 independent schools participate in the scheme in England.

Mr. Walden: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what recent reviews her Department has carried out into the academic standards of schools to which assisted places scheme funds are paid. [190]

Mrs. Gillan: The academic standards of schools participating in the assisted places scheme are regularly monitored through data on the public examination performance and post-school destinations of their pupils, and through inspection by Ofsted.

Mr. Walden: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what percentage of overall private school income derives from the APS. [178]

Mrs. Gillan: Information about the overall income of independent schools is not collected centrally.

Mr. Walden: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what access her Department has to Inland Revenue records in monitoring the validity of claims for assisted places. [186]

Mrs. Gillan: In order to be eligible for assistance under the scheme, parents are required to submit corroborative documentary evidence of their income to participating schools which carry out income assessments on behalf of the Department. Such evidence may include P60s and Inland Revenue tax assessments on schedule A, schedule D or schedule E. The Department regularly audits a sample of schools' assessments, including the supporting documentation.

Class Sizes, Dudley

Mr. Pearson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) what has been the average size of class taught by one teacher in primary schools in Dudley metropolitan borough in each year since 1983; [579]

(2) what has been the average size of class taught by one teacher in secondary schools in Dudley metropolitan borough in each year since 1983. [577]

Mr. Robin Squire: Information on average class sizes of single teacher classes in Dudley local education authority is shown in the table:

Average class sizes of single teacher classes in maintained schools in Dudley local education authority area

Position in January each year

Year	*Primary*	*Secondary*
1983	25.1	20.4
1984	24.8	20.1
1985	24.8	20.0
1986	25.4	19.9
1987	25.6	19.4
1988	25.6	19.1
1989	25.9	19.5
1990	25.9	19.4
1991	26.4	20.2
1992	25.7	21.5
1993	26.2	22.1
1994	27.0	22.7
1995[1]	27.3	22.9

[1] Provisional data.

Remploy

Ms Hodge: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans the Government have to sell off Remploy. [1666]

Mr. Forth: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Swansea, West (Mr. Williams) on 8 November 1995, *Official Report*, column *934*.

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many disabled people are employed in Scotland by Remploy *(a)* in Remploy factories and *(b)* in Interwork schemes. [806]

Mr. Paice: In Scotland, Remploy provide employment for 945 disabled people; 756 of these work in factories and 189 in Interwork.

Wakefield TEC

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what level of funding has been made available to Wakefield training and enterprise council for work in areas which have lost their mining industry. [121]

Mr. Paice: Over the last three years over £6 million has been available to Wakefield training and enterprise council to assist in areas affected by the closures of collieries. Other Government funding available to the TEC will also have benefited former mining areas.

HEALTH

Medicines Monitoring Unit

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what funding was given by his Department to the medicines monitoring unit in 1994–95 and 1995–96; and what level of funding for the unit is expected for 1996–97. [319]

Mr. Sackville: The level of funding from the Medicine Control Agency for 1994–95 for the Medicines Monitoring unit project was £111,424 and for 1995–96 it is expected to be £115,264.

Prescribed Drugs

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the latest available figure for the percentage of *(a)* hospital admissions and *(b)* community health services' patients receiving care as a result of adverse reactions to prescribed drugs. [544]

Mr. Sackville: The information is not available centrally. Information on the number of ordinary admissions and day cases associated with drugs, medicaments and biological substances causing adverse effects in therapeutic use in 1993–94 is published in "Hospital Episode Statistics, England, Volume 2", copies of which are available in the Library.

Accident and Emergency Admissions

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients were admitted to hospital in each health region as *(a)* accident and emergency admissions and *(b)* surgical emergencies in each of the last five years; and how many have been admitted for these reasons so far this year. [321]

Mr. Sackville: The available information will be placed in the Library. The tables are based on raw data from the hospital episode statistics and have not been adjusted to take account of shortfalls in coverage.

Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what consideration his Department has given to the possibility that the death of 19-year-old Stephen Churchill from Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease in May could be linked to BSE, what requests he has received for an inquiry into the cause of the death; and what was his response; and if he will make a statement. [152]

Mr. Sackville: The spongiform encephalopathy advisory committee, which provides the Government with independent expert advice on BSE and Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease, has advised that it is not possible to draw any conclusions in this case about a link with BSE as confirmed cases of CJD have been found in the same age group in other countries before the appearance of BSE. In addition, the case had no reported contact with BSE.

The question of an inquiry into the death of Stephen Churchill was first raised by the press. A number of letters have been received since in connection with the case. In view of the existence of the national CJD surveillance unit, which investigates the incidence and epidemiology

of CJD in the UK since the advent of BSE; and of the SEAC, we do not consider that there is a need for an independent inquiry.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research his Department is currently undertaking into *(a)* BSE and *(b)* Creutzfeldt-Jakob dementia; and if he will make a statement on BSE in the food chain. [1663]

Mr. Sackville: The Department of Health and the Scottish Office jointly fund the national Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease (CJD) surveillance unit which investigates the incidence and epidemiology of the disease, paying particular attention to occupation and eating habits, so that any change in the pattern of CJD following the advent of BSE can be detected.

The Department is also funding a series of studies at the Institute of Animal Health into time temperature combinations required to inactivate BSE and scrapie agents.

The Medical Research Council, the main body through which the Government fund medical research in the United Kingdom, receives its grant in aid from the office of my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade and is carrying out research into transmissible spongiform encephalopathies aimed at increasing understanding of some of the biological processes involved in such diseases in man.

The independent expert spongiform encephalopathy advisory committee—SEAC—published "Transmissible Spongiform Encephalopathies: A Summary of Present Knowledge and Research" on 7 February 1995. Copies of this report are available in the Library.

There is currently no scientific evidence to link BSE in cattle with the development of CJD in humans. All the information and evidence relating to the possibility of BSE entering the food chain is being looked at by SEAC.

Residential Care

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of those entering residential homes are considered severely or moderately disabled, according to the most recent statistics. [1128]

Mr. Bowis: Information on the degree of disability of individuals on entry to residential homes is not available centrally. Most people entering residential care should be regarded as having a significant degree of disability or disfunction. At 31 March 1994, about 80 per cent. of all residents in residential care homes were in homes for elderly people and a further 2.5 per cent. in home specifically catering for adults with physical and/or sensory disabilities. The number of physically disabled residents in nursing homes was about 15 per cent. of all residents in nursing homes.

Mr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many inquiries his Department has received in the last year concerning the transference of assets and its effect on residential care provision. [1131]

Mr. Bowis: Around 40 letters have been received in 1995 and numerous telephone inquiries.

Mr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average cost per week of residential care is in *(a)* England and Wales and *(b)* the west midlands. [1133]

Mr. Bowis: In 1993–94, the latest date for which information is available, the average expenditure per week on residential care for older people per local authority supported resident was approximately £265. Corresponding data for authorities in the west midlands are given as series HE1 in the unit costs section of "Key Indicators of Local Authority Social Services 1995", copies of which are available in the Library.

Information relating to Wales is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

Illness, Disability and Infirmity

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will define the distinctions recognised by his Department between illness and disability and infirmity. [1132]

Mr. Bowis: The Department does not use specific definitions to distinguish between illness, disability and infirmity. The provision of health and social care is expected to be based on a full assessment of an individual's needs.

Milk

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what inspections his officers are carrying out in dairies and supermarkets to ensure milk from *(a)* broken or *(b)* out-of-date cartons is not being recycled; [1262]

(2) when and from whom he first received representations as to the recycling of milk from broken or out-of-date cartons. [1263]

Mr. Sackville: My Department was first approached by *The Observer* on 3 November 1995 about this matter.

Allegations about the reprocessing of milk were subsequently brought to the attention of the appropriate local authority environmental health departments who have responsibility for inspections of dairies and supermarkets in their areas.

I understand that following this checks were made in two dairies, but no evidence was apparent of unhygienic practices or contraventions of food safety legislation.

Temazepam

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the amount of Temazepam per capita distributed annually in England; and if he will make a statement. [1542]

Mr. Bowis: It is 0.066g.

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many deaths in each of the past five years are attributable to the abuse of Temazepam *(a)* in England and *(b)* in each health region. [1543]

Mr. Bowis: The table shows the numbers of deaths due to Temazepam abuse, alone or with other drugs—ICDs'

304.1, 304.7, 304.8 305.4, 305.9—by year of occurrence for the latest five-year period available in England and each regional health authority.

	1990	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*
England	12	13	15	15	19
Regional health authority					
Northern	0	0	2	0	2
Yorkshire	0	0	0	1	2
Trent	0	1	1	1	1
East Anglian	0	0	0	0	0
North West Thames	2	0	3	2	1
North East Thames	1	3	2	2	4
South East Thames	1	2	0	2	1
South West Thames	2	3	1	0	0
Wessex	0	0	1	1	1
Oxford	0	0	0	0	0
South Western	1	1	1	1	0
West Midlands	2	0	3	2	2
Mersey	2	1	0	1	1
North Western	1	2	1	2	4

[1] International Classification of Diseases, 9th Revision.

Waiting Times

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what is his policy on waiting times for initial appointments in NHS trust hospitals; [1170]

(2) if he will make a statement on waiting times for hospital appointments *(a)* in the NHS and *(b)* in private medical care. [1171]

Mr. Malone: Decisions on how quickly patients are seen following out-patient referral must be based on an assessment of clinical priority made by doctors. The revised patients charter, which came into effect on 1 April 1995, contains a national standard for the maximum time patients should have to wait for their first out-patient appointment: all patients should be seen within 26 weeks of written referral by their general practitioner, and nine out of 10 patients in each trust should be seen within 13 weeks.

The latest information available shows that in the quarter ended 31 June, 85 per cent. of patients seen had waited less than 13 weeks and 97 per cent. had waited less than 26 weeks. Where the standard is not being met, hospitals are required to have in place an action plan to reduce the waiting time to the charter standard.

No information is available centrally on appointments taking place in the private sector.

Long-stay Beds

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what was the number of long-stay beds in the national health service in 1990 for *(a)* the elderly, *(b)* psychiatry, *(c)* those with learning difficulties and *(d)* the chronically sick young; and what the figures are under these categories for 1 April. [1140]

(2) if he will estimate the number of available long-stay beds in the National Health Service by 1 April 1998 and 1 April 2000 for *(a)* the elderly, *(b)* psychiatry, *(c)* those with learning difficulties and *(d)* the chronically young sick. [1141]

Mr. Bowis: The information available is published in "Bed availability for England", copies of which are available in the Library.

Hospital Closures

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what alternative arrangements apply in circumstances when a major hospital is closed to admissions and victims of major accidents; and if he will make a statement. [1151]

Mr. Sackville: Such closures are infrequent and generally of short duration. If national health service hospital trusts have to place restrictions on the cases that they can deal with, they should collaborate with health authorities, ambulance services and other hospitals to ensure that appropriate contingency measures are in place.

Energy Efficiency

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress has been made towards cutting energy consumption in Government buildings for which he has responsibility in each year since 1990. [1444]

Mr. Sackville: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my hon. Friend the Minister of State for Construction and Planning gave my hon. Friend the Member for Surrey, East (Mr. Ainsworth) on 17 May *Official Report*, columns *259–62*, for energy consumption figures for the Department of Health.

Additional figures for 1994–95 will be published shortly. These are expected to show a decrease of 8 per cent. over the previous year, as a result of our continuing efforts to reduce energy consumption.

NHS Appointments (Doncaster)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) who will be responsible for the appointment of a chairman and non-executive directors to the Doncaster health authority in the period from 1 April 1996; [1820]

(2) who is responsible for the appointment of those non-executive directors of the Doncaster Healthcare trust and the Doncaster Royal Infirmary trust for whom he is not responsible. [1821]

Mr. Sackville: From 1 April 1996, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health will be responsible for the appointment of the chairman and all non-executive directors to national health service trusts and health authorities. Trent regional health authority is at present responsible for the appointment of two of the non-executive directors at the Doncaster Healthcare trust and at the Doncaster Royal Infirmary and Montagu Hospital NHS trust.

Cheviot and Wandsbeck NHS Trust

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how long the former chief executive of the Cheviot and Wandsbeck NHS trust had been in post; and what reasons were given for his early retirement. [2232]

Mr. Sackville: This is a matter for Cheviot and Wandsbeck National Health Service trust. The hon. Member may wish to contact the chairman of the trust, Mr. Roger Baker for details.

Health Authorities

Mr. Peter Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will announce the boundaries of the new health authorities. [2560]

Mr. Malone: We are today announcing decisions on the boundaries of new health authorities in England which will come into operation on 1 April 1996. Details of the new boundaries will be placed in the Library.

Human Foetal Tissue

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the ethical issues arising from the Medical Research Council project at the Centre for Brain Repair involving the use of tissue from aborted babies; what steps are taken to ensure that the mothers of those babies are made aware of the purpose for which their dead children are being used; if he will indicate the cost of the project; and he will list the consultations which were undertaken with the public and interested organisations before the granting of the necessary approval for the project to proceed. [1343]

Mr. Sackville: I understand that the project is still at the planning stage and as yet no human tissue has being used, but future studies using human fetal tissue are being considered. Any such studies will follow the strict guidelines of the Polkinghorne report, Cm 762. Its recommendations, which were accepted by the Government and the British Medical Association, were that such tissue could be used for research and treatment. Such experimental proposals will be subjected to the appropriate scrutiny when they are submitted to the local research ethics committee.

Mrs. Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will list all those projects for which licences have been issued in each of the last five years and which have involved the use of tissue from aborted babies, indicating in each case the number of aborted babies involved; and if he will list the steps which his Department has taken in each of those cases to ensure that the provisions of the Polkinghorne report have been implemented; [1344]

(2) what administrative and reporting procedures are undertaken by his Department to monitor the issuing of licences for projects involving the use of tissue from aborted babies. [1345]

Mr. Sackville: Local research ethics committees—LRECs—advise within every health district on the acceptability of research proposals involving human subjects and human foetal tissue. Departmental guidance on the functions of LRECs includes the Polkinghorne code of practice, copies of which are available in the Library. The Department of Health does not collect information about research proposals approved by LRECs.

Genetic Screening

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will make a statement on the implications for public policy of developments in pre-natal genetic screening; [1346]

(2) if he will make a statement on the implications for public policy of developments in post-natal genetic screening. [1347]

Mr. Sackville: These issues are being considered in the light of the Select Committee on Science and Technology's report on human genetics. The Government's position will be set out in the published response to the Select Committee's report.

Psychotherapists (Children)

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many child psychotherapists were working in the NHS in each region for *(a)* 1979, *(b)* 1984, *(c)* 1989 and *(d)* the latest available year; and if he will make a statement. [1664]

Mr. Bowis: The information available for English regions is shown in the table.

NHS hospital and community health services qualified child psychotherapists as at 30 September each year

	1979	*1984*	*1989*	*1994*
Northern	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	10
Yorkshire	[2]—	[1]—	[2]—	10
Trent	[1]—	[1]—	[2]—	20
East Anglia	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—
North West Thames	30	10	30	40
North East Thames	10	20	40	40
South East Thames	[2]—	[2]—	10	10
South West Thames	10	10	10	20
Wessex	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	10
Oxford	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	10
South Western	[2]—	[2]—	10	20
West Midlands	[1]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—
Mersey	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—
North Western	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	10
SHAs	[2]—	[1]—	[2]—	20
England total	70	60	130	220

Notes:

[1] Denotes zero.

[2] Denotes figures of five and under.

Source:

Department of Health and Non-Medical Workforce Census Notes:

1. Figures are for qualified child psychotherapists only, they exclude assistants and trainees.
2. Figures are expressed as whole-time equivalents rounded to the nearest ten.
3. Totals may not equal sum of components due to rounding.

King's Healthcare NHS Trust

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what provisions have been made by Kings Healthcare for on-site facilities to continue an integrated centre for epilepsy; and if he will make a statement. [2010]

Mr. Bowis: King's Healthcare National Health Service trust has assured me that it is committed to the Centre for Epilepsy and is working closely with the chairman of the centre to identify precisely how it will be accommodated in the future.

Nursing Agencies

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will specify the professional duties of registered

employment agencies which specialise in hiring out auxiliary unqualified and qualified nurses, with respect to advice to client hospitals concerning past offences of falsely claiming nursing qualifications. [1730]

Mr. Sackville: Local authorities are responsible for licensing nurses agencies and for securing their proper conduct. Each placement made by an agency must be supervised by a registered nurse or medical practitioner.

Written Answers to Questions

Friday 24 November 1995

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Ordtech

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Attorney-General what advice he gave to Ministers before they signed public interest immunity certificates in relation to the initial Ordtech trial. [1024]

The Attorney-General: The signing of public interest immunity certificates in relation to the Ordtech trial falls within Sir Richard Scott's terms of reference. The Government will await Sir Richard's considered view on the Ordtech case.

HEALTH

Local Government

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the Acts of Parliament including Consolidation Acts that affect local government that have been introduced by his Department since January 1994. [24]

Mr. Bowis: There are none that affect local government directly.

Mental Health

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the mental health task force submitted an overview report on the way purchasers and providers of mental health services were approaching the replacement of large mental hospitals, following its visits to health authorities early in 1994; and if it has been published. [1924]

Mr. Bowis: No specific report has been published on this part of the mental health task force's work. The main conclusions are summarised in section 4.2 of the task force's final report, copies of which are available in the Library.

NHS Appointments

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to require NHS auditors as part of their routine audit to ensure that checks against undischarged bankruptcy or criminal convictions on the appointment of chairmen, chief executives and directors have been carried out. [1788]

Mr. Malone: It is for the statutory auditor to investigate such matters as he sees fit and to satisfy himself accordingly.

Prescription Charges

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps his Department is taking to examine the implications of the European Court of Justice ruling on prescription charges for men aged 60 years and over for the treatment of the sexes in other areas of benefits and charges. [2593]

Mr. Malone: The ruling does not affect any other area of charges or benefits paid under national health service regulations.

Teenage Conceptions

Mr. Robathan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on progress towards the target of "The Health of the Nation" to reduce teenage conceptions. [3069]

Mr. Sackville: Recently published figures show that conception rates among girls under 16 have fallen for the third year running and by a fifth over those three years. While conception rates are still high by international standards, this encouraging reduction has reversed the upward trend of the 1980s and reflects valuable work on the part of all those who provide help and advice to young people. Further sustained effort will be necessary to maintain the downward trend towards the target of "The Health of the Nation".

NHS Contracts

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many contracts have been made between purchasers and providers in the NHS in each of the last three years; [2413]

(2) how many GP fundholder contracts with providers have been made in each of the last three years. [2412]

Mr. Malone: In 1993–94 3,982 national health service contracts were agreed between district health authorities and trusts, in 1994–95 there were 3,505 and in 1995–96 there are 3,737 national health service contracts agreed. There is no information available centrally on the numbers of general practitioner fundholder contracts.

Non-NHS Providers

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary for Health if he will itemise how much *(a)* NHS trusts, *(b)* general practitioner fundholders, *(c)* regional health authorities and *(d)* district health authorities spent on health care from non-NHS providers in each year since 1991–92 in each region. [2417]

Mr. Sackville: This information will be placed in the Library.

Extra-contractual Referrals

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many extra-contractual references have been made in the NHS in each of the last three years. [2410]

Mr. Malone: The information is not available centrally.

Private Patient Income

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish details on private patient income in the NHS for each of the last four years *(a)* by region, *(b)* by district and *(c)* by trust. [2430]

Mr. Sackville: The figures for 1994–95, 1992–93, and 1991–92 will be placed in the Library. I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the right hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) on 13 January 1995, *Official Report*, columns *267–68* for figures for 1993–94.

Capital Expenditure

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the total capital expenditure *(a)* for trusts and *(b)* for regions in each year from 1993–94, by region. [2418]

Mr. Sackville: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 30 October 1995, *Official Report*, columns *34–35*.

Continuing Care

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the level of reinvestment being planned by health authorities in continuing care provision in response to circular HSG(95)8. [2411]

Mr. Bowis: Health authorities are currently consulting on their draft policies and eligibility criteria for continuing health care. They are required to finalise these and any resulting changes in spending on continuing health care services by 1 April 1996.

ENVIRONMENT

Carbon Tax

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what discussions he has had with the Chancellor of the Exchequer with respect to the introduction of a carbon tax on polluting industries. [1168]

Mr. Clappison: My right hon. Friends have frequent discussions on matters of common interest, which from time to time include the question of a carbon tax.

The United Kingdom is committed under the framework convention of climate change to return emissions of all greenhouse gases to 1990 levels by the year 2000. We do not need a carbon tax to meet this commitment as, for carbon dioxide, we are on course to achieve reductions of 4 to 8 per cent. below 1990 emission levels.

This rate of progress puts us at the forefront of international efforts to combat climate change and demonstrates once again the Government's determination to deliver on their environmental commitments.

Energy Efficiency (Government Estate)

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what progress has been made towards cutting energy consumption in Government buildings for which he has responsibility, in each year since 1990. [1456]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Figures for the energy efficiency performance of the Government estate are published annually. The information given in the last report—published in the answer to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for East Surrey, (Mr. Ainsworth) on 17 May 1995, *Official Report*, column *260*—showed that the percentage reduction in the standard energy cost performance indicator for each year covered, relative to the base year 1990–91, for the Department of the Environment was as follows:

1991–92: 3 per cent.

1992–93: 5 per cent.

1993–94: 9 per cent.

Energy efficiency is an important aspect in the specifications for the new buildings which the Department will occupy once it vacates 2 Marsham street.

Air Pollution Monitoring

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when the air pollution monitoring stations in Oxford and the London borough of Brent will be integrated into the national air monitoring network. [1805]

Mr. Clappison: The air pollution monitoring stations in Oxford and the London borough of Brent will be integrated into the national air monitoring network shortly.

Beverley Town

Mr. Cran: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what criteria he will use to decide whether the town of Beverley should be included in any forthcoming parish review. [1904]

Sir Paul Beresford: We are aware of the strong local desire for a parish council in Beverley town. We are currently considering what reviews the Local Government Commission should be directed to undertake in addition to its on-going programme of periodic electoral reviews.

Drought Orders

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many drought orders have been made in the south-west in 1995; what rivers they affect; how much water is to be extracted; and what is the duration of the order. [2061]

Mr. Clappison: Seven drought orders have been made so far in 1995 affecting the area for which South West Water Services Ltd. is the water undertaker. The details are as follows:

Made 7 September; in force for up to six months.

1. The South West Water Services Limited (Drought) Order 1995

The order authorised the imposition of restrictions on non-essential uses of water in parts of Carrick, Kerrier and Penwith districts.

2. The South West Water Services Limited (Drift Reservoir) (Drought) Order 1995

The order halved the minimum flow of compensation water required from Drift reservoir into the Newlyn river from 0.016 cubic metres a second to 0.008 cubic metres a second.

3. THE SOUTH WEST WATER SERVICES LIMITED (STITHIANS RESERVOIR) (DROUGHT) ORDER 1995

The order halved the minimum flow of compensation water required from Stithians reservoir into the River Kennal from 0.0316 cubic metres a second to 0.0158 cubic metres a second.

4. THE SOUTH WEST WATER SERVICES LIMITED (RIVER HAYLE) (DROUGHT) ORDER 1995

The order reduced the minimum flow required to be maintained in the River Hayle below the St. Erth intake from 0.222 cubic metres a second to 0.105 cubic metres a second.

5. THE SOUTH WEST WATER SERVICES LIMITED (LESWIDDEN POOL) (DROUGHT) ORDER 1995

The order authorised the abstraction of not more than 5,460 cubic metres of water a day from Leswidden pool to boost the flow in Sancreed stream.

Made 20 September; in force for up to six months

6. THE SOUTH WEST WATER SERVICES LIMITED (HAWKS TOR PIT) (DROUGHT) ORDER 1995

The order authorised the abstraction of up to 10,000 cubic metres of water a day from Hawks Tor Pit and its transfer by pipeline to the De Lank water treatment works.

Made 31 October; in force up to 31 December 1995

7. THE SOUTH WEST WATER SERVICES LIMITED (COLLIFORD LAKE) (DROUGHT) ORDER 1995

The order increases the amount of water that may be abstracted from Colliford Lake reservoir in 1995 from 5,390,000 cubic metres to 8,000,000 cubic metres.

Water Services

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will order an investigation into the investment activities of Yorkshire Water and Welsh Water. [1901]

Mr. Clappison: No. This is a matter for the Director General of Water Services.

Education Expenditure

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was *(a)* the total education standard spending assessment for England and *(b)* the latest estimate of the actual expenditure by local authorities on education for 1995–1996. [2249]

Sir Paul Beresford: The information is as follows:

Expenditure on education by English local authorities 1995–96

	£ million
(a) Standard spending assessment	17,024
(b) Budgeted net revenue expenditure	17,821

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Ministerial Transport, London

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many times in the last year he has used *(a)* London Underground and *(b)* London Transport buses while on official business. [379]

Mr. John. M. Taylor: I have used neither London Underground nor London Transport buses on official business in the last year.

Legal Aid (Immigration)

Mr. Boateng: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many legal aid certificates were issued for advice and/or representation in cases arising out of the operation of the Immigration Acts; and what was the total cost for each of the past five successive years. [205]

Mr. John M. Taylor: It is not possible to identify separately the number of civil legal aid certificates arising out of the operation of the Immigration Acts. The figures for green form payments on all immigration and nationality matters are as follows. It is not possible to break them down any further.

Green form bills in immigration and nationality matters

Year	Number of cases	£ Expenditure
1990–91	14,660	2,652,770
1991–92	23,556	5,017,978
1992–93	30,443	7,247,751
1993–94	45,493	11,294,855
1994–95	51,828	14,572,056

Human Rights

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department upon which date before 1 January 1996 and with effect from which retrospective date the Lord Chancellor will introduce a measure to provide the effective remedy required under article 13 of the European convention on human rights for a violation of a citizen's right under article 6 of that convention where such violation is or was caused by the failure of the Law Society in the performance of its duties towards the supervision of solicitor officers of the court. [208]

Mr. John M. Taylor: The Government have no such plans. No further action is required of the Government to comply with article 6 of the European convention on human rights. It follows that article 13 has no application here.

Asylum Appeals

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many appeals against a refusal of asylum are currently outstanding with the Immigration Appellate Authority; and what was the equivalent figure on *(a)* 1 January 1995 and *(b)* on 1 January 1994. [569]

Mr. John M. Taylor: There were approximately 9,980 appeals outstanding on 31 October 1995, 3,400 on 1 January 1995 and 480 on 1 January 1994.

Local Government

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will list the Acts of Parliament and Consolidation Acts that affect local government that have been introduced by his Department since January 1994. [45]

Mr. John M. Taylor: My Department has introduced no Act of Parliament during this period containing provisions which affect local government exclusively. However, the Statute Law (Repeals) Act 1995 effected the repeal of certain obsolete and unnecessary local enactments.

Jurors (Counselling)

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what provisions are made for jury counselling at the conclusion of murder trials. [337]

Mr. John M. Taylor: The Court Service makes no specific provision for jury counselling at the conclusion of murder trials. Where jurors who are distressed contact court staff, they are advised to contact their general practitioner or, if they prefer, a freephone healthline number which details counselling services available. Where the evidence in a case is particularly distressing, the Court Service offers further advice or assistance, where this is considered appropriate.

Immigration Adjudicators

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will provide a breakdown of the number of full-time and part-time special adjudicators employed by the Immigration Appellate Authority *(a)* at the present time, *(b)* on 1 January 1994 and *(c)* on 1 January 1993. [568]

Mr. John M. Taylor: There were no special adjudicators on 1 January 1993 as the Immigration Appeals Bill had not yet been enacted. The first special adjudicators were designated by the Lord Chancellor in July 1993. On 1 January 1994 there were 16 full-time immigration adjudicators and 15 part-time immigration adjudicators who were designated as special adjudicators by the Lord Chancellor. At the present time 25 full-time and 52 part-time immigration adjudicators are so designated.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Audiovisual Eureka

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what has been the outcome of the United Kingdom's presidency of the pan-European Audiovisual Eureka initiative. [3072]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: I am pleased to announce that I have today formally made the London declaration setting out a new role and objectives for Audiovisual Eureka. I do so having been notified by Ministers of 25 of the 33 participating Audiovisual Eureka countries, as well as by the Council of Europe, that they are content to see the declaration adopted. A copy of the declaration has been placed in the House Libraries.

The London declaration, negotiated under the United Kingdom presidency of Audiovisual Eureka—AVE—takes forward the recommendations of an independent evaluation of the initiative undertaken by management consultants, Coopers and Lybrand. The declaration refocuses the pan-European media initiative more narrowly and in keeping with its limited resources. The redefined objectives are to:

> strengthen and promote the audiovisual industry in the wider Europe, taking into account new technology;
>
> concentrate its activities on acting as an intermediary on the one hand between AVE countries not presently members of the European Union and, on the other, the members of the European Union, as well as European Community and other programmes and instruments applicable to the audiovisual sector;
>
> initiative and further appropriate structural projects principally in the areas of training audiovisual professionals and the development and distribution of European audiovisual works; and
>
> provide a range of project-related services targeted at small and medium-sized enterprises, in particular to foster partnerships involving countries with limited audiovisual capacity.

These objectives will be achieved through a four-year work programme prepared by the United Kingdom and Poland, as the current and future presidencies of AVE, which was approved by national co-ordinators from participating countries on 23 and 24 November in Strasbourg.

The declaration will take effect from 1 January 1996, which also marks the beginning of the new work programme. I expect all member countries of AVE to signal their acceptance of the declaration before then.

DEFENCE

Princess of Wales

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence of which regiments the Princess of Wales is colonel in chief. [2282]

Mr. Soames: The Princess of Wales is colonel in chief of the Light Dragoons and the Princess of Wales' Royal Regiment—Queen's and Royal Hampshires.

Training Areas

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which body was responsible for taking the decisions on the locations of the low-level operational training areas; and what other bodies were consulted prior to their establishment. [528]

Mr. Soames: The decisions on the locations of the tactical training areas were taken by the Ministry of Defence in consultation with National Air Traffic Services. Records to indicate whether any other bodies were consulted have not been retained.

Refits

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the last refitting dates of all *(a)* surface vessels and *(b)* submarines which have taken place over the last five years, indicating the cost of each refit. [463]

Mr. Arbuthnot *[holding answer 20 November 1995]:* The date and cost of refits undertaken over the last five years are:

Vessel	*Refit completion date*	*Total cost at outturn prices (£)*
a. Surface vessels		
Middleton	April 1991	3,800,000
Chiddingfold	April 1991	4,304,000
Sheraton	April 1991	2,568,000
Southampton	May 1991	23,600,000
Sirius	May 1991	22,990,000
Dovey	May 1991	707,000
Humber	May 1991	545,000
Sir Bedivere	August 1991	1,873,000
Landing Craft Unit 715	August 1991	200,000
Landing Craft Unit 714	August 1991	202,000
Nottingham	September 1991	23,562,000
Beaver	September 1991	25,859,000
Helford	November 1991	839,000
Andromeda	December 1991	27,392,000
Herald	December 1991	8,522,000
Hurworth	January 1992	7,554,000
Blackwater	January 1992	2,592,000
Itchen	March 1992	1,921,000
Olmeda	April 1992	8,995,000
Kingfisher	April 1992	746,000
Britannia	May 1992	7,627,000
Landing Craft Unit 701	May 1992	277,000
Liverpool	July 1992	39,538,000
Bicester	July 1992	8,215,000
Colonel Templer	July 1992	5,854,000
Anglesey	November 1992	5,029,000
Wilton	November 1992	1,977,000
Landing Craft Unit 710	November 1992	365,000
Hecla	December 1992	4,985,000
Arun	December 1992	640,000
Manchester	February 1993	45,697,000
Alderney	March 1993	5,692,000
Diligence	March 1993	2,983,000
Smiter	March 1993	15,000
Spey	April 1993	2,539,000
Bayleaf	April 1993	3,865,000
Messina	May 1993	13,000
Biter	May 1993	24,000
Olna	May 1993	8,786,000
Archer	June 1993	28,000
Ajax	July 1993	193,000
Beagle	September 1993	2,547,000
Atherstone	September 1993	2,773,000
Fort Austin	September 1993	6,875,000
Brave	November 1993	20,488,000
Argus	November 1993	4,726,000
Black Rover	November 1993	3,058,000
Grey Rover	November 1993	2,415,000
Orangeleaf	December 1993	3,721,000
Brecon	March 1994	9,024,000
Sir Percivale	March 1994	1,693,000
Illustrious	April 1994	152,659,000
Gleaner	April 1994	56,000
Brambleleaf	May 1994	5,058,000
Berkeley	May 1994	3,741,000
Landing Craft Unit 706	June 1994	145,000
Battleaxe	July 1994	13,203,000
Leeds Castle	August 1994	5,013,000
Gold Rover	August 1994	3,405,000
Sir Geraint	September 1994	2,081,000
Gloucester	October 1994	48,365,000
Resource	October 1994	6,236,000
Sir Galahad	November 1994	2,956,000
Ledbury	December 1994	6,106,000
Olwen	December 1994	8,119,000
Sir Tristram	February 1995	3,647,000
Orkney	March 1995	5,457,000
Oakleaf	April 1995	5,883,000
London	May 1995	[1]27,584,000
Fort Grange	May 1995	8,353,000
York	June 1995	34,339,000
Bulldog	June 1995	3,774,000
Landing Craft Unit 700	September 1995	123,000
Landing Craft Unit 704	September 1995	116,000
b. Submarines		
Renown	April 1993	155,571,000
Splendid	December 1993	118,202,000

[1] Shows costs to date, as final cost certificates have not yet been received.

Royal Ordnance plc

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the relationship between his Department, Royal Ordnance and PRB; and which countries were supplied with armaments and defence equipment arising from it. [996]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The question does not specify dates, but the Royal Ordnance factories were part of the Ministry of Defence until 2 January 1985, when the property, rights and liabilities were vested in Royal Ordnance plc. At this time, the company was wholly owned by the Government and the Secretary of State for Defence was the sole shareholder. RO plc from 2 January 1985 operated, as far as possible, as an independent company and acted commercially, under the terms of a memorandum of understanding. RO plc sold the tank factory in Leeds to Vickers plc in October 1986 and the sale of RO plc to British Aerospace was completed in April 1987. Since April 1987 the relationship between the Ministry of Defence and the company has been one of customer and supplier.

PRB was also a supplier to the Ministry of Defence, both directly and, we believe, indirectly, as a subcontractor to Royal Ordnance.

From 2 January 1985, exports by Royal Ordnance were subject to the normal licensing arrangements, but it has been the practice of successive Governments not to reveal information about individual defence exports.

Military Aircraft

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what procedures exist for military air traffic controllers to report breaches of active danger areas by military aircraft; and how many such breaches were reported in each of the last three years. [1298]

Mr. Soames: National Air Traffic Services procedures allow military air traffic controllers to report civil and military aircraft breaches of danger areas in the United Kingdom. In the event of a breach by UK-based military aircraft, a report is sent to the appropriate military operating authority. Reports of breaches by foreign military aircraft are sent to NATS. Where the aircraft operator is not known, breaches are reported initially to

HQ Military Air Traffic Organisation so that the aircraft can be identified. Since the beginning of 1993, the number of infringements by military aircraft has been:

Year	*Number*
1993	3
1994	15
1995 (to date)	13

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the difference between a practice interception and a visual identification, in terms of the manoeuvres permitted by British military fighter aircraft when in the vicinity of a civil aircraft. [1305]

Mr. Soames: An interception is the initial manoeuvre flown by military aircraft to identify visually an aircraft which has penetrated the UK air defence region without warning. The practice of these manoeuvres is essential training for military aircrew, but any training involving civil aircraft is conducted only as part of a pre-briefed exercise and does not take place in controlled airspace.

Low Flying

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the dates in the past year on which fast jet low flying was authorised after 2300 hours; and what was the reason for the special authorisation in each case. [1286]

Mr. Soames: Fast jet low flying was authorised after 2300 hours on the nights of 8–9 and 9–10 June 1995 and 25–26 July 1995 to meet essential training requirements.

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to use the automated low flying enquiry and notification system to monitor the concentrations of night low flying in particular areas over time, as an aid to managing the environmental impact of such flights. [1292]

Mr. Soames: The intention is to make the fullest practicable use of ALFENS, which will include such monitoring.

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if military aircraft are permitted to carry out night low-flying sorties over the United Kingdom, other than in the highlands restricted area, in areas where the forecast weather is less than the minimum requirements for visual flight. [1304]

Mr. Soames: Outside the highlands restricted area, night low-flying sorties may be conducted only in areas where the weather conditions meet the minimum requirements for visual flight.

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on progress in introducing the ALFENS system; when he expects the system to reach its full operational capability; and how many United Kingdom air bases will have the system installed. [1293]

Mr. Soames: Tests of the system commenced in July 1995 as scheduled. These revealed a number of problems which are being resolved, in order to provide full operational capability as expected by mid-1996. ALFENS will be installed at 73 United Kingdom military bases.

Service Deaths

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the dates and circumstances of all deaths of service or civilian personnel in the past five years for which coroners' inquests or fatal accident inquiries have been held. [1294]

Mr. Soames: Information of the nature requested is not held centrally by my Department and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Purple Airspace

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many infringements of purple airspace have been reported in each year since 1990. [1276]

Mr. Soames: The information requested has been provided by National Air Traffic Services:

Year	*Infringements by military aircraft*	*Infringements by civil aircraft*
1990	2	5
1994	0	1
1995 (to date)	1	0

There were no infringements of purple airspace recorded in 1991, 1992 or 1993.

AIRPROX

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessments he has made of the likely effects of the adoption of the AIRPROX system on the rates of aircraft proximity incident reporting by *(a)* pilots and *(b)* controllers. [1300]

Mr. Soames: The forthcoming introduction of the AIRPROX (Pilot) term may result in an increase in the number of aircraft proximity incidents since the new term has a wider definition than "airmiss" which it replaces. The introduction, last year, of the AIRPROX (Controller) has not resulted in a significant change in the number of incidents since the definition of the new term is the same as "Aircraft Proximity Hazard (APHAZ)" which it replaced.

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to extend the AIRPROX (Controller) reporting system to military air traffic controllers. [1301]

Mr. Soames: None. Aircraft proximity incidents reported by military air traffic controllers will continue to be investigated by military authorities. Where an AIRPROX (Controller) report raised by a civil air traffic controller involves military aircraft, the military authorities will assist with the Civil Aviation Authority investigation.

In-flight Dumping

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the total amount of aviation fuel lost as a result of in-flight dumping in each financial year since 1990; what was the cost of the loss in each year; and if he will make a statement on measures taken since 1990 to reduce waste by minimising in-flight dumping. [1296]

Mr. Soames: In-flight dumping of fuel takes place only when absolutely necessary for operational or flight safety reasons. Details of the amount and costs of aviation fuel lost as a result of in-flight dumping are not held centrally and this information could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Military Aircraft Accident Summaries

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his policy on the timing of the publication of military aircraft accident summaries in relation to the timing of inquests or fatal accident inquiries. [1295]

Mr. Soames: Military aircraft accident summaries of aircraft accidents involving fatalities are published by my Department after the next of kin have been notified of the outcome of the board of inquiry. The timing of inquests and fatal accident inquiries is entirely a matter for the coroner or procurator fiscal, as appropriate.

Harrier Aircraft

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the minimum permitted altitude for use of thrust vectoring in forward flight by Harrier aircraft when evading mock interceptions over the United Kingdom. [1285]

Mr. Soames: The use of thrust vectoring up to 30 deg. of nozzle deflection in forward flight is permitted down to approved minimum separation distances within the United Kingdom low flying system when Harrier aircraft are evading mock interceptions. Full nozzle deflection thrust vectoring is permitted above 7,000 ft.

Parachute Regiment

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what disciplinary action was taken in respect of the members of the Parachute Regiment involved in anti-social behaviour on a recent commercial flight to Tenerife; how many personnel were involved; and if he will make a statement. [1815]

Mr. Soames: As a result of this incident, 15 soldiers were placed on a formal warning as to their future conduct.

Ship Sales

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 20 November, *Official Report*, column *17*, if he will list the dates of construction of each of the vessels currently being sold by his Department. [2250]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The information is as follows:

Ship name	*Laid down*
HMS Sirius	9 August 1963
HMS Scylla	17 May 1967
HMS Hermione	6 December 1965
HMS Jupiter	3 October 1966
HMS Redpole	'4 August 1967
HMS Cygnet	'8 July 1976
HMS Kingfisher	'8 October 1975
RMAS Roysterer	'26 April 1972
RMAS Foxhound	'22 February 1963
RMAS Labrador	'14 November 1966
RMAS Daphne	'19 December 1968
RMAS Nancy	'31 August 1973
RMAS Lydford	'7 April 1970
RMAS Waterspout	'5 April 1967
HMS Upholder	November 1983
HMS Unicorn	February 1989
HMS Unseen	January 1986
HMS Ursula	August 1987
RMAS Pauline Elizabeth	Not recorded

' Dates shown are commissioning dates, as laid down dates are not available for these vessels.

Nigerian Military Personnel

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are the number of Nigerian military currently undertaking training in the United Kingdom; and what is the policy of the Government regarding further such training for Nigerian military officers and non-commissioned officers. [2259]

Mr. Soames: There are no members of the Nigerian armed forces currently undertaking training in the United Kingdom. In December 1993, together with our European Union partners, we announced a series of measures applying to Nigeria which included a complete suspension of all military training. Nigerian military personnel undertaking training in the United Kingdom at that time were asked to leave.

Ships and Submarines

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list *(a)* surface ships and *(b)* submarines which have been decommissioned but not put up for sale by his Department; and if he will specify what has happened to each of these vessels over the last five years. [2251]

Mr. Arbuthnot: It is the Government's policy to put up for sale all vessels, apart from nuclear-powered submarines, that are no longer required by the Royal Navy. The following nuclear submarines have been decommissioned in the last five years and are stored at Rosyth awaiting disposal: Churchill, Conqueror, Courageous, Resolution, Revenge, Swiftsure, Valiant and Warspite.

Skyship 600

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the total cost of his Department's airship, the Skyship 600, Prince of Wales; where it is currently based; what investigation his Department is carrying out into how it burst; what estimate he has made of the total cost of repair to the airship; and if he will make a statement. [2252]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The total procurement cost of the Department's Skyship 600, registered number ZH 762, was approximately £2.6 million and it is based at the Defence Test and Evaluation Organisation site at Boscombe Down. The incident which resulted in rupture of the envelope occurred during a masting operation at Boscombe Down in May 1995 following a day's flying. This was investigated at a formal board of inquiry which

concluded human error to be the cause. Repair of the envelope has not been possible; the cost of a replacement has not yet been established.

Former Officers

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his policy in relation to former serving officers of the armed services taking up business appointments in companies which may be bidding for defence contracts. [2253]

Mr. Soames: Former serving officers of the armed forces are required, for a period of two years after leaving Crown service, to apply for official permission before accepting a paid appointment with any organisation with which they had dealings during their last two years of Crown employment.

TRANSPORT

Light Rail Funding

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the implications for Wythenshawe of Greater Manchester passenger transport authority's strategic development plan; and if he will make a statement of the future of light rail funding with particular reference to the benefits of extending Metrolink. [2112]

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what assessment he has made of the implications for Manchester, Withington of Greater Manchester passenger transport authority's strategic development plan; [1847]

(2) if he will make a statement on the future of light rail funding. [1848]

Mr. Norris: My Department is aware of Greater Manchester passenger transport authority strategic development plan for public transport which covers the period 1992 to 2002. It is a matter for GMPTA to prioritise the proposals in the plan, which we will then consider in competition with other bids for local transport resources.

Bids for light rail schemes are submitted to my Department during the annual transport policies and programmes round, and are funded through the package approach. I am prepared to consider supporting light rail schemes, including extensions to the Metrolink, provided that they can be demonstrated to be the right and most cost-effective solution to a particular urban transport problem, where they are planned within the context of a strategy or transport package to achieve mode shift away from the private car, and where they will attract significant private sector and local investment. It should be remembered, however, that light rail is not the only solution to urban transport problems, and the difficulties and costs associated with developing schemes should not be underestimated.

Mr. Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the current status of all proposed light rail projects applying for, or seeking *(a)* construction powers and *(b)* funding; indicating the percentage levels of funding secured on each project from the private sector. [2256]

Mr. Norris: Two applications for orders under the Transport and Works Act 1992 have been made which relate to light rail projects. These are the Greater Manchester (LRTS) (Airport Extension) and the Greater Manchester (LRTS) (Eccles Extension) Orders. In both cases local inquiries have been held and the Secretary of State is awaiting the inspectors' reports.

My Department has received two applications for funding in 1996–97. These are for the Manchester Metrolink extension to Salford quays and the Leeds supertram. The amount of private sector funding for both these projects has not yet been finalised. Before I agree to fund a new light rail scheme, the promoters must have secured significant private sector and local investment. Each light rail project is different and the level of private sector investment in each scheme will differ.

Metrolink

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the benefits of extending Metrolink. [1849]

Mr. Norris: My Department has received an application from Greater Manchester passenger transport executive for funding under section 56 of the Transport Act 1968 of the Metrolink extension to Salford quays. Subject to final costs and the value of the operating concession, this application appears to meet the criteria that we expect such a scheme to fulfil.

The Department has also received an initial section 56 application for the Metrolink extension to Oldham and Rochdale, although GMPTE has not submitted a bid for funding in 1996–97. GMPTE need to carry out further work on the economic appraisal of this scheme before we can give an indication of whether it meets the relevant criteria.

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he last met Greater Manchester passenger transport authority to discuss Metrolink 2000 and Greater Manchester's plans for an integrated passenger transport network. [1766]

Mr. Norris: My right hon. Friend visited Manchester to perform a sod-cutting ceremony at Manchester airport on 20 October 1995. While he was there, he received a presentation from Greater Manchester passenger transport authority on its plans to extend the Manchester Metrolink.

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received in support of the planned Metrolink extensions; and if he will list them. [2113]

Mr. Norris: My Department has received a small number of letters from the general public and local Members of Parliament in support of the proposed Metrolink extensions, primarily in response to the recent public inquiries into the extensions to Manchester airport and Eccles. We also received 200 objections to the Greater Manchester (LRTS) (Airport Extension) Order.

Mr. Orme: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what estimates he has made of how many fewer car journeys will be made as a consequence of the opening of the planned Metrolink extension to Eccles via Salford quays. [2088]

Mr. Norris: We have yet to receive an economic appraisal of the extension to Eccles. Greater Manchester passenger transport executive must obtain the necessary powers under the Transport and Works Act 1992 for the extension from Salford quays to Eccles before submitting an application for funding to the Department of Transport. The extension to Salford quays alone is forecast to remove 19 million car trips over the 30-year period of the appraisal.

Crossrail

Ms Glenda Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the expenditure to date by his Department on the crossrail 2000 scheme. [2149]

Mr. Norris: Expenditure to date on crossrail amounts to some £143 million.

Ferrybridge–Hook Moor Inquiry

Mr. William O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what procedure in respect of recording of statements, questions and answers was applied during the public inquiry held recently into the A1 Ferrybridge to Hook Moor proposals by the Highways Agency. [2107]

Mr. Watts: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 8 November, *Official Report*, columns *897–98*.

Rail Operators

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to require railway operators to comply with specific passenger loading maxima. [1784]

Mr. Watts: The franchising director will specify load factors or seating capacity requirements in the passenger service requirements where this is necessary to avoid overcrowding on commuter services. The franchising director will set rigorous standards which will regulate the level of crowding on London commuter services below the average experienced in the last 10 years. Where neither load factor regulation nor capacity requirements apply, franchise operators will be required to use all reasonable endeavours to avoid excessive overcrowding on the services they provide.

M1 (Lighting)

Sir Irvine Patnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has for continous lighting on the remaining unlit sections of theM1 between London and junction 29. [1706]

Mr. Watts: I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency to write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Sir Irvine Patnick, dated 24 November 1995:

As you know, the Minister for Railways and Roads, Mr. John Watts, has asked me to reply to your Parliamentary Question asking the Secretary of State for Transport, what plans he has for continuous lighting on the remaining unlit sections of the M1 between London and Junction 29.

The M1 is unlit between junctions 19 and 20, 21A and 23, and 26 and 29. There are no plans at present to light these sections but lighting will be considered if it can be economically justified on the bases of forecast savings in night time road accidents.

Motor Vehicle Licensing

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to announce the results of the consultation exercise on the continuous licensing of motor vehicles. [1791]

Mr. Norris: The consultation exercise on the continuous licensing of motor vehicles ended on 2 June. The responses to the exercise have been very carefully considered and an announcement will be made shortly.

Light Rail Systems

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will publish a list of tram systems currently operating, indicating the number of passengers carried for each where known; if he will make it his policy to promote the development of trams; and if he will make a statement. [1787]

Mr. Norris: There are five principal light rail/tram systems currently operating in England. Details of the schemes and the number of passenger journeys made on each system in 1994–95 are:

	Millions
	1994–95
Blackpool Tramway	5.8
Tyne and Wear Metro	37.2
Docklands Light Railway	11.0
Greater Manchester Metrolink	12.3
South Yorkshire Supertram	2.2

Source:
Transport Statistics Great Britain 1995 and Blackpool Transport Services Ltd.

Inter-urban operations have survived on the Isle of Man with Manx electric railway and the Snaefell mountain railway. A seasonal tramway operates in Llandudno. Construction of the Midland Metro line 1 has begun, and funding has been arranged for the Croydon Tramlink subject to the bids that come forward from the private sector for the concession.

The Government do not have a policy of promoting light rail schemes: local authorities are best placed to develop solutions for the urban transport problems in their town or city. We are prepared to consider supporting light rail schemes that can be demonstrated to be the right and most cost-effective solution to a particular problem, where they are planned within the context of a strategy or transport package to achieve mode shift away from the private car, and where they will attract significant private sector and local investment.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many staff his Department employs on a regional basis in each standard English region; what is the cost of running these regional operations; what was the total budget for each region in 1994–95; and what are the main purposes for which the budget is used. [262]

Mr. Norris *[holding answer 22 November 1995]:* My Department employs the following number of staff in the Government offices for the regions:

	Numbers
East Midlands	12
Eastern	10
London	68
North west	12
Northern	21
South west	9
West Midlands	10
Yorkshire and Humberside	4
Total	146

The financial resources required for managing the Government offices are integrated and a separated figure for expenditure on the transport element is not available.

My Department also employs a number of staff in the regions in its executive agencies, its traffic area network and a number of HQ branches. These staff are not employed on a regional basis and a breakdown of each region would be available only at a disproportionate cost.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Habitual Residence Test

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many claimants for income support have been subjected to the habitual residence test since its inception. [1829]

Mr. Roger Evans: The habitual residence test has applied to all claimants for income support who have made either a new or repeat claim since 1 August 1994. Figures relating to those claimants who indicated on their claim forms that they entered the United Kingdom within the five years prior to the claim are available in the Library.

Family Credit

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people are currently receiving the £10 weekly allowance with (i) family credit and (ii) disability working allowance for working more than 30 hours a week. [1835]

Mr. Roger Evans: Provisional figures for July 1995 will be available next month. Data for November 1995 will not be available until April 1996.

Income Support

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what are the latest figures available for people claiming income support *(a)* by gender, *(b)* by region, *(c)* by marital status, *(d)* with dependants and *(e)* in total; what were the equivalent figures for 1979; and if he will make a statement. [1082]

Mr. Roger Evans: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is set out in the tables.

Direct comparisons cannot be made between supplementary benefit and income support as their structure and scope differ considerably.

Income support families with/without dependants by gender, region and marital status 1994

Region	*All cases*	*Cases without dependants*				*Cases with dependants*			
		Females		*Males*		*Females*		*Males*	
		With partner	*Single*	*With partner*	*Single*	*With partner*	*Single*	*With partner*	*Single*
South East (excluding London)	795,000	6,000	274,000	59,000	225,000	4,000	143,000	74,000	10,000
London (inner and outer)	939,000	7,000	272,000	57,000	318,000	6,000	186,000	79,000	13,000
North	359,000	2,000	117,000	27,000	109,000	2,000	64,000	33,000	4,000
Wales	323,000	2,000	110,000	23,000	93,000	2,000	60,000	28,000	4,000
Scotland	556,000	5,000	191,000	36,000	181,000	3,000	99,000	33,000	8,000
Yorkshire and Humberside	517,000	4,000	177,000	39,000	151,000	3,000	89,000	48,000	6,000
East Midlands	353,000	3,000	117,000	29,000	101,000	2,000	64,000	32,000	5,000
East Anglia	163,000	1,000	58,000	15,000	44,000	1,000	28,000	14,000	2,000
South west	388,000	3,000	137,000	31,000	114,000	2,000	65,000	31,000	5,000
West Midlands	547,000	5,000	184,000	43,000	156,000	3,000	94,000	55,000	6,000
North west	761,000	7,000	254,000	48,000	234,000	5,000	148,000	56,000	9,000
Total	5,700,000	47,000	1,891,000	408,000	1,727,000	35,000	1,039,000	482,000	70,000
England	4,821,000	40,000	1,590,000	349,000	1,453,000	29,000	880,000	420,000	59,000
Scotland	556,000	5,000	191,000	36,000	181,000	3,000	99,000	33,000	8,000
Wales	323,000	2,000	110,000	23,000	93,000	2,000	60,000	28,000	4,000
Great Britain	5,700,000	47,000	1,891,000	408,000	1,727,000	35,000	1,039,000	482,000	70,000

Notes:

1. Single includes separated, temporarily separated, widowed, divorced, and prisoners' partners.
2. Figures are rounded to the nearest thousand. Due to rounding some of the totals may not tally.
3. A dependant is defined as under the age of 19.

Source: Income Support Statistics Quarterly Enquiry November 1994.

Income support families without dependants by gender, region and marital status

Region	All cases	Cases without dependants		
		All couples	Single male	Single female
England	1,994,000	n/a	n/a	n/a
Scotland	2,30,000	n/a	n/a	n/a
Wales	1,42,000	n/a	n/a	n/a
Great Britain	2,367,000	397,000	486,000	1,484,000

Notes:

1. Single include separated, temporary separated, widowed, divorced and prisoners' partners.
2. Figures are rounded to the nearest thousand. Due to rounding some of the totals may not tally.
3. A dependant is defined as under the age of 19.
4. No regional breakdown is available for 1979 for cases without dependants.

Source: Supplementary Benefit Statistics Annual Enquiry November 1979.
Income Support Statistics Quarterly Enquiry November 1994.

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many claimants of income support with a disability premium payable on incapacity grounds are currently exempt from the all-work test by virtue of *(a)* receipt of the highest rate of the disability living allowance care component, *(b)* in receipt of the premium and aged over 58 years on 13 April 1995, *(c)* with a serious medical condition and *(d)* a serious mental illness. [1834]

Mr. Evans: The information requested is not available. Information on the number of income support recipients who qualify to be treated as incapable of work without having to take the all-work test because of receipt of the highest rate of the care component of the disability living allowance will be available at a later date.

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many families on income support receive *(a)* the disabled child premium and *(b)* the lone parent premium; and how many who receive the lone parent premium also receive the disabled premium. [1838]

Mr. Evans: In November 1994, the latest date for which figures are available, 48,000 families on income support had been awarded the disabled child premium, 1,043,000 families had the lone parent premium and 25,000 families had both premiums.

Notes:
All figures have been rounded to the nearest thousand.

Source:
Income Support Quarterly Enquiry.

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people are currently receiving income support urgent cases payment; and how many of these also receive *(a)* a disability premium and *(b)* a disabled child premium. [1841]

Mr. Evans: As of November 1994, the latest date for which figures are available, 63,000 claimants were receiving income support urgent case payments. Of these, 2,000 claimants were awarded the disability premium and the number with an award of disabled child premium was negligible.

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what how many claimants of income support are working 16 or more hours per week but treated as not in remunerative work because earnings or hours are reduced to 75 per cent. of a non-disabled person. [1756]

Mr. Evans: The information is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people currently in receipt of disability premium payable with *(a)* income support, *(b)* housing benefit and *(c)* council tax are also in receipt of earnings. [1757]

Mr. Evans: The information is set out in the table.

	Recipients
Income support	12,000
Housing benefit	22,000
Council tax benefit	32,000

Notes:

1. Figures refer to the number of benefit units which could be a single person or a couple.
2. Earnings could be declared by either the claimant or their partner.
3. Figures given may include recipients who are in receipt of more than one of the benefits listed.

Source:
Income Support Quarterly Enquiry: May 1994.
Housing Benefit Management Information System annual 1 per cent. sample taken May 1994.

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) if he will list the main disabling conditions of people currently in receipt of *(a)* incapacity benefit and *(b)* income support with a disability premium; [1750]

(2) if he will list the main disabling conditions of people who have been found capable of work between April and September 1995 who were previously in receipt of *(a)* incapacity benefit and *(b)* income support with a disability premium. [1753]

Mr. Evans: Information is not available in the format requested. Of the 800 categories of diagnosis recorded for incapacity claims the 20 most common are:

1. Backache
2. Depression (Unspecified)
3. Osteo Arthritis
4. Arthritis (Unspecified)
5. Ischaemia, of any kind
6. Angina
7. Spondylitis
8. Hypertension
9. Pain, other or unspecified
10. Injury to limb, face, neck, trunk, joint, or shoulder
11. Anxiety State
12. Asthma
13. Nervous Debility
14. Diabetes
15. Schizophrenia

16. Sciatica
17. Heart Disease
18. Multiple Sclerosis
19. Epilepsy
20. Invertebral disc, prolapsed, slipped, lesion.

Family Benefits

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many children were living in families dependent on benefit in each year since 1979; and if he will make a statement. [1083]

Mr. Heald: Information prior to 1991 is not available. The information that is available is set out in the table:

Number of children in Great Britain in families receiving income-related benefits

Thousands

Year	*Number of children in families receiving one or more income-related benefit*
1991	3,340
1992	3,720
1993	4,100
1994	4,170

Notes:
1. Figures have been rounded to the nearest 10,000.
2. Children may be in families receiving more than one income-related benefit. Overlaps between benefits have been taken into account.
3. Children are defined as aged 15 and under.

Source:
Income Support Statistics May 1991–May 1994.
Family Credit Statistics April 1991–April 1994.
Disability Working Allowance Statistics April 1992–April 1994.
Housing Benefit Management Information System Enquiries May 1991–May 1994.

Occupational Pensions

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has of the percentage of those in employment but not in an occupational pension scheme who *(a)* earn more than £10,000 per annum, *(b)* earn less than £8,000 per annum and *(c)* earn less than £6,000 per annum. [1843]

Mr. Heald: The information requested is as follows:

Percentage of employees not in an occupational pension scheme by usual gross annual earnings (Great Britain, 1993)

Annual earnings	*All employees*
More than £10,000	32
Less than £8,000	57
Less than £6,000	44

Note:
Excluding a few people who were not sure if they were in a scheme but thought it possible.
Source:
1993 General Household Survey.

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the percentage of (i) men and (ii) women, between the ages 20 to 59 years and broken down by five-year age groups, who belong to *(a)* an occupational pension scheme and *(b)* a personal pension scheme; what are the average yearly contributions made by each group; and what estimate he has of the average pension receivable in (i) 1995, (ii) 2000, (iii) 2005, (iv) 2010, (v) 2015, (vi) 2020, (vii) 2025 and (viii) 2030 for those whose membership will have been (1) 10 years, (2) 20 years, (3) 30 years and (4) 40 years, respectively. [1828]

Mr. Heald: Information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is as follows:

Percentage of men between the ages of 20 and 59 years who belong to an occupational or personal pension scheme by age group (Great Britain, 1993)

	20–24	*25–29*	*30–34*	*35–39*	*40–44*	*45–49*	*50–54*	*55–59*	*Total 20–59*
Occupational pension scheme member[1]	21	31	41	43	43	48	42	32	38
Personal pension scheme member	18	34	33	30	29	31	27	19	28

Note:
[1] Including a few people who were not sure if they were in a scheme but thought it possible.
Source:
General Household Survey 1993.

Percentage of women between the ages of 20 to 59 years who belong to an occupational or personal pension scheme by age group (Great Britain, 1993)

	20–24	*25–29*	*30–34*	*35–39*	*40–44*	*45–49*	*50–54*	*55–59*	*Total 20–59*
Occupational pension scheme member[1]	18	26	25	25	28	28	25	18	24
Personal pension scheme member	13	16	12	13	16	15	11	6	13

Source:
General Household Survey 1993.

Note:
[1] Including a few people who were not sure if they were in a scheme but thought it possible.

Retirement Pensions

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people of pensionable age fail to qualify for a full pension in their own right. [1844]

Mr. Heald: Information on the number of people who have no entitlement to retirement pension is not immediately available. I will let the hon. Member have such information as becomes available as soon as possible.

The available information is in the table.

Retirement Pension in payment in Great Britain at 30 September 1994 to men over 65 and women over 60

Category	*All rates*	*Less than full rate*
Cat A men	3,321,170	179,370
Cat A women	2,395,760	692,890
Cat BL wives	1,279,970	49,030
Cat ABL wives	682,490	2,890
Cat B widows	1,779,040	62,790

Note:
Cat A—pension derived from own contributions.
Cat BL—pension derived from spouse's contributions. Full rate is about 60 per cent. Cat A rate.
Cat ABL—pension derived from both own and spouse's contributions. Full rate is about 60 per cent. of Cat A rate.
Cat B—pension derived from late spouse's contributions. Full rate same as Cat A rate.
Source:
Retirement Pension Biannual enquiry September 1994.

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his estimate of the cost to his Department of paying retirement pension to people *(a)* who die before their next pay day and *(b)* whose benefit was due to be reduced for a hospital stay. [1749]

Mr. Heald: Retirement pension is payable for complete weeks only. There is, therefore, no cost if people die before their next pay day and their benefit was due to be reduced as a result of a stay in hospital.

Disability Working Allowance

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his estimate of *(a)* the numbers of new claimants and *(b)* the cost of reducing the disability working allowance taper from 70 per cent. to (i) 60 per cent., (ii) 50 per cent. and (iii) 30 per cent. [1751]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: The estimated effects of changes in the disability working allowance taper are given in the table. The costs are given in 1995–96 prices rounded to the nearest £1 million, and are net of housing benefit and council tax benefit offsets. The numbers of new DWA claimants are rounded to the nearest 1,000.

Disability working allowance	*60 per cent. taper*	*50 per cent. taper*	*30 per cent. taper*
New claimants	1,000	2,000	7,000
Net cost £ million	1	4	14

Source:
Family Expenditure Surveys of 1991, 1992 and 1993.
Disability Working Allowance Statistics Quarterly Enquiry January 1995.

The use of proxy groups means that the estimates are subject to wide margins of error. They will be accurate only to the extent that the proxy groups have the same characteristics as those eligible for DWA.

Reduced Earnings Allowance

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people are currently in receipt of reduced earnings allowance; how many are aged *(a)* 39 or under, *(b)* 40 to 49, *(c)* 50 to 59, *(d)* 60 to 65 and *(e)* 65 to 70 years, by gender; and what is the average amount payable. [1755]

Mr. Roger Evans: Information is not available in the format requested. At 2 April 1994—the latest date for which information is available—there were 142,796 people receiving reduced earnings allowance.

Such information as is available is set out in the table:

Number of reduced earnings allowance assessments current at 2 April 1994 analysed by age and gender

	Males		*Females*	
Age at 31 March 1994	*Reduced earnings allowance*	*Frozen or restricted reduced earnings allowance*	*Reduced earnings allowance*	*Frozen or restricted reduced earnings allowance*
39 or under	8,342	—	2,501	—
40–49	17,604	—	4,874	—
50–59	29,196	—	7,965	—
60–64	17,480	—	3,628	30
65–69	14,992	109	217	2,382

Based on a 10 per cent. sample with an allowance for late returns.

The average rate of reduced earnings allowance at 2 April 1994 was £36.05 and the average rate of frozen or restricted reduced earnings allowance was £24.64.

Housing Benefit

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many families on housing benefit receive *(a)* the disabled child premium and *(b)* the lone parent premium; and how many who receive the lone parent premium also receive the disabled child premium. [1839]

Mr. Roger Evans: The information is set out in the table.

Housing benefit recipients: Great Britain, May 1994

	Numbers of families
(a) Disabled child premium	39,000
(b) Lone parent premium	859,000
(c) Disabled child premium and lone parent premium	21,000

Notes:
1. Figures relate to the number of benefit units which may be a single person or a couple.
2. Families have been defined as single people or couples who have dependants.
3. The figure for (c) is included within the figures given for (a) and (b).
Source:
Housing Benefit Management Information System annual 1 per cent. sample taken May 1994.

National Insurance

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the benefits on receipt of which people may be credited with class 1 national insurance contributions; how many people were affected by this; and what is the cost to the Exchequer of crediting people with class 1 national insurance contributions by benefit type and in total. [1827]

Mr. Heald: Class 1 national insurance credits may be awarded to people receiving unemployment benefit, incapacity benefit, severe disablement allowance, statutory sick pay, statutory maternity pay, maternity allowance, disability working allowance, invalid care allowance and, where the individual is sick or unemployed, with income support. Credits may also be awarded in cases of sickness and unemployment where no benefit is in payment. Estimates of the cost of credits to the Exchequer are not available. Estimates of the number of benefit recipients in the United Kingdom who were credited with at least one class 1 contribution in the tax year 1992–93 are in the table.

Number of people in the United Kingdom with at least one credited contribution in the tax year 1992–93 (UK) by type of benefit to which this relates

Thousands[1, 2]

Type of benefit	*Number*
Unemployment benefit	[3]5,083
Sickness benefit/invalidity benefit/maternity allowance/SDA/SSP/SMP	[4]1,947
Invalid care allowance	220
Disability working allowance	3

Notes:

[1] Figures have been rounded to the nearest thousand.

[2] People credited with more than one type of credit are included in more than one of the above totals.

[3] Includes unemployed people receiving income support and unemployed people not receiving benefit.

[4] Includes sick people receiving income support and sick people not receiving benefit.

Source:

1 per cent. sample of national insurance records.

Child Support Agency

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to privatise sections of the Child Support Agency; and if he will make a statement. [634]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the chief executive, Miss Ann Chant. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Miss Ann Chant to Ms Liz Lynne, dated 23 November 1995:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about privatisation of parts of the Child Support Agency.

The Agency is currently undertaking a study into the feasibility of having incoming mail opened and sorted during night time hours by Royal Mail. Evaluation of the feasibility study will enable the Agency to determine whether there are significant operational advantages in placing a contract for the delivery of this service in the longer term.

A pilot exercise is running at Falkirk until 31 March 1996. After the exercise, decisions will be taken on whether to contract out the service at Falkirk and whether to extend the operation to other Child Support Agency Centres.

On a wider basis, the services provided by the Child Support Agency will be considered as part of a formal evaluation of the Agency, as is required of all Next Steps Agencies. This is due to be completed by March 1998 and it will include the consideration of all possible options for the best means of delivering the services currently provided by the Agency.

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will give a breakdown of child support arrears, indicating the initial payment period, and the number of cases with each level of arrears. [635]

Mr. Mitchell: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the chief executive, Miss Ann Chant. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Miss Ann Chant to Ms Liz Lynne, dated 23 November 1995:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about Child Support arrears.

Although information on the number of cases with arrears is available, a breakdown of the amount of arrears in each case could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. Information on the proportion of arrears that relate to the initial payment period (IPP) is not available. Once IPP maintenance has been rescheduled as arrears it cannot be separately identified.

At 15 September 1995, there were 161,309 cases with arrears. Of these, 89,768 had made at least one payment in the previous 13 weeks, and in the remaining 71,541, no payments had been made.

At the end of September the total maintenance owed to the Agency was £738m. Around 65% of this (£480m) is provisional debt as it relates to interim maintenance assessments. A further 13% (£100m) relates to cases where an agreement has been made with the absent parent as to how and when the maintenance will be paid in the future; these agreements are carefully monitored. It is not possible to say how much of the remaining £158m relates to the initial payment period.

I hope this is helpful.

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) in how many cases he has become aware that a Child Support Agency client is a potential suicide risk; and if he will give a month-by-month breakdown for each centre; [636]

(2) what procedures are applied when he becomes aware that a client of the Child Support Agency is a potential suicide risk. [637]

Mr. Mitchell: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the chief executive, Miss Ann Chant. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Miss Ann Chant to Ms Liz Lynne, dated 23 November 1995:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Questions to the Secretary of State for Social Security about the Child Support Agency's approach to cases where a client "is a suicide risk".

I am sorry that it is not possible to provide an answer to your Questions in the form you have asked, but I will try to address what I think are your main concerns.

Like many other organisations, this Agency is responsible for administering legal and financial responsibilities which are prescribed in legislation, and which may have to be enforced—not least to protect the rights of third parties. Because of the basic nature of our work, we often have to enter people's lives with information that may well add to existing emotional and financial problems.

All staff, particularly those engaged on debt management work, are well trained to deal sensitively with all clients, and to have due regard for the fact some people—whether they are absent parents or parents with care—may well become extremely distressed and even threaten to harm themselves. If they have serious concerns about a particular client, then, following the sort of procedures adopted by organisations with comparable responsibilities, they refer it to a senior, more experienced, manager for their consideration. For example, if a non-compliant absent parent is apparently getting seriously distressed by impending court action, they may check to make doubly sure that all other possibilities have been exhausted, and suspend action on the case for a limited period while this is done. They will decide on how to proceed with all such cases and will control and monitor further action on them.

That manager has no discretion to vary the legally-due amount of maintenance, but they can negotiate the rate of arrears repayments if this offers a possible solution. When managers act in this special role they are not counsellors, nor do they deal solely with cases where there is a suggestion that a client may have threatened to harm themselves: they are simply taking on additional management responsibilities. They act in a supportive manner, but within the framework of ensuring that child maintenance is paid at the required levels to those to whom it is due.

I hope this information is helpful to you.

SCOTLAND

Local Government Finance

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what assessment his Department has made of the impact on the timetabling of capital projects by existing councils as a result of their being unable to commit more than 70 per cent. of the new unitary budgets for 1995–96; [1183]

(2) when he issued guidance to existing councils in Scotland not to commit more than 70 per cent. of the capital budgets of the new unitary councils in 1995–96; and what considerations underlay the issuing of this guidance; [1184]

(3) what discussions officials of his Department have had with those of the existing regional, district and island councils and shadow councils relating to the impact of his Department's guidance to existing councils not to commit more than 70 per cent. of the capital expenditure of the new unitary councils in the financial year 1995–96; and what the content of these discussions has been. [1185]

Mr. Kynoch: Local authorities' ability to enter into legal commitments in forward years is restricted to a percentage specified in annual capital consent letters. In previous years, authorities have been permitted to enter into forward legal commitments on their non-housing capital programmes of up to 80 per cent. of their provisional capital allocations for the two subsequent years. Non-housing capital consents issued to authorities on 13 March 1995 changed the amount which could be committed in 1996–97 and 1997–98 to 70 per cent. of capital allocations for 1995–96, except in the case of the islands councils where the limit remains at 80 per cent.

The change was made to ensure that existing authorities were able to maintain continuity in their capital programmes without unduly constraining their successors by committing a very high proportion of their likely future resources. This change was discussed and agreed with representatives of the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities at a meeting on 14 February 1995.

The forward commitment limit of 70 per cent. for housing capital programmes is unchanged from previous years.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he expects to be able to indicate the budgets and capital budgets of Scotland's new unitary councils. [1182]

Mr. Kynoch: My right hon. Friend intends to issue non-housing capital consents in late February or early March 1996 and housing capital consents in March 1996. The setting of the revenue budgets for 1996–97 is entirely the responsibility of the councils concerned.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Identity Cards

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what research his Department has undertaken into the impact identity cards have had on the reduction of crime in European Union countries where they are compulsory; and if he will make a statement. [1528]

Mr. Kirkhope: The Green Paper "Identity Cards" Cm 2879 published in May included information on international experience of identity cards. We have since sought further information on the lessons to be learnt from the use of national identity cards in other European Union countries including any information which may be available in those countries on the impact of identity cards in reducing crime.

Prisons (Discipline)

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many concerted acts of indiscipline have taken place at each prison in England and Wales in the current year and in each year since 1990; and if he will make a statement. [448]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Pearson to Mr. Alan Beith, dated 24 November 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent question about how many concerted acts of indiscipline have taken place at each prison in England and Wales in the current year and in each year since 1990.

Concerted indiscipline takes place when two or more prisoners refuse to conform to the rules and regulations of a prison. Such incidents include both passive disobedience and active indiscipline.

The information requested is provided in the attached table, a copy of which will be placed in the Library of the House.

Prison	1 April 1990 to 31 March 1991	1 April 1991 to 31 March 1992	1 April 1992 to 31 March 1993	1 April 1993 to 31 March 1994	1 April 1994 to 31 March 1995	1 April 1995 to 31 October 1995
Acklington	6	2	5	2	0	0
Albany	0	0	0	0	1	0
Aldington	0	0	0	0	0	0
Ashwell	0	2	0	0	0	0
Askham Grange	0	0	0	0	0	0
Aylesbury	1	0	0	0	0	0
Bedford	0	0	0	0	3	1
Belmarsh	0	3	15	7	4	1
Birmingham	0	0	0	2	0	0
Blakenhurst	0	0	0	8	3	1
Blantyre House	0	0	0	0	0	0
Blundeston	1	0	1	0	2	0
Brinsford	0	4	0	0	0	1
Bristol	1	0	1	2	0	0
Brixton	4	1	0	0	0	0
Brockhill	2	1	0	0	0	0
Buckley Hall	0	0	0	0	1	4
Bullingdon/Oxford	1	0	11	11	2	4
Bullwood Hall	0	2	1	0	1	0
Camp Hill	0	1	1	0	0	0
Canterbury	0	0	0	1	1	0
Cardiff	2	0	2	0	0	0
Castington	1	0	4	0	1	0
Channings Wood	0	0	1	1	0	0
Chelmsford	0	0	1	2	0	0
Coldingley	0	0	0	0	0	0
Cookham Wood	1	0	0	0	0	0
Dartmoor	1	0	3	1	1	0
Deerbolt	1	0	0	0	0	0
Doncaster	0	0	0	0	15	3
Dorchester	1	2	0	1	1	1
Dover	0	1	0	0	0	0
Downview	0	0	0	0	0	0
Drake Hall	0	0	0	0	0	0
Durham	0	4	4	0	0	0
East Sutton Park	0	0	0	0	0	0
Elmley	0	0	0	2	0	0
Erlestoke	0	0	0	2	0	0
Everthorpe	1	3	1	3	3	0
Exeter	3	0	1	1	0	0
Featherstone	0	1	1	1	3	2
Feltham	0	4	0	0	0	0
Ford	0	0	0	0	0	0
Frankland	1	2	3	1	0	1
Full Sutton	13	26	13	7	3	1
Garth	0	1	3	2	3	0
Gartree	1	0	0	0	0	0
Glen Parva	1	1	2	2	1	0
Gloucester	0	0	0	2	0	0
Grendon/Spring Hill	0	0	0	0	0	0
Guys Marsh	0	0	0	0	1	0
Haslar	1	1	2	1	3	0
Hatfield	0	0	0	0	0	0
Haverigg	0	2	1	2	0	1
Hewell Grange	0	0	0	0	0	0
Highdown	0	0	1	2	1	0
Highpoint	0	3	1	2	2	4
Hindley	1	0	0	0	0	0
Hollesley Bay	0	1	1	0	0	0
Holloway	0	1	0	1	2	1
Holme House	0	0	6	1	1	0
Hull	5	3	1	4	3	1
Huntercombe	8	2	0	0	0	0
Kingston	0	0	0	0	0	0
Kirkham	0	0	0	0	0	0
Kirklevington	1	2	0	0	0	0
Lancaster	0	0	1	0	0	0
Lancaster Farms	0	0	1	2	0	0
Latchmere House	0	0	0	0	0	0
Leeds	3	1	2	0	1	0
Leicester	1	1	3	0	1	1
Lewes	0	0	0	0	0	0

Prison	1 April 1990 to 31 March 1991	1 April 1991 to 31 March 1992	1 April 1992 to 31 March 1993	1 April 1993 to 31 March 1994	1 April 1994 to 31 March 1995	1 April 1995 to 31 October 1995
Leyhill	0	0	0	0	0	0
Lincoln	0	0	2	0	0	0
Lindholme	2	3	3	3	2	0
Littlehey	0	0	0	0	0	0
Liverpool	0	0	0	0	1	0
Long Lartin	1	6	3	3	7	1
Low Newton	4	7	0	1	2	2
Maidstone	0	0	0	0	0	0
Manchester	1	4	1	1	0	0
Moorland	0	3	5	0	0	2
Morton Hall	0	0	0	0	0	0
The Mount	0	0	0	1	0	0
New Hall	0	0	0	0	0	0
Northeye	0	1	0	0	0	0
North Sea Camp	0	0	0	0	0	0
Northallerton	0	1	1	1	1	0
Norwich	4	4	0	0	2	0
Nottingham	0	2	0	1	0	0
Onley	2	0	1	0	1	0
Parkhurst	0	0	4	2	2	1
Pentonville	3	4	1	0	0	0
Portland	1	0	0	1	0	0
Preston	1	2	0	6	1	1
Pucklechurch	1	0	0	2	1	1
Ranby	1	0	1	0	1	1
Reading	0	0	2	0	0	0
Risley	0	2	1	4	2	0
Rochester	4	9	3	3	3	2
Send	0	0	0	0	0	0
Shepton Mallet	2	0	0	1	0	0
Shrewsbury	1	1	0	1	3	0
Stafford	1	2	1	0	0	0
Standford Hill	0	1	0	1	0	0
Stocken	0	1	0	0	0	1
Stoke Heath	2	2	1	1	0	0
Styal	1	0	0	1	1	0
Sudbury/Foston Hall	0	0	0	0	0	0
Swaleside	1	1	0	2	5	3
Swansea	1	0	0	0	0	1
Swinfen Hall	0	1	0	0	0	0
Thorn Cross	0	0	0	0	0	0
Usk	0	0	0	0	0	0
The Verne	1	0	1	10	2	0
Wakefield	0	0	0	0	0	1
Wandsworth	1	4	0	0	0	0
Wayland	3	1	1	3	1	1
Wealstun	0	0	0	0	0	0
Wellingborough	0	0	0	0	0	0
Werrington	0	0	0	0	0	0
Wetherby	0	0	0	1	1	0
Whatton	0	0	0	0	0	0
Whitemoor	0	5	5	11	8	6
Winchester	2	1	0	1	0	1
Wolds	0	0	7	4	3	0
Woodhill	0	0	3	1	2	1
Wormwood Scrubs	0	0	0	1	0	0
Wymott	2	3	1	2	0	0
Total	106	149	142	146	116	54

Police Statistics

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* male and *(b)* female officers there were in each constabulary and at each rank per constabulary in England and Wales in (i) 1979, (ii) 1984, (iii) 1989 and (iv) 1994; and if he will make a statement. [449]

Mr. Maclean: Information for 1994 is provided in table 1. Information for 1979, 1984 and 1989 in the form requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost. Tables 2, 3 and 4 show police strength by rank for those years. Information on overall proportions of male and female officers in each force is contained in the annual reports of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Constabulary, copies of which are in the Library.

Table 1: Police service in England and Wales
Strength for ordinary duty return for 31 December 1994

	Male ranks									
Police force name	*Chf Cn*	*Dp Chf Cn*	*Asst Chf*	*Chf Sup*	*Sup*	*Chf Insp*	*Insp*	*Sgt*	*Const*	*Total male ranks*
Avon and Somerset	1	1	3	6	28	46	155	457	1,963	2,660
Bedfordshire	1	1	1	3	13	13	57	147	708	944
Cambridgeshire	1	1	1	3	12	20	58	185	833	1,114
Cheshire	1	0	2	3	17	29	96	259	1,247	1,654
City of London	1	1	0	4	7	15	49	118	571	766
Cleveland	1	1	1	0	12	19	84	207	932	1,257
Cumbria	1	1	1	4	13	23	66	180	734	1,023
Derbyshire	1	1	2	4	20	29	92	260	1,169	1,578
Devon and Cornwall	1	1	2	12	26	45	139	422	1,867	2,515
Dorset	0	1	1	6	14	24	70	190	814	1,120
Durham	1	1	1	4	15	21	74	206	873	1,196
Essex	1	1	3	7	23	49	122	424	1,871	2,501
Gloucestershire	1	1	1	4	12	19	56	164	763	1,021
Greater Manchester	1	1	5	20	62	111	381	999	4,375	5,955
Hampshire	1	1	3	6	38	44	147	477	2,093	2,810
Hertfordshire	1	1	1	4	19	28	89	233	1,040	1,416
Humberside	1	1	1	8	18	33	106	295	1,336	1,799
Kent	1	1	2	8	27	41	191	407	1,986	2,664
Lancashire	1	1	3	6	30	59	152	484	1,994	2,730
Leicestershire	1	1	1	6	14	25	100	256	1,165	1,569
Lincolnshire	1	1	1	4	12	19	63	184	782	1,067
Merseyside	1	1	3	14	51	74	230	689	2,908	3,971
Metropolitan Police	10	9	29	68	195	405	1,309	4,104	17,514	23,643
Norfolk	1	1	1	4	13	21	58	193	964	1,256
Northamptonshire	1	0	1	4	13	18	60	151	768	1,016
Northumbria	1	1	3	7	38	51	169	497	2,391	3,158
North Yorkshire	1	0	1	3	12	21	65	209	850	1,162
Nottinghamshire	1	1	2	7	23	27	123	324	1,539	2,047
South Yorkshire	1	1	3	11	31	44	153	423	1,950	2,617
Staffordshire	1	1	2	7	24	35	116	331	1,354	1,871
Suffolk	1	1	1	5	15	18	64	173	769	1,047
Surrey	1	1	2	2	21	15	97	240	1,059	1,438
Sussex	1	1	3	4	23	41	158	430	1,904	2,565
Thames Valley	1	1	3	8	34	47	196	502	2,504	3,296
Warwickshire	1	1	1	2	12	15	56	158	644	890
West Mercia	1	1	1	4	21	40	122	280	1,290	1,760
West Midlands	1	1	5	18	73	87	354	952	4,292	5,783
West Yorkshire	1	1	4	8	41	68	268	738	3,237	4,366
Wiltshire	1	0	0	4	10	20	66	182	816	1,099
Dyfed Powys	1	1	1	3	13	20	42	152	624	857
Gwent	1	0	1	2	13	13	43	149	667	889
North Wales	1	1	1	6	21	25	68	216	854	1,193
South Wales	1	1	2	6	31	45	156	468	2,037	2,747
Total all forces	51	46	106	319	1,160	1,862	6,320	18,115	80,051	108,030

	Female ranks									
Police force name	*Chf Cn*	*Dp Chf Cn*	*Asst Chf*	*Chf Sup*	*Sup*	*Chf Insp*	*Insp*	*Sgt*	*Const*	*Total female ranks*	*Total police ranks*
Avon and Somerset	0	0	0	0	1	3	4	19	330	357	3,017
Bedfordshire	0	0	0	0	0	1	4	11	153	169	1,113
Cambridgeshire	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	13	139	154	1,268
Cheshire	0	1	0	0	1	0	4	27	219	252	1,906
City of London	0	0	0	0	0	1	4	6	110	121	887
Cleveland	0	0	0	0	2	0	5	14	157	178	1,435
Cumbria	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	5	155	162	1,185
Derbyshire	0	0	0	0	1	1	4	12	197	215	1,793
Devon and Cornwall	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	19	338	363	2,878
Dorset	0	0	0	0	0	1	3	13	150	167	1,287

	Female ranks										
Police force name	*Chf Cn*	*Dp Chf Cn*	*Asst Chf*	*Chf Sup*	*Sup*	*Chf Insp*	*Insp*	*Sgt*	*Const*	*Total female ranks*	*Total police ranks*
Durham	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	8	150	160	1,356
Essex	0	0	0	0	1	0	9	24	386	420	2,921
Gloucestershire	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	7	137	146	1,167
Greater Manchester	0	0	0	0	3	5	16	70	935	1,029	6,984
Hampshire	0	0	0	0	0	1	7	25	409	442	3,252
Hertfordshire	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	19	248	270	1,686
Humberside	0	0	0	0	1	0	2	14	226	243	2,042
Kent	0	0	1	0	0	3	3	40	405	452	3,116
Lancashire	0	0	0	0	1	1	7	26	429	464	3,194
Leicestershire	0	0	1	0	1	2	4	16	245	269	1,838
Lincolnshire	0	0	0	0	0	4	2	11	124	141	1,208
Merseyside	0	0	0	0	3	2	12	60	630	707	4,678
Metropolitan Police	0	0	0	4	4	7	38	290	3,625	3,968	27,611
Norfolk	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	10	139	152	1,408
Northamptonshire	0	1	0	0	0	0	2	7	145	155	1,171
Northumbria	0	0	0	0	1	3	6	23	404	437	3,595
North Yorkshire	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	6	142	151	1,313
Nottinghamshire	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	10	269	284	2,331
South Yorkshire	0	0	0	0	2	2	2	27	376	409	3,026
Staffordshire	0	0	0	0	0	2	3	10	328	343	2,214
Suffolk	0	0	0	0	2	0	1	7	147	157	1,204
Surrey	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	19	210	234	1,672
Sussex	0	0	1	0	1	0	3	36	318	359	2,924
Thames Valley	0	0	0	2	4	1	7	42	526	582	3,878
Warwickshire	0	0	0	0	0	1	3	5	137	146	1,036
West Mercia	0	0	0	0	0	1	4	16	256	277	2,037
West Midlands	0	0	0	1	1	4	20	79	1,108	1,213	6,996
West Yorkshire	0	0	0	0	0	3	13	30	625	671	5,037
Wiltshire	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	9	144	157	1,256
Dyfed Powys	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	6	116	123	980
Gwent	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	5	107	115	1,004
North Wales	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	8	158	170	1,363
South Wales	0	0	0	1	0	0	4	22	252	279	3,026
Total all forces	0	2	3	9	31	50	238	1,126	15,804	17,263	125,293

Notes:
Chf Cn = Chief Constable.
Dp Chf Cn = Deputy Chief Constable.
Asst Chf = Assistant Chief Constable.
Chf Sup = Chief Superintendent.
Sup = Superintendent.
Chf Insp = Chief Inspector.
Insp = Inspector.
Sgt = Sergeant.
Const = Constable.

Table 2: Police service strength by rank in England and Wales as at 31 December 1979

Police force	*Chf Cn*	*Dp Chf Cn*	*Asst Chf*	*Chf Sup*	*Sup*	*Chf Insp*	*Insp*	*Sgt*	*Const*	*Totals*
Avon and Somerset	1	1	3	15	31	71	131	440	2,168	2,861
Bedfordshire	1	1	1	5	14	17	51	141	692	923
Cambridgeshire	1	1	1	6	14	24	51	175	814	1,087
Cheshire	1	1	2	9	21	31	107	273	1,353	1,803
Cleveland	1	1	2	7	19	26	83	223	1,049	1,411
Cumbria	1	1	2	7	16	24	68	171	782	1,072
Derbyshire	1	1	2	8	28	35	100	243	1,339	1,757
Devon and Cornwall	1	1	3	14	34	52	124	425	1,985	2,639
Dorset	1	1	1	4	15	22	59	175	881	1,159
Durham	1	1	2	8	18	28	71	204	980	1,313
Dyfed Powys	1	1	1	7	10	24	36	156	682	918
Essex	1	1	3	11	25	58	111	408	1,885	2,503
Gloucestershire	1	1	1	6	14	19	58	169	830	1,099
Greater Manchester	1	1	5	29	93	148	413	1,071	4,892	6,653
Gwent	1	1	1	6	10	21	44	144	730	958

Table 2: Police service strength by rank in England and Wales as at 31 December 1979

Police force	Chf Cn	Dp Chf Cn	Asst Chf	Chf Sup	Sup	Chf Insp	Insp	Sgt	Const	Totals
Hampshire	1	1	3	14	29	62	121	418	2,296	2,945
Hertfordshire	1	1	2	9	21	31	82	238	1,081	1,466
Humberside	1	1	2	10	27	37	100	311	1,384	1,879
Kent	1	1	4	11	34	54	168	417	2,118	2,808
Lancashire	1	1	4	16	45	68	151	511	2,292	3,089
Leicestershire	1	1	2	7	23	35	90	284	1,258	1,701
Lincolnshire	1	1	2	7	15	29	62	179	871	1,167
Merseyside	1	1	5	20	60	69	231	701	3,381	4,469
Norfolk	1	1	1	6	14	26	63	186	939	1,237
Northamptonshire	1	1	—	7	12	24	54	146	681	926
Northumbria	1	1	2	13	51	60	190	511	2,510	3,339
North Wales	1	1	1	7	18	30	59	204	950	1,271
North Yorkshire	1	1	1	7	16	29	73	202	1,008	1,338
Nottinghamshire	1	1	2	9	34	42	130	316	1,590	2,125
South Wales	1	1	3	13	42	63	178	518	2,206	3,025
South Yorkshire	1	1	3	11	37	43	150	426	1,972	2,644
Staffordshire	1	1	3	11	27	49	102	325	1,496	2,015
Suffolk	1	1	1	6	12	28	52	163	841	1,105
Surrey	1	1	2	8	22	30	75	240	1,081	1,460
Sussex	1	1	3	14	38	44	157	460	2,059	2,777
Thames Valley	1	1	2	12	41	62	138	446	2,061	2,764
Warwickshire	1	1	1	6	12	18	53	139	652	883
West Mercia	1	1	2	10	29	35	115	259	1,385	1,837
West Midlands	1	1	5	21	81	112	360	1,005	4,574	6,160
West Yorkshire	1	1	6	26	70	88	285	796	3,526	4,799
Wiltshire	1	1	1	6	11	23	47	148	769	1,007
City of London	[1]1	[2]1	[3]1	7	13	18	61	146	586	834
Metropolitan	[1]6	[2]16	[3]52	178	214	465	1,197	3,812	16,542	22,482
Totals	48	58	146	614	1,410	2,274	6,057	17,925	83,176	111,708

[1] Includes ranks of assistant commissioner and above in Metropolitan police, and commissioner in City of London police.
[2] Includes deputy assistant commissioner in Metropolitan police, and assistant commissioner in City of London police.
[3] Includes commanders in Metropolitan police and City of London police.
Chf Cn = Chief Constable.
Dp Chf Cn = Deputy Chief Constable.
Asst Chf = Assistant Chief Constable.
Chf Sup = Chief Superintendent.
Sup = Chief Superintendent.
Chf Insp = Chief Inspector.
Insp = Inspector.
Sgt = Sergeant.
Const = Constable.

Table 3: Police service strength by rank in England and Wales as at 31 December 1984

Police force	Chf Cn	Dp Chf Cn	Asst Chf	Chf Sup	Sup	Chf Insp	Insp	Sgt	Const	Totals
Avon and Somerset	1	1	3	13	38	68	153	466	2,236	2,979
Bedfordshire	1	1	1	5	15	19	52	141	759	994
Cambridgeshire	1	1	1	5	14	24	57	180	853	1,136
Cheshire	1	1	2	8	22	30	107	281	1,345	1,797
Cleveland	1	1	2	7	18	29	93	234	1,079	1,464
Cumbria	1	1	1	7	17	24	71	175	809	1,106
Derbyshire	1	1	1	8	27	38	101	261	1,323	1,761
Devon and Cornwall	1	1	3	13	35	47	134	436	2,075	2,745
Dorset	1	1	1	6	17	21	68	180	886	1,181
Durham	1	1	2	8	19	27	78	214	928	1,278
Dyfed Powys	1	1	1	7	11	24	35	155	687	922
Essex	1	1	3	11	28	59	118	414	2,014	2,649
Gloucestershire	1	1	1	6	15	18	58	174	865	1,139
Greater Manchester	1	1	6	27	94	135	410	1,072	4,999	6,745
Gwent	1	1	—	4	14	16	49	143	729	957
Hampshire	1	1	3	11	31	58	123	436	2,387	3,051
Hertfordshire	1	1	2	9	24	32	91	253	1,167	1,580
Humberside	1	1	1	8	24	38	109	319	1,411	1,912
Kent	1	1	3	11	34	50	174	418	2,164	2,856
Lancashire	1	1	4	14	41	68	151	514	2,301	3,095

Table 3: Police service strength by rank in England and Wales as at 31 December 1984

Police force	Chf Cn	Dp Chf Cn	Asst Chf	Chf Sup	Sup	Chf Insp	Insp	Sgt	Const	Totals
Leicestershire	1	1	2	7	26	35	96	279	1,256	1,703
Lincolnshire	1	1	1	6	13	26	63	178	863	1,152
Merseyside	1	1	5	20	60	76	246	743	3,441	4,593
Norfolk	1	1	1	7	16	21	68	192	953	1,260
Northamptonshire	1	1	1	5	12	20	61	149	760	1,010
Northumbria	1	1	3	14	48	63	191	504	2,519	3,344
North Wales	1	1	1	7	20	29	66	206	950	1,281
North Yorkshire	1	1	2	7	17	27	77	197	1,012	1,341
Nottinghamshire	1	1	2	8	32	35	123	331	1,687	2,220
South Wales	1	1	3	14	45	63	186	530	2,263	3,106
South Yorkshire	1	1	3	11	37	44	159	452	2,165	2,873
Staffordshire	1	1	2	11	31	48	115	313	1,581	2,103
Suffolk	1	1	1	6	16	23	53	161	865	1,127
Surrey	1	1	2	8	22	28	80	245	1,216	1,603
Sussex	1	1	3	12	39	42	158	417	2,136	2,809
Thames Valley	1	1	2	13	41	58	152	459	2,548	3,275
Warwickshire	1	1	1	5	15	18	61	142	672	916
West Mercia	1	1	2	11	29	37	126	295	1,395	1,897
West Midlands	1	1	5	19	83	114	356	1,028	4,917	6,524
West Yorkshire	1	1	4	24	72	88	286	804	3,746	5,026
Wiltshire	1	1	1	6	15	19	56	147	783	1,029
City of London	[1]1	[2]1	[3]1	5	11	19	56	130	574	798
Metropolitan	[1]6	[2]17	[3]52	206	221	458	1,405	4,228	20,125	26,718
Totals	48	59	140	621	1,459	2,216	6,472	18,596	89,444	119,055

[1] Includes ranks of assistant commissioner and above in Metropolitan police, and commissioner in City of London police.
[2] Includes deputy assistant commissioner in Metropolitan police, and assistant commissioner in City of London police.
[3] Includes commanders in Metropolitan police and City of London police.
Chf Cn = Chief Constable.
Dp Chf Cn = Deputy Chief Constable.
Asst Chf = Assistant Chief Constable.
Chf Sup = Chief Superintendent.
Sup = Superintendent.
Chf Insp = Chief Inspector.
Insp = Inspector.
Sgt = Sergeant.
Const = Constable.

Table 4: Police service strength by rank in England and Wales as at 31 December 1989

Police Force	Chf Cn	Dp Chf Cn	Asst Chf	Chf Sup	Sup	Chf Insp	Insp	Sgt	Const	Totals
Avon and Somerset	1	1	3	13	37	70	150	468	2,312	3,055
Bedfordshire	1	1	1	4	15	21	53	143	799	1,038
Cambridgeshire	1	1	1	5	13	26	58	192	893	1,190
Cheshire	1	1	2	8	21	32	105	291	1,413	1,874
Cleveland	1	1	2	7	20	27	92	232	1,086	1,468
Cumbria	1	1	1	7	18	24	71	191	838	1,152
Derbyshire	1	1	2	8	26	37	100	262	1,353	1,790
Devon and Cornwall	1	1	3	13	35	48	129	445	2,155	2,830
Dorset	1	1	1	7	16	23	68	189	952	1,258
Durham	1	1	2	6	17	28	78	212	1,012	1,357
Dyfed Powys	1	1	1	7	13	22	38	150	701	934
Essex	1	1	2	11	31	59	126	438	2,130	2,799
Gloucestershire	1	1	1	6	15	19	58	174	887	1,162
Greater Manchester	1	1	6	28	89	130	401	1,078	5,231	6,965
Gwent	1	1	1	5	15	17	48	155	757	1,000
Hampshire	1	1	3	10	34	52	135	478	2,404	3,118
Hertfordshire	1	1	2	10	25	30	93	250	1,235	1,647
Humberside	1	1	2	7	25	38	105	324	1,490	1,993
Kent	1	1	3	10	37	50	173	435	2,268	2,978
Lancashire	1	1	3	12	41	72	154	516	2,374	3,174
Leicestershire	1	1	2	7	21	32	103	278	1,303	1,748
Lincolnshire	1	1	1	5	12	25	67	196	877	1,181
Merseyside	1	1	4	18	61	80	253	761	3,501	4,680
Norfolk	1	1	1	5	17	23	67	199	1,039	1,353
Northamptonshire	1	1	1	6	14	23	69	164	840	1,119

Table 4: Police service strength by rank in England and Wales as at 31 December 1989

Police Force	Chf Cn	Dp Chf Cn	Asst Chf	Chf Sup	Sup	Chf Insp	Insp	Sgt	Const	Totals
Northumbria	1	1	3	13	49	65	195	516	2,683	3,526
North Wales	1	1	1	7	23	28	66	211	994	1,332
North Yorkshire	1	1	2	7	18	27	73	211	1,039	1,379
Nottinghamshire	1	1	2	8	26	34	131	333	1,784	2,320
South Wales	1	1	3	13	43	63	186	538	2,270	3,118
South Yorkshire	1	1	2	10	39	47	161	443	2,242	2,946
Staffordshire	1	1	1	12	31	50	123	335	1,618	2,172
Suffolk	1	1	1	6	18	20	55	179	903	1,184
Surrey	1	1	2	7	23	25	96	262	1,237	1,654
Sussex	1	1	3	12	33	40	173	460	2,201	2,924
Thames Valley	1	1	3	13	39	50	173	500	2,865	3,645
Warwickshire	1	1	1	5	14	18	64	151	722	977
West Mercia	1	1	2	11	30	40	127	299	1,463	1,974
West Midlands	1	1	6	24	84	123	395	1,074	5,138	6,846
West Yorkshire	1	1	5	21	69	81	288	818	3,933	5,217
Wiltshire	1	1	1	5	16	22	59	183	831	1,119
City of London	[1]1	[2]1	[3]1	6	11	20	55	125	565	785
Metropolitan	[1]6	[2]16	[3]34	161	252	483	1,434	4,304	21,411	28,101
Totals	48	58	124	566	1,485	2,244	6,645	19,163	93,753	124,086

[1] Includes ranks of assistant commissioner and above in Metropolitan police, and commissioner in City of London police.
[2] Includes deputy assistant commissioner in Metropolitan police, and assistant commissioner in City of London police.
[3] Includes commanders in Metropolitan police and City of London police.
Chf Cn = Chief Constable.
Dp Chf Cn = Deputy Chief Constable.
Asst Chf = Assistant Chief Constable.
Chf Sup = Chief Superintendent.
Sup = Superintendent.
Chf Insp = Chief Inspector.
Insp = Inspector.
Sgt = Sergeant.
Const = Constable.

Prisoners (Mental Health)

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners in England, Wales and Scotland received some form of mental health care in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [1527]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter as far as England and Wales are concerned has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given. The provision of information about the position in Scotland is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. A. J. Beith, dated 24 November 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the number of prisoners in England and Wales who have received some form of mental health care in each of the last five years.

This information is not available in the form requested. The Mental Health Act 1983 provides for prisoners who are so mentally disordered as to warrant their detention in a psychiatric hospital for medical treatment to be transferred to such hospitals. The number of such transfers for the years in question is as follows:

Year	Number transferred
1990	337
1991	457
1992	605
1993	767
1994	784

Since December 1991, Prison Service establishments in England and Wales have been carrying out regular medical monitoring exercises. To monitor the assessed needs of mentally disordered prisoners, information is collected centrally on a periodic basis. On a given day prisoners considered by prison doctors to need some form of mental health care are categorised as follows:

(a) prisoners requiring removal or transfer to a psychiatric hospital under Mental Health Act provisions and who are awaiting transfer. This figure included remand prisoners awaiting disposal by the court.

(b) prisoners who were sufficiently ill to be occupying in-patient beds in prison health care centres.

(c) prisoners requiring some form of mental health care but not removal/transfer to psychiatric hospital or in-patient treatment in a prison health care centre.

These single-day surveys can be used to calculate the average number of prisoners requiring transfer to a psychiatric hospital or some other form of mental health care on any one day in the year in question and produce the following figures.

Year	Number of prisoners
1992	2,483
1993	2,694
1994	2,742

Crime Statistics

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* serving police officers, *(b)* civilian staff assisting the police and *(c)* crimes there were in the latest available 15 years for each police authority in the United Kingdom; and what was the ratio of crimes to police officers in each case. [1529]

Mr. Maclean: Information about police strength and criminal offences recorded by the police for each force in England and Wales for the last 15 years can be found in the appendix to the annual reports of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Constabulary and in "Criminal Statistics, England and Wales". Copies of these reports are in the Library.

The table gives the number of notifiable offences, excluding criminal damage valued at £20 and under, recorded per police officer for each force area in England and Wales for the years 1980 to 1994. Figures for Scotland and Northern Ireland are matters for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland and my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

Notifiable offences recorded per police officer

Force area	*1980*	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*
Avon and Somerset	18	20	22	22	24
Bedfordshire	27	29	30	31	34
Cambridgeshire	26	28	26	26	26
Cheshire	17	19	21	22	23
Cleveland	23	26	29	28	32
Cumbria	15	16	18	19	21
Derbyshire	19	23	25	24	26
Devon and Cornwall	17	19	20	21	22
Dorset	20	21	24	25	26
Durham	20	22	25	26	30
Essex	20	21	23	23	23
Gloucestershire	16	18	20	19	21
Greater Manchester	26	30	32	33	37
Hampshire	20	23	25	25	27
Hertfordshire	21	22	24	22	24
Humberside	17	27	30	29	32
Kent	17	18	21	21	23
Lancashire	16	18	20	20	22
Leicestershire	19	21	24	24	25
Lincolnshire	15	17	20	20	22
London, City of	7	7	8	8	8
Merseyside	24	27	29	29	32
MPD	23	24	25	24	26
Norfolk	19	23	26	26	26
Northamptonshire	24	25	29	29	31
Northumbria	30	33	38	38	43
North Yorkshire	15	18	20	20	22
Nottinghamshire	33	37	37	36	38
South Yorkshire	20	22	25	26	30
Staffordshire	17	19	20	22	23
Suffolk	16	18	19	20	21
Surrey	14	15	17	17	17
Sussex	16	17	20	21	22
Thames Valley	23	25	28	28	30
Warwickshire	15	18	20	21	23
West Mercia	17	20	23	23	24
West Midlands	25	28	31	31	34
West Yorkshire	25	27	29	28	31
Wiltshire	18	20	22	22	24
Dyfed-Powys	15	12	13	14	16
Gwent	33	20	23	24	25
North Wales	20	20	21	22	24
South Wales	23	24	27	27	29
England and Wales	21	23	26	25	27

Force area	*1985*	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*
Avon and Somerset	26	30	32	31	31
Bedfordshire	34	38	39	37	38
Cambridgeshire	27	27	28	28	30
Cheshire	23	24	26	24	23
Cleveland	32	36	38	37	38
Cumbria	22	25	23	22	23
Derbyshire	25	24	24	22	25
Devon and Cornwall	23	25	25	25	26
Dorset	27	29	30	28	30
Durham	30	30	30	29	30
Essex	24	26	26	25	26
Gloucestershire	23	24	28	28	29
Greater Manchester	39	43	41	39	38
Hampshire	28	30	30	28	30
Hertfordshire	24	26	25	24	24
Humberside	36	39	43	41	43
Kent	24	24	25	25	26
Lancashire	22	24	25	26	24
Leicestershire	26	27	28	28	30
Lincolnshire	25	25	28	26	28
London, City of	8	10	9	8	9
Merseyside	32	35	33	29	27
MPD	26	28	26	25	26
Norfolk	28	30	30	30	32
Northamptonshire	34	35	36	33	34
Northumbria	45	46	47	43	48
North Yorkshire	25	25	25	24	24
Nottinghamshire	38	40	40	39	43
South Yorkshire	28	30	31	28	30
Staffordshire	24	26	25	25	26
Suffolk	23	25	25	24	26
Surrey	17	19	19	19	20
Sussex	23	23	22	22	25
Thames Valley	31	33	32	29	32
Warwickshire	22	23	25	23	25
West Mercia	24	25	24	23	24
West Midlands	35	38	38	33	32
West Yorkshire	31	32	33	31	34
Wiltshire	25	25	23	22	23
Dyfed-Powys	16	17	18	19	17
Gwent	27	25	26	23	23
North Wales	25	26	27	25	25
South Wales	30	33	33	35	35
England and Wales	28	30	30	28	29

Force area	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*
Avon and Somerset	40	48	55	56	55
Bedfordshire	48	51	51	49	47
Cambridgeshire	36	45	51	51	48
Cheshire	27	32	39	41	38
Cleveland	47	49	53	51	52
Cumbria	26	35	35	34	34
Derbyshire	32	41	45	48	47
Devon and Cornwall	31	37	38	41	38
Dorset	36	39	38	39	42
Durham	36	43	44	44	44
Essex	32	36	38	37	35
Gloucestershire	35	46	52	52	52
Greater Manchester	44	50	51	48	45
Hampshire	36	43	45	43	42
Hertfordshire	27	32	34	33	32
Humberside	50	57	61	68	66
Kent	32	43	49	49	49
Lancashire	29	33	35	36	34
Leicestershire	40	48	52	53	53
Lincolnshire	31	36	39	42	38
London, City of	9	9	8	6	6
Merseyside	27	31	30	29	29
MPD	29	31	32	30	28
Norfolk	38	44	46	44	40
Northamptonshire	41	49	48	50	49
Northumbria	53	59	56	53	50
North Yorkshire	32	35	37	41	45
Nottinghamshire	54	61	67	65	62
South Yorkshire	34	39	43	50	50
Staffordshire	32	38	44	44	42
Suffolk	30	32	35	34	32
Surrey	25	29	31	31	28
Sussex	31	37	39	35	35
Thames Valley	39	49	50	50	48
Warwickshire	31	39	44	43	41
West Mercia	29	35	37	39	40
West Midlands	37	42	45	46	46

Force area	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994
West Yorkshire	42	55	58	59	57
Wiltshire	27	31	32	31	30
Dyfed-Powys	20	25	27	23	20
Gwent	29	36	39	38	37
North Wales	27	31	35	34	31
South Wales	42	49	51	50	52
England and Wales	34	40	40	42	40

Probation Service

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will place a copy of his draft replacement to his Department's recruitment brochure for the probation service in the Library; [2297]

(2) when he aims to publish the replacement to his Department's recruitment brochure for the probation service "Facing up to Crime"; and what will be the total cost of the new production; [2296]

(3) if he will list the organisations he is consulting or intends to consult on his replacement for his Department's recruitment brochure for the probation service, together with the closing date for comments; and if he will place copies of all responses in the Library. [2298]

Mr. Kirkhope: An information and recruitment booklet about the work of the probation service to replace "Facing up to Crime" will be published as soon as possible, at a cost of about £45,000. The Association of Chief Officers of Probation, Central Probation Council, Association of Black Probation Officers, National Association of Asian Probation Staff, National Association of Probation Officers, Probation Managers Association and the Society of Chief Officers of Probation have been consulted, with a request to comment by 20 November. We shall place a copy of the new booklet in the Library on publication but do not propose to do so in relation to the consultative draft or the one comment on it so far submitted.

Mr. Rowe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many probation officers are currently paid from public funds; how many have a qualification in social work; what is the age profile of the probation service; how many probation officers were recruited in 1994; and what was the age profile of these recruits. [1986]

Mr. Kirkhope: The latest available information is as follows:

At 31 March 1995 there were in post 6,041[1] main grade probation officers.

Statistics on the age profile of probation service staff, the numbers holding a social work qualification and the numbers recruited each year are not collected centrally.

[1]Excludes trainee and temporary probation officers.

Nigerian Military Personnel

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many members of the Nigerian military entered the United Kingdom since the execution of Mr. Saro-Wiwa and his colleagues; when they entered the United Kingdom; and for what reasons. [2258]

Mr. Kirkhope: Statistical records are not kept of admissions by reference to occupation. However, since 24 June 1993 visas have been issued to members of the Nigerian military only in exceptional circumstances.

Asylum

Ms Janet Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the European Union resolutions, to which he has been a signatory, relating to harmonisation of asylum policy among European Union member states. [1672]

Miss Widdecombe: The following measure relating to the harmonisation of asylum policy has been adopted by the Council in accordance with the procedures established by the intergovernmental chapter—title VI—of the treaty on European Union:

Resolution on minimum guarantees for asylum seekers.

Additionally the following resolutions were adopted by Immigration Ministers under the ad hoc arrangements which existed before the structures created under title VI:

Resolution on a harmonised approach to questions concerning host third countries;

Resolution on manifestly unfounded applications for asylum;

Resolution on certain common guidelines as regards the admission of particularly vulnerable groups from the former Yugoslavia.

Immigration Ministers also agreed the following additional measures:

Convention determining the state responsible for examining applications for asylum lodged in one of the member states of the European Community ("Dublin Convention");

Decision setting up CIREA—Centre of Information Discussion and Exchange on Asylum;

Conclusions concerning countries where there is generally no serious risk of persecution.

Asylum and Immigration

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list those countries on the asylum and immigration white list. [1900]

Miss Widdecombe: My right hon. and learned Friend informed the House on 20 November, *Official Report*, column 336, that he will announce at an early stage during the passage of the Asylum and Immigration Bill the likely candidates for inclusion on the list of countries to be designated as not giving rise to a serious risk of persecution.

Prison Service

Ms Janet Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received from the director general of the Prison Service about problems being experienced as a result of the growth in the numbers of prisoners. [1683]

Miss Widdecombe: I have regular discussions with the Director General on a wide range of Prison Service issues, including the prison population.

Illegal Immigrants

Ms Janet Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate he has made

of the number of employers in the United Kingdom who employ illegal immigrants; and what is the basis for this estimate. [1675]

Miss Widdecombe: No such estimates are available.

Extradition

Mr. Cann: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many British citizens have been extradited to *(a)* Thailand and *(b)* the Philippines in each year from 1979 to date, to answer charges relating to sexual activity with juveniles. [1627]

Mr. Kirkhope: There have been no extraditions from the United Kingdom to Thailand or the Philippines since 1979. Statistics regarding the extradition of British citizens are not recorded because there is no bar to extradition of United Kingdom nationals in United Kingdom law.

Prison Staff

Ms Janet Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the daily average number of prison staff absent on sick leave, as a total number and as a percentage of the total prison work force. [132]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Ms Janet Anderson, dated 24 November 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question asking what is the daily average number of prison staff absent on sick leave, as a total number and as a percentage of the total prison workforce.

The information sought is not available centrally in the form requested and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

During the six months to 30 September 1995, 4.9 per cent. of total shift hours were taken as sick leave by prison officer grades. Over the same period, a total of 31,204 staff weeks were lost due to sick absence (an average of 1200 staff weeks lost per week). There are approximately 24,500 staff in the above mentioned grades.

Prisons (Teachers)

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many of the teaching staff working with prisoners are employed on a part-time basis and how many on a full-time basis; what is the average rate of pay for *(a)* part-time and *(b)* full-time teaching staff working with prisoners; and what is the average holiday entitlement for (i) part-time and (ii) full-time teaching staff working with prisoners. [395]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. George Howarth, dated 24 November 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about how many of the teaching staff working with prisoners are employed on a part-time basis and how many on a full-time basis; what is the average rate of pay for *(a)* part-time and *(b)* full-time teaching staff working with prisoners; and what is the average holiday entitlement for (i) part-time and (ii) full-time teaching staff working with prisoners.

The Prison Service does not directly employ any of the teaching staff working in prisons. They are employees of organisations which were awarded contracts for the provision of education services at prison establishments following a competitive tendering exercise. All issues relating to their terms and conditions of employment are matters for their employers, and details of the deployment of teachers are not held centrally. Under the General Terms and Conditions of Contract covering education services, contractors are required to appoint a full-time education co-ordinator to undertake duties for no less than 30 hours a week at each establishment where they hold a contract, so there is at least one full-time teacher at each establishment.

Teaching staff at the contracted out prisons (Blakenhurst, Buckley Hall, Doncaster and Wolds) and at Manchester are employees either of the organisation holding the contract for overall management of the establishment, or of an organisation appointed by the main contractor to manage the education provision. Issues relating to the terms and conditions of employment of these staff are also a matter for the employing organisation rather than the Prison Service.

Prisons (Education)

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of Prison Service education facilities is provided by private contractors. [394]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. George Howarth, dated 24 November 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about what proportion of Prison Service education facilities is provided by private contractors.

There are currently separate contracts for the provision of education services at 123 Prison Service establishments and these are held by 46 different organisations. The great majority of these are colleges of further education, together with one university and three local authority education departments. Four contractors are constituted as private companies. These are Dartington Tech, Direct Training Services Ltd, Mill Wharf Education Services and Secure Education and Training (which is a wholly owned subsidiary of North Oxfordshire College). In addition, two of the four privately-managed prisons have private sector organisations providing the education services.

Private Security Firms

Ms Janet Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will give details of private security firms under contract to his Department, indicating whether or not they are members of the industry's self-regulating organisations. [139]

Mr. Howard: The following private security firms are currently employed by my Department:

Armaguard Ltd.
Aviation Security Consultants
Burns International Security Services Ltd.
Care Security Systems Ltd.
Chubb Alarms Ltd.
Defenco Security Services
Group 4 Court Service Ltd.
Group 4 Prison Services Ltd.
Group 4 Securitas (Security Express)

Group 4 Total Security Ltd.
Lisburn Security Services
Maritime Aviation Security Services
Premier Prison Services Ltd.
Reliance Security Service Ltd.
Scrottons Aviation Security
Securicor Custodial Services Ltd.
Securicor Ltd.
Securicor Security Services Ltd.
Securiguard Services Ltd.
Security Ulster Ltd.
Security Wales Ltd.
Sigma Security Ltd.
Shorrock Security Guards Ltd.
UK detention Services Ltd.

Information about the self-regulating organisations to which these security firms belong is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Terrorists

Rev. Ian Paisley: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list those convicted terrorists who will be released from Ulster's jails before Christmas as a result of changes in remission rules, indicating the crime they were convicted of and the length of sentence imposed. [64]

Sir John Wheeler: Responsibility for the subject in question has been delegated to the Northern Ireland Prison Service under its chief executive, Mr. Alan Shannon. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. D. Shannon to Rev. Ian Paisley, dated 23 November 1995.

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has asked me to reply to this Parliamentary Question in which you asked for a list of convicted terrorists who will be released before Christmas as a result of changes in remission rules.

It remains our policy not to divulge information about individual prisoners and their crimes but I can advise you that it is anticipated that 94 prisoners who were convicted of scheduled offences will be released on licence before Christmas 1995 as a result of the changes in remission rules brought in by the Northern Ireland (Remission of Sentence) Act 1995.

I hope this information is helpful.

Belfast Institute of Further and Higher Education

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) what proposals he has to improve the quality of the buildings in the Belfast institute of further and higher education; [1111]

(2) when the Belfast Institute of further and higher education commissioned an economic appraisal to address the institute's most pressing accommodation needs in accordance with his request; what were its findings, and what action has been taken. [1112]

Mr. Ancram: The Belfast education and library board completed a major review of the institute's accommodation needs in 1991 which produced a preferred option of a new building on a new site at a cost of some £70 million. Because of the magnitude of this proposal, the board was asked to examine how the accommodation needs could be provided on a phased basis. An economic appraisal to address the most pressing accommodation needs is currently being prepared by the board and is expected to be completed by the end of the year.

Health Spending

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will itemise how much *(a)* NHS trusts, *(b)* general practitioner fundholders, *(c)* regional health authorities and *(d)* district health authorities spent on health care from non-NHS providers in each year since 1991–92 in each region. [2416]

Mr. Moss: In Northern Ireland integrated health and personal social services are supplied by health boards, health and social services trusts and general practitioner fundholders.

Expenditure by health and social services boards on purchase of health and social services from non-NHS/HPSS providers was as follows:

	NHSSB £	*SHSSB* £	*EHSSB* £	*WHSSB* £
1992–93	377,056	159,871	4,876,322	364,100
1993–94	279,013	172,350	3,177,081	820,278
1994–95	65,190	631,752	2,693,070	1,143,911

The accounts of health and social services boards were revised in 1992–93 to take account of the separation of the purchaser/provider functions. Consequently, the information in the table on expenditure is not available prior to this date.

The first six health and social services trusts in Northern Ireland were established with effect from 1 April 1993, a further seven trusts were established with effect from 1 April 1994. The accounts of the trusts, within each board area, indicated expenditure on purchases from non-NHS/HPSS providers as follows:

	1993–94 £	*1994–95* £
Northern area	Nil	Nil
Southern area	Nil	4,048
Eastern area	Nil	36,509
Western area	Nil	Nil

General practitioner fundholders' expenditure on the purchase of health and personal social services from non-NHS/HPSS providers was as follows:

	1994–95 £
Northern area	86,518
Southern area	1,067
Eastern area	165,510
Western area	67,769

Prior to 1994–95 the accounts of general practitioner fundholders did not separately record expenditure on purchases from non-NHS/HPSS providers. Consequently, the information in the table on purchase is not available prior to this date.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Spiro Family

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will ask the consul general in Los Angeles if he might be prepared to interview Mr. Alain and Mr. Arthur Ivy on the question of what knowledge they have as to the circumstances surrounding the death of the Spiro family. [2073]

Mr. Hanley: It is for the United States police authorities to conduct any interviews relevant to the incident.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if the consul general in Los Angeles has, within the last eight weeks, asked the San Diego county sheriff when he intends to release the medical examiners' report into the circumstances surrounding the death of the Spiro family in the United States of America. [2072]

Mr. Hanley: Consular officials in Los Angeles requested copies of the police and autopsy reports on 19 October following the conclusion of police investigations. We expect them in the next few weeks.

Sri Lanka

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the Government's current policy on the sale of military equipment to Sri Lanka; when the latest embargo was lifted; and what considerations underlay this action. [2070]

Mr. Hanley: We maintain strict controls on all exports of military equipment to Sri Lanka. We examine each case on its merits, paying particular attention to the Sri Lankan Government's human rights record. A total embargo on arms sales to Sri Lanka was lifted in October 1992, following evidence that the Sri Lankan Government had improved their human rights record.

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make it his policy to ban the sale of arms to Sri Lanka. [2051]

Mr. Hanley: We maintain strict controls on all exports of military equipment to Sri Lanka. We examine each case on its merits, paying particular attention to the Sri Lankan Government's human rights record, and bearing in mind their right to defend themselves against military attack.

Iraq

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) how evidence of wrongdoing referred to in his answer of 6 November, *Official Report*, column *551*, will be investigated in the absence of information on export licences granted prior to 1987 at the Department of Trade and Industry; and what are the specific criteria against which wrongdoing is assessed in this investigation; [1982]

(2) which body will undertake the investigation referred to in his answer of 6 November, *Official Report*, column *551*; and what is the estimated date for completion of the investigation; [1981]

(3) when the United Nations Special Commission referred information, which was referred to in his answer of 6 November, *Official Report*, column *551*, to the British Government; and what it expected the British Government to do with that information; [1983]

(4) over what period and in which goods the British companies mentioned in the UNSCOM evidence, referred to in his answer of 6 November, *Official Report*, column *551*, were trading with Iraq; [1984]

(5) if the information provided by the United Nations Special Commission in his answer of 6 November, *Official Report*, column *551*, is being investigated at present. [1980]

Mr. David Davis: I refer the hon. Member to my letters of 24 July and 25 September and to my replies of 27 October, *Official Report*, column *862*, and 6 November, *Official Report*, column *551*.

I also refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) on 21 November, *Official Report*, column *68*.

I have nothing further to add to previous answers to questions on this subject.

Nepal

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action Her Majesty's Government are taking to press for the release of 11 Christians imprisoned in Nepal for proselytism. [1994]

Mr. Hanley: Our ambassador in Katmandu raised the case of the 11 Christians with the Nepalese authorities on 24 August. All 11 were released on 9 November.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action Her Majesty's Government are taking to encourage constructive action by the Governments of Nepal and India on the problem of the trafficking of women and children from Nepal to India for the purpose of prostitution. [1995]

Mr. Hanley: We share international concern about this matter. We are working through our aid programme, and through liaison with the Nepalese authorities and non-governmental organisations, to help combat the trafficking of young Nepalese women.

Nigerian Military Personnel

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the Government's policy towards the granting of visas for Nigerian military personnel. [2257]

Mr. Hanley: Since 24 June 1993 it has been Government policy not, except in the most exceptional circumstances, to issue visas to Nigerian military or security personnel or their families. In line with an EU resolution adopted on 20 November this year, this policy

has now been extended to Nigerian civilian Ministers and their families. Although visas that have already been issued cannot be cancelled, we have arranged for entry to the United Kingdom to be denied to those who hold valid multiple entry visas.

PRIME MINISTER

Computers

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what assessment he has made of the implications of the decision to exclude the British company Meiko from the shortlist to provide computers for the Ministry of Defence on Britain's technology base. [1565]

Mr. Page: I have been asked to reply.

The Department of Trade and Industry has made no such assessment.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Playing Fields

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what assessment she has made of how many school playing fields are under threat of development in England. [1558]

Mrs. Gillan: The latest information available comes from the Sports Council's register of recreational land, which at present hold records for around 80 per cent. of all playing fields in England.

According to the register, of the 42,690 school playing fields in England, 850 are subject to existing planning permission or to a pending planning decision.

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is her estimate of the number of school playing fields that have been sold in England since 1981. [1557]

Mrs. Gillan: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) on 19 October 1995, *Official Report*, column *376*.

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans her Department has to increase the statutory minimum areas of school playing fields. [1468]

Mrs. Gillan: None.

School Computers

Sir Irvine Patnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is the average number of computers *(a)* per school and *(b)* per pupil in the Sheffield, Yorkshire and Humberside areas; and if she will make a statement. [1708]

Mr. Robin Squire: The information requested is not available.

School Governors (Training)

Sir Irvine Patnick: to ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what training courses for school governors are the statutory responsibilities of local education authorities; how many courses Sheffield education authority has held in the last five years; and if she will make a statement. [1707]

Mr. Robin Squire: Each local education authority must by law make available free of charge to the governors of its schools any training it considers necessary for them to discharge their functions effectively. It is for each LEA to judge what is necessary. But most LEAs, including Sheffield, have appointed governor training co-ordinators to secure the availability of suitable training programmes. Figures on the number of training courses provided by LEAs are not held centrally. But since April 1992 Sheffield has offered governing bodies the opportunity to buy into an annual scheme including various forms of support and training.

In 1993–94 Sheffield provided 189 training events; in 1994–95, 158; and for the current year an anticipated total of 184.

Assisted Places Scheme

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans she has to review the financial assessment regulation in respect of the assisted places scheme. [2228]

Mrs. Gillan: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham (Mr. Walden) on 23 November 1995, *Official Report*, columns 323-24.

Restart Courses

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list the number of participants for restart courses; what the scheme cost, what the planned expenditure was; and what number of those on the scheme achieved positive outcomes, and the breakdown of those outcomes in terms of numbers moving into *(a)* full-time education, *(b)* full-time employment, *(c)* part-time employment and *(d)* other outcomes for each year since 1991. [1764]

Mr. Forth: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from M. E. G. Fogden to Mr. David Blunkett, dated 24 November 1995:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question about Restart Courses.

It may help if I explain that Restart Courses have been in existence since 1986. In April 1994 a new two week Restart Course programme was launched. The new course combines formal morning attendance with individual job search activities in the afternoon. New Restart Courses were developed on the success of the original shorter one week courses and are designed to boost confidence and job search activity. There is an emphasis

on making real applications for jobs and opportunities. They give people an opportunity to take a fresh look at their situation, become aware of the options open to them locally and plan positive steps back to work. During the course each person produces a plan of the steps they need to take to help them back to work.

The attached table gives the number of participants who have attended the courses since 1991 and the cost and planned expenditure for each year. The table and explanatory notes also contain information on positive outcomes.

I hope this is helpful.

Restart courses

	1991–92	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*April–October 1995*
Number of participants	133,840	134,960	143,280	147,120	63,855
Cost of scheme (cash prices £ million)[1]	10.6	10.9	11.3	14.1	6.1
Planned expenditure (£ million)[2]	8.1	10.9	39.5	15.1	10.7
Outcomes into employment[3]	—	—	—	—	2,588
Other outcomes[4]	—	—	—	—	15,393
Total positive outcomes[5]	—	—	—	26,529	17,981

Notes:
[1] Total expenditure for the year.
[2] (i) 1993–94 includes planned expenditure for Jobplan.
(ii) The figures shown are those published in the Departmental Report just before the start of each operational year. These figures are subject to change during the year.
[3] Information on total job entries was not collected until April 1995. Both full and part-time jobs are included in this figure. Separate figures are not routinely collected.
[4] Other outcomes include starts on TFW, Jobclub, Community Action, JIG, Worktrials, JRW, jss, Career Development Loans, PDF, Further Education, Other e.g. Princes Trust voluntary work. Information on starts on other outcomes was not collected until April 1995. Separate information on participants entering full-time education is not routinely collected.
[5] This information was not routinely collected until April 1994.

Training

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list for each year since 1994 in respect of *(a)* workwise/worklink and 1-2-1 and *(b)* modern apprenticeships (i) the number of participants, (ii) the scheme cost, (iii) the planned expenditure, (iv) the number of those on the scheme who achieved positive outcomes, and the breakdown of the positive outcomes in terms of numbers going into (1) full-time education, (2) full-time employment, (3) part-time employment and (4) other outcomes. [1842]

Mr. Forth: The figures requested are shown in the following tables:

1994–95 Youth Training

	Number of participants	*Scheme cost (£000s)*	*Planned expenditure 1995–96 (£000s)*	*Percentage of leavers gaining a positive outcome (to January 1995)*	*Percentage of leavers into full-time education (to January 1995)*	*Percentage of leavers into full-time employment (to January 1995)*	*Percentage of leavers into part-time employment (to January 1995)*	*Other outcomes (to January 1995)*
Modern Apprenticeships	[1]270,600	676,491	669,386	72	8	50	5	[2]8

Notes:
Figures are for all Youth Training (including Youth Credits). Figures for Modern Apprenticeships cannot be separately identified.
[1] At August 1995.
[2] Self-employment or another Government training programme.
Source:
TEC MI returns, Welsh Office, The Scottish Office, YT National Follow-Up Survey.

1995–96 (to 31 October 1995) (Workwise/worklink/1-2-1)

	Number of participants	*Scheme cost*	*Planned expenditure 1996–97*	*Positive outcomes*	*Into full-time education*	*Into full-time employment*	*Into part-time employment*	*Other outcomes*
Workwise/ Worklink	12,308	£9.5 million	Not yet known	[1]7,431	n/a	[1]1,307	n/a	[3]3,781
1-2-1	40,265	£6 million	Not yet known	[1]23,108	[2]n/a	[1]2,381	n/a	[3]20,727

[1] Includes full and part-time employment.
[2] Numbers into full-time education included in 'Other Outcomes'.
[3] Other outcomes includes Business Start-Up starts; Training for Work sitarts; Community Action starts; Family Credit starts; other sign offs; Jobclub starts; Job Interview Guarantee (JIG) starts; Work Trial starts.

1994–95 (Workwise/Worklink/1-2-1)

	Number of participants	*Scheme cost*	*Positive outcomes*	*Into full-time education*	*Into full-time employment*	*Into part-time employment*	*Other outcomes*
Workwise/Worklink (pilot)	9,266	£2.5 million	2,953	[1]n/a	[1]n/a	[1]n/a	[1]n/a
1-2-1 (pilot)	7,533	£0.5 million	5,109	[2]n/a	[3]866	n/a	[4]4,243

[1] Separate information on types of positive outcome were not collected during the pilot stage.
[2] Numbers into full-time education included in 'Other Outcomes'.
[3] Includes full and part-time employment.
[4] Other outcomes includes Business Start-Up starts; Training for Work starts; Community Action starts; Family Credit starts; other sign offs; Jobclub starts; Job Interview Guarantee (JIG) starts; Work Trial starts.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list for each year since 1993 in respect of *(a)* community action, *(b)* workstart and *(c)* training for work, (i) the number of participants, (ii) what the scheme cost, (iii) what the planned expenditure was, (iv) what number of those on the scheme achieved positive outcomes and (v) the break-down of the outcomes in terms of the numbers going into (1) full-time education, (2) full-time employment, (3) part-time employment and (4) other outcomes. [1758]

Mr. Forth: The information requested is contained in the following three tables:

Table 1

Community action	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*
Number of participants[1]	23,389	47,646	21,932 (to October)
Cost of scheme[2]	£14.4 million	£98.5 million	£44,947,987 (to October)
Planned expenditure	£31.4 million	£100 million	£70 million
Outcomes into full-time education[3]	2.8 per cent.	3.8 per cent.	—
Outcomes into full-time employment[3]	12.7 per cent.	9.4 per cent.	—
Outcomes into part-time employment[3]	4.1 per cent.	4.4 per cent.	—
Other outcomes[3], [4]	6.5 per cent.	9.3 per cent.	—
Total positive outcomes[3]	26.1 per cent.	26.9 per cent.	—

Notes:
[1] This is the number of people who *started* on Community Action in each year.
[2] Community Action began in July 1993 and the underspend in 1993–94 was due to a less rapid build up than was anticipated.
[3] Outcomes are measured by postal follow up of all participants 3 months after leaving the programme. As this is a survey the figures are represented as percentages, no actual numbers are available. The latest available data are up to the end of March 1995.
[4] Other positive outcomes are self-employment and participation in Government training schemes.

Table 2

Workstart	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*
Numbers into employment	1,099	476	—
Cost of scheme	£0.28 million	£1.87 million	—
Planned expenditure	£1.14 million	£2.45 million	£0.53 million

1) Workstart subsidies are paid to employers who recruit the ES's very long term unemployed clients. All clients enter jobs which involve working 16 hours or more per week and are expected to last at least the length of the subsidy period.
2) For Workstart pilots ran from June 1993 to December 1994. The subsidy was paid over a 12 month period and so some participating employers are still receiving payments. As payments cease if a subsidised employee leaves, the total 1995–96 expenditure will not be known until February 1996.
3) Two new Workstart pilots began in April this year. They have a combined budget of £5.89 million for 1995–96. As in the first pilots the exact amount to be spent will depend upon people remaining in work for the duration of the subsidy set. To date (10 November) there have been 482 starts on this pilot.

Table 3

Training for work	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*
Number of participants	147,800	118,000	81,700 (to August)
Cost of scheme[1]	£760.2 million	£683 million (provisional)	—
Planned expenditure	£781,826,000	£693,348,000	£573,984,000
Outcomes into full-time education[2]	4 per cent.	3 per cent.	—
Outcomes into full-time employment[2]	23 per cent.	25 per cent.	—

Table 3

Training for work	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*
Outcomes into part-time employment[2]	8 per cent.	8 per cent.	—
Other outcomes[2,3]	8 per cent.	6 per cent.	—
Total positive outcomes[2]	43 per cent.	42 per cent.	—

Notes:
[1] The final outturn information for 1994–95 will not be available until late autumn when the Department's Appropriation Accounts are finalised.
[2] Information on positive outcomes comes from the TFW National Follow up Surveys and it is only possible to give percentages and not actual numbers. The latest available information is up to January 1995. Over the period covered by the table it is only possible to give a consistent series for England and Wales.
[3] Other outcomes are self-employment or another Government training programme.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list for each year since 1991 for *(a)* job review workshops, *(b)* job clubs, *(c)* travel to interview, *(d)* youth training credits, *(e)* career development loans, and *(f)* job search seminars (i) the number of participants, (ii) what the scheme cost, (iii) what the planned expenditure was, (iv) what number of those on the scheme achieved positive outcomes, and (v) the breakdown of the positive outcomes in terms of the numbers going into (1) full-time education, (2) full-time employment, (3) part-time employment and (4) other outcomes. [1759]

Mr. Forth: The information requested is contained in the following tables:

Table 1: Job review workshops

	1991–92	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*April–October 1995*
Number of participants	15,358	41,915	37,293	33,821	18,266
Cost of scheme (cash prices £ million)[1]	1.3	3.8	3.4	2.6	1.3
Planned expenditure (£ million)[2]	n/a	n/a	n/a	3.8	3.2
Outcomes into employment[3]	—	—	—	—	—
Other outcomes[3]	—	—	—	—	—
Total positive outcomes[3]	—	—	—	—	—

[1] Total expenditure for the year.
[2] (i) The Government updates its expenditure plans annually and these are published in March in the Departmental Report. These figures are subject to change during the year. "n/a" equates to figures which are not published in the Departmental Report and are therefore not available.
(ii) The figure for April to October 1995 is an estimate for the total operational year and may be subject to change.
[3] Job review workshops are targeted mainly at unemployed professional and executive people and help individuals identify transferable skills so that they are able to consider a wider range of occupations. Information about outcomes which participants may enter during or following the two day workshop is not therefore routinely collected. Outcomes into employment is not therefore available.
1. Other outcomes are not collected for this programme (see above).
2. Total positive outcomes are not collected for this programme (see above).

Table 2: Jobclub

	1991–92	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*April–October 1995*
Number of participants	190,117	220,997	249,107	266,422	141,291
Cost of scheme (cash prices £ million)[1]	29.2	38.7	50.0	49.0	26.1
Planned expenditure (£ million)[2]	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	48.7
Outcomes into employment[3]	76,831	96,925	105,678	113,768	60,769
Other outcomes[4]	26,082	30,953	29,992	29,849	15,142
Total positive outcomes	102,913	127,878	135,670	143,617	75,911

[1] Total expenditure for the year.
[2] (i) The Government updates its expenditure plans annually and these are published in March in the Departmental Report. These figures are subject to change during the year. "n/a" equates to figures which are not published in the Departmental Report and are therefore not available.
(ii) The figure for April to October 1995 is an estimate for the total operational year and may be subject to change.
[3] Total outcomes into employment include full and part-time jobs. Separate figures are not routinely collected. Outcomes are only recorded if they occur during Jobclub membership and can be directly attributed to the programme.
[4] Other outcomes include Government training programmes and other training or employment related opportunities, including further education and self-employment.

Table 3: Travel to interview scheme

	1991–92	1992–93	1993–94	1994–95	April–October 1995
Number of participants	31,004	45,240	50,373	51,140	[1]22,280
Cost of scheme (cash prices £ million)[2]	0.9	1.5	1.7	1.8	1.0
Planned expenditure (£ million)[3]	n/a	n/a	n/a	1.3	2.2
Outcomes into employment[4]	n/a	n/a	5,801	6,762	3,121
Other outcomes[5]	—	—	—	—	—
Total positive outcomes[6]	n/a	n/a	5,801	6,762	3,121

[1] To September.
[2] Total expenditure for the year.
[3] (i) The Government updates its expenditure plans annually and these are published in March in the Departmental Report. These figures are subject to change during the year. "n/a" equates to figures which are not published in the Departmental Report and are therefore not available.
(ii) The figure for April to October 1995 is an estimate for the total operational year and may be subject to change.
[4] Information about outcomes into employment was not collected prior to 1993–94.
[5] Since the scheme is targeted only at those gaining job interviews and subsequently jobs, information about other outcomes is not collected. The numbers obtaining a job as a result of an interview where fares to the interview are funded by this scheme are recorded.
[6] Total positive outcomes are jobs entries only (see (4) above).

Table 4: Youth Training Credits

	1991–92	1992–93	1993–94	1994–95	April–October 1995
Number of participants[1]	286,000	282,100	283,600	273,200	270,600
Cost of scheme (cash prices £ million)[2]	n/a	60.9	111.6	149.4	n/a
Planned expenditure (£ million)[3]	115	132	712	676	669
Outcomes into employment (per cent.)[4]	46(4)	44(5)	47(5)	50(5)	—
Other outcomes (per cent.)[5]	17	17	18	16	—
Total positive outcomes (per cent.)[6]	67	67	70	72	—

[1] The figures shown are the total number of people participating in Youth Training since the number of people taking Youth Training Credits is not separately available.
[2] (i) For 1991–92 separate data was not collected for this programme.
(ii) For 1994–95 the figure shown is provisional and may be subject to change.
(iii) For 1995–96 Youth Training Credits now work, not as a separate programme as in previous years, but as an access mechanism to training. Outturn figures will not be available until after the end of this financial year.
[3] (i) Planned expenditure on Youth Training credits in 1993–94 and subsequently is included as part of the overall planned expenditure on Youth Training and cannot be separately identified. In 1991–92 and 1992–93 actual figures for Youth Training Credits are shown. For comparative purposes the total planned expenditure on Youth Training, which included Youth Training Credits, was £741 million and £705 million respectively.
(ii) In 1994–95 planned expenditure included spending by TECs on careers advice and guidance and the development of the youth credits scheme.
(iii) In 1995–96 planned expenditure includes provision for Modern Apprenticeships which was introduced nationally in September 1995.
[4] (i) As outcome information is estimated from survey data it is not possible to give actual numbers. The information given is on the basis of percentage outcome estimates from surveys conducted six months after a participant leaves the programme.
(ii) The latest available information is for the period April 1994 to January 1995 and is for England and Wales only.
(iii) The percentage of people entering full-time employment is shown. The figures in brackets shows the additional percentage of participants entering part-time employment.
[5] Other Outcomes include entry into other Government programmes and self-employment.
[6] This is the percentage of participants who entered jobs, further training, self-employment and full-time education.

Table 5: Career development loans

	1991–92	1992–93	1993–94	1994–95	April–October 1995
Number of participants[1]	10,432	10,230	12,159	15,159	15,169
Cost of scheme (cash prices £ million)[2]	5.4	6.9	8.0	9.8	7.2
Planned expenditure (£ million)[3]	5.9	7.0	8.3	12.5	16.8
Outcomes into employment (per cent.)[4]	75	68	68	70	72

Table 5: Career development loans

	1991–92	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*April–October 1995*
Other outcomes (per cent.)[5]	0.3	5.3	3.7	—	—
Total positive outcomes[6]	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

[1] Total number of participants are shown as the number of loans approved in year.
[2] Total expenditure in the year.
[3] (i) The Government updates its expenditure plans annually and these are published in March in the Departmental Report. The figures provided are the Supply Estimate for each year and may, due to minor adjustments between the PES settlement and publication of the Estimate, differ slightly from the planned figure published in the Departmental Report.
(ii) The figure for April to October 1995 is an estimate for the total operational year and may be subject to change.
[4] Total job entries include full and part-time jobs. Separate figures are not routinely collected. As outcome information is estimated from survey data it is not possible to give actual numbers. The information given is on the basis of percentage outcome estimates from surveys conducted three months after a participant leaves the programme.
[5] For this programme the only other outcome recorded is the number of clients going into further training. This is expressed as a percentage (see (4) above).
[6] Since only percentage figures are available for those entering outcomes a total number of participants entering positive outcomes is not available.

Table 6: Job Search Seminar

	1991–92	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*April–October 1995*
Number of participants	18,772	86,297	68,816	66,226	34,726
Cost of scheme (cash prices £ million)[1]	2.4	5.0	4.7	4.3	2.3
Planned expenditure (£ million)[2]	n/a	n/a	n/a	4.9	4.9
Outcomes into employment[3]	3,410	15,131	11,015	9,605	4,884
Other outcomes[4]	—	—	—	—	—
Total positive outcomes[5]	—	—	—	—	—

[1] Total expenditure for the year.
[2] (i) The Government updates its expenditure plans annually and these are published in March in the Departmental Report. These figures are subject to change during the year. "n/a" equates to figures which are not published in the Departmental Report and are therefore not available.
(ii) The figure for April to October 1995 is an estimate for the total operational year and may be subject to change.
[3] Total job entries include full and part-time jobs. Separate figures are not routinely collected. Only those job outcomes achieved during the five week period of the seminar are recorded are shown above.
[4] The main focus of this programme is to provide advice on job search and to increase job search activity with the aim of helping participants find employment. Entry into outcomes other than employment is not therefore routinely collected.
[5] Total positive outcomes are for job entries only [see (4) above].

Grant-maintained Schools

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment in how many cases she has required governors to modify proposals for grant-maintained status. [1760]

Mr. Robin Squire: Some 650 proposals for grant-maintained status have been approved with modifications. These include changes to the implementation date, the admissions arrangements and the membership of the governing body.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list for each of the last two years the date of each ballot result on grant-maintained status and the date of publication of each set of proposals. [1761]

Mr. Squire: The information requested is set out in the following table:

Ballot result	*Proposal published*
3 January 1994	N\V
7 January 1994	22 April 1994
19 January 1994	3 February 1994
19 January 1994	4 May 1994
25 January 1994	27 January 1994
25 January 1994	11 February 1994
25 January 1994	4 March 1994
25 January 1994	29 April 1994
26 January 1994	4 March 1994
26 January 1994	18 March 1994
26 January 1994	25 March 1994
27 January 1994	N\V
31 January 1994	3 February 1994
31 January 1994	17 February 1994
31 January 1994	28 February 1994
31 January 1994	31 March 1994
31 January 1994	14 May 1994
31 January 1994	14 May 1994
1 February 1994	N\V
1 February 1994	9 March 1994
2 February 1994	N\V
2 February 1994	N\V
2 February 1994	N\V
2 February 1994	3 February 1994
7 February 1994	N\V
7 February 1994	28 March 1994
7 February 1994	31 March 1994
8 February 1994	N\V
10 February 1994	N\V
11 February 1994	18 February 1994
14 February 1994	N\V

Ballot result	Proposal published
14 February 1994	8 March 1994
14 February 1994	16 March 1994
16 February 1994	15 March 1994
16 February 1994	15 March 1994
16 February 1994	5 May 1994
16 February 1994	25 May 1994
22 February 1994	N\V
22 February 1994	N\V
22 February 1994	17 June 1994
23 February 1994	N\V
23 February 1994	N\V
23 February 1994	28 March 1994
25 February 1994	25 May 1994
28 February 1994	N\V
28 February 1994	10 March 1994
28 February 1994	25 March 1994
4 March 1994	18 March 1994
7 March 1994	N\V
7 March 1994	29 April 1994
7 March 1994	25 May 1994
9 March 1994	N\V
9 March 1994	N\V
9 March 1994	28 March 1994
9 March 1994	6 May 1994
14 March 1994	N\V
14 March 1994	18 March 1994
14 March 1994	18 April 1994
14 March 1994	21 April 1994
14 March 1994	11 July 1994
15 March 1994	N\V
17 March 1994	N\V
18 March 1994	N\V
18 March 1994	27 April 1994
21 March 1994	N\V
21 March 1994	N\V
21 March 1994	22 April 1994
21 March 1994	22 April 1994
22 March 1994	N\V
22 March 1994	N\V
22 March 1994	30 June 1994
23 March 1994	N\V
23 March 1994	15 April 1994
23 March 1994	14 June 1994
23 March 1994	14 June 1994
24 March 1994	14 April 1994
25 March 1994	N\V
25 March 1994	N\V
25 March 1994	20 April 1994
25 March 1994	27 April 1994
28 March 1994	18 April 1994
29 March 1994	N\V
29 March 1994	13 May 1994
29 March 1994	14 June 1994
30 March 1994	N\V
30 March 1994	15 April 1994
5 April 1994	N\V
5 April 1994	27 April 1994
5 April 1994	8 July 1994
5 April 1994	23 December 1994
6 April 1994	N\V
6 April 1994	16 April 1994
6 April 1994	22 April 1994
7 April 1994	N\V
7 April 1994	N\V
7 April 1994	1 September 1994
9 April 1994	N/V
11 April 1994	N\V
11 April 1994	15 April 1994
13 April 1994	N\V
14 April 1994	N\V
18 April 1994	N\V
18 April 1994	20 May 1994
18 April 1994	3 September 1994
19 April 1994	N/V

Ballot result	Proposal published
26 April 1994	10 May 1994
26 April 1994	8 June 1994
27 April 1994	N/V
27 April 1994	N/V
27 April 1994	17 November 1994
28 April 1994	N/V
29 April 1994	N/V
29 April 1994	15 July 1994
2 May 1994	N/V
2 May 1994	9 May 1994
2 May 1994	30 May 1994
3 May 1994	28 May 1994
4 May 1994	N/V
5 May 1994	N/V
6 May 1994	N/V
9 May 1994	N/V
9 May 1994	N/V
12 May 1994	N/V
13 May 1994	1 June 1994
16 May 1994	8 July 1994
20 May 1994	N/V
20 May 1994	N/V
24 May 1994	28 May 1994
24 May 1994	28 May 1994
26 May 1994	N/V
27 May 1994	N/V
30 May 1994	N/V
30 May 1994	N/V
31 May 1994	N/V
31 May 1994	15 July 1994
1 June 1994	N/V
2 June 1994	23 June 1994
7 June 1994	N/V
10 June 1994	N/V
10 June 1994	8 July 1994
13 June 1994	12 August 1994
13 June 1994	30 September 1994
13 June 1994	10 October 1994
15 June 1994	N/V
15 June 1994	22 June 1994
17 June 1994	N/V
22 June 1994	N/V
22 June 1994	N/V
27 June 1994	N/V
27 June 1994	15 July 1994
27 June 1994	16 September 1994
30 June 1994	11 November 1994
1 July 1994	N/V
1 July 1994	12 September 1994
1 July 1994	21 October 1994
4 July 1994	N/V
5 July 1994	N/V
6 July 1994	N/V
6 July 1994	N/V
8 July 1994	11 November 1994
12 July 1994	N/V
1 August 1994	N/V
1 August 1994	N/V
3 August 1994	N/V
4 August 1994	10 October 1994
15 August 1994	N/V
15 August 1994	18 October 1994
24 August 1994	25 November 1994
9 September 1994	N/V
22 September 1994	N/V
19 October 1994	13 December 1994
21 October 1994	1 December 1994
26 October 1994	4 November 1994
31 October 1994	20 December 1994
4 November 1994	30 November 1994
7 November 1994	N/V
18 November 1994	N/V
21 November 1994	24 November 1994
22 November 1994	N/V

Ballot result	Proposal published
22 November 1994	19 December 1994
22 November 1994	11 January 1995
23 November 1994	20 December 1994
24 November 1994	N/V
29 November 1994	19 December 1994
30 November 1994	22 December 1994
1 December 1994	N/V
2 December 1994	N/V
2 December 1994	N/V
2 December 1994	23 December 1994
5 December 1994	N/V
6 December 1994	7 December 1994
7 December 1994	N/V
8 December 1994	N/V
9 December 1994	15 December 1994
9 December 1994	27 February 1995
12 December 1994	20 January 1995
15 December 1994	N/V
19 December 1994	N/V
27 December 1994	6 February 1995
28 December 1994	14 January 1995
2 January 1995	N/V
2 January 1995	N/V
6 January 1995	N/V
11 January 1995	15 February 1995
18 January 1995	24 February 1995
25 January 1995	9 Febuary 1995
26 January 1995	N/V
2 February 1995	N/V
10 February 1995	N/V
13 February 1995	17 March 1995
20 February 1995	31 March 1995
21 February 1995	N/V
21 February 1995	19 June 1995
1 March 1995	20 April 1995
6 March 1995	16 March 1995
6 March 1995	30 March 1995
10 March 1995	N/V
10 March 1995	14 March 1995
13 March 1995	21 March 1995
14 March 1995	24 June 1995
22 March 1995	N/V
29 March 1995	22 June 1995
31 March 1995	7 April 1995
3 April 1995	N/V
3 April 1995	7 April 1995
7 April 1995	16 May 1995
7 April 1995	9 June 1995
13 April 1995	24 May 1995
4 May 1995	N/V
16 May 1995	22 May 1995
18 May 1995	N/V
18 May 1995	30 June 1995
24 May 1995	7 August 1995
25 May 1995	N/V
30 May 1995	17 July 1995
5 June 1995	15 June 1995
7 June 1995	N/V
8 June 1995	N/V
12 June 1995	N/V
16 June 1995	30 June 1995
30 June 1995	12 October 1995
3 July 1995	25 August 1995
5 July 1995	N/V
7 July 1995	21 July 1995
10 July 1995	N/V
11 July 1995	4 August 1995
14 July 1995	N/V
19 July 1995	25 July 1995
19 July 1995	22 September 1995
21 July 1995	N/V
21 July 1995	10 August 1995
31 July 1995	12 September 1995
4 August 1995	N/V
19 October 1995	P/A
25 October 1995	P/A
2 November 1995	P/A
2 November 1995	P/A
2 November 1995	P/A
2 November 1995	N/V
3 November 1995	N/V
6 November 1995	N/V
8 November 1995	N/V
8 November 1995	P/A
9 November 1995	P/A
14 November 1995	P/A
15 November 1995	P/A
20 November 1995	P/A
20 November 1995	N/V
22 November 1995	N/V

Note:
Proposals published:
N/V= 'no' vote
P/A= proposals awaited

Job Finder's Grant

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list the number of persons benefiting from job finder's grant; what the scheme cost; and what the planned expenditure was for each year since 1994. [1762]

Mr. Forth: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from M. E. G. Fogden to Mr. David Blunkett, dated 24 November 1995.

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question about the Jobfinder's Grant.

I attach a table showing how many people have been awarded Jobfinder's Grants nationally and by Employment Service region.

The figures shown cover the period 7 February 1994 to 31 December 1994 when the scheme was being piloted in the Midlands and from 18 April 1995 when the programme was introduced nationally (22 May in Yorkshire and Humberside region, where a more flexible variant to the programme is being piloted) up to 3 November, the latest date for which figures are available.

Last year's pilot cost £800,000. Planned expenditure in 1995/96 is £5 million.

I hope this is helpful.

Jobfinder's grant

	Grants awarded (7 February 1994 to 31 December 1994)	*Grants awarded (18 April 1995 to 3 November 1995)*
London and South East	—	952
South-west	—	536
Wales	—	442
West Midlands	1,417	1,023
North-west	—	1,015
Scotland	—	467
Northern	—	563
Yorkshire and Humberside	—	701
East Midlands and Eastern	3,291	1,149
National total	4,708	6,848

Jobmatch Scheme

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list the number of persons benefiting from the jobmatch scheme; what the scheme cost; and what the planned expenditure was for 1995. [1763]

Mr. Forth: The fullest information available, covering the period 3 April to 30 September 1995, shows that 989 people had benefited from jobmatch at a total programme cost of £497,000. The overall planned expenditure for the 1995–96 financial year was £5 million.

Job Interview Guarantee

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list the number of participants for the job interview guarantee; what the scheme cost; what the planned expenditure was; what number of those on the scheme achieved placings; and what was the breakdown of the placings in terms of the numbers going into *(a)* full-time employment and *(b)* part-time employment. [1765]

Mr. Forth: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from M. E. G. Fogden to Mr. David Blunkett, dated 24 November 1995:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question about Job Interview Guarantee (JIG).

During the year 1994/95, the number of people assisted by JIG was 450,138. Actual expenditure was £22,367,851, compared with planned expenditure of £23,767,851.

The number of those assisted who were placed into a job was 205,020. As JIG is particularly aimed at long term unemployed people, you might be interested to know that 165,535 of those placed had been out of work for six months or more. I am afraid no statistics are held which differentiate between full and part time employment.

I hope this is helpful.

Invalidity Benefit

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many of the people disallowed invalidity benefit following the all-work test between April and September 1995 made a claim to unemployment benefit and *(a)* received unemployment benefit only, *(b)* received unemployment benefit and income support, *(c)* received income support only, *(d)* received credits only and *(e)* were not entitled; how many were signing on pending an appeal against disallowance of incapacity benefit; and how many were referred to the placing, assessment and counselling teams. [1837]

Mr. Forth: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from M. E. G. Fogden to Mr. Keith Bradley, dated 24 November 1995:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question about how many of the people disallowed Incapacity Benefit (IB) following the All Work Test between April and September 1995, made a claim to unemployment benefit and about the outcome of those claims.

In the period April to September 1995, 8,974 people disallowed IB following the All Work Test made a claim to unemployment benefits. Of these, 34 had their claims disallowed because they did not meet the conditions for receiving such benefits by being available for and actively seeking work. Information is not collected centrally about the nature of the benefit received by the remainder. Also we do not keep records of the number of people who while making a claim for unemployment benefits are also making an appeal against the decision of the Benefits Agency adjudication officer to disallow IB. This is because such appeals have no effect on a claim to unemployment benefits.

During the same period, 2624 people who had been disallowed IB were referred to our Placing, Assessment and Counselling Teams for specialist assessment and help.

I hope this is helpful.

Job Vacancies

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list, for the latest month for which figures are available and for the equivalent month in 1990, the number of job vacancies advertised in jobcentres which were *(a)* part-time and *(b)* temporary in character; and what proportion of total vacancies advertised each represented. [2423]

Mr. Forth: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from M. E. G. Fogden to Mr. Michael Meacher, dated 24 November 1995:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question about part time and temporary vacancies in Jobcentres.

The information is recorded on a quarterly basis, rather than monthly as you requested. Details for the latest quarter, and the equivalent period in 1990 are as follows:

10 July 1995–6 October 1995

	Number
(a) Total number of vacancies notified	697,693
(b) of which were part time	202,561
(c) percentage of total vacancies	29
(d) of which were temporary	162.025
(e) percentage of total vacancies	23.2

9 July 1990 to 5 October 1990

	Number
(a) Total vacancies notified	622,768
(b) of which were part time	184,312
(c) percentage of total vacancies	29.6
(d) of which were temporary	108,031
(e) percentage of total vacancies	17.3

I hope this is helpful.

Remploy

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what assessment she has made of the calculation of flow back shown in the Remploy annual accounts as the net cost to the Treasury; what is the detailed basis for the calculations; and if she will publish the calculations for the average flow back per Remploy disabled employee for each of the last five years. [2255]

Mr. Paice: The figures are Remploy's own and no assessment has been made of the results or the basis for the calculations.

Labour Statistics, West Yorkshire

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is the total number of *(a)* full-time and part-time permanent positions and *(b)* full-time and part-time temporary positions in the West Yorkshire region, including a breakdown of occupations. [1446]

Mrs. Angela Knight: I have been asked to reply.

The estimates available from the labour force survey are shown in the table following:

Employees in West Yorkshire, by occupation Spring 1995

	Permanent		Temporary	
	Full-time	Part-time	Full-time	Part-time
All employees	588,000	187,000	26,000	30,000
Managers and administrators	104,000	n/a	n/a	n/a
Professional occupations	61,000	10,000	n/a	n/a
Associated professional and technical	58,000	10,000	n/a	n/a
Clerical and secretarial	87,000	39,000	n/a	n/a
Craft and related	82,000	n/a	n/a	n/a
Personal and protective services	39,000	38,000	n/a	n/a
Selling	30,000	35,000	n/a	n/a
Plant and machine operatives	103,000	11,000	n/a	n/a
Other occupations	23,000	35,000	n/a	n/a

n/a—not available, estimate below 10,000.

Incomes

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) what percentage of workers on adult rates currently earn less than *(a)* £2.50, *(b)* £3, *(c)* £3.50, *(d)* £4, *(e)* £4.50, *(f)* £5, *(g)* £5.50 and *(h)* £6.50, per hour including and excluding overtime, in (i) Yorkshire and Humberside, (ii) north Yorkshire, (iii) the north and (iv) the United Kingdom, distinguishing between manual and non-manual, male and female and part-time workers; [1462]

(2) what percentage of full-time workers on adult rates currently earn less than *(a)* £100, *(b)* £150, *(c)* £200 and *(d)* £250 per week, including and excluding overtime, in (i) Yorkshire and Humberside, (ii) north Yorkshire, (iii) west Yorkshire, (iv) south Yorkshire, (v) Humberside, (vi) the north of England and (vii) the United Kingdom. [1458]

Mrs. Angela Knight: I have been asked to reply.

Information available from the new earnings survey is provided in the tables.

Hourly earnings including overtime

	Non-manual				Manual			
	Male		Female		Male		Female	
Percentage earning	Full-time	Part-time	Full-time	Part-time	Full-time	Part-time	Full-time	Part-time
Yorkshire and Humberside								
<£2.50	0.7	5.0	0.9	3.2	0.7	7.1	2.9	6.6
<£3.00	1.2	9.4	2.1	5.7	1.9	16.5	9.6	13.0
<£3.50	2.5	17.7	6.0	18.1	5.4	41.2	27.0	40.0
<£4.00	4.9	28.2	11.5	32.3	11.4	54.1	45.1	65.2
<£4.50	8.0	39.2	20.4	45.4	19.6	66.5	62.0	80.1
<£5.00	11.4	46.4	29.5	56.4	29.7	69.4	73.3	85.8
<£5.50	15.8	51.9	39.1	64.7	40.4	75.3	80.7	90.7
<£6.50	24.9	60.2	55.0	75.0	59.8	83.5	92.4	95.7
North Yorkshire								
<£2.50	1.1	6.3	1.3	3.7	0.5	3.4	4.3	4.1
<£3.00	1.9	12.5	2.5	5.3	1.0	6.9	8.5	13.8
<£3.50	3.3	25.0	7.8	16.3	5.7	37.9	39.4	41.4
<£4.00	6.8	46.9	13.1	35.3	12.1	65.5	54.3	62.8
<£4.50	10.8	56.3	22.2	47.4	22.1	79.3	67.0	77.9
<£5.00	12.7	65.6	33.8	59.5	35.5	79.3	76.6	85.5
<£5.50	17.1	68.8	42.8	65.3	46.9	79.3	81.9	98.7
<£6.50	26.8	68.8	59.7	74.7	66.7	93.1	92.6	93.1
North								
<£2.50	0.4	6.3	0.7	3.7	0.8	5.1	3.0	6.0
<£3.00	1.0	8.1	2.0	5.2	2.1	13.1	9.7	17.7
<£3.50	2.7	19.8	6.8	18.8	5.9	32.3	25.6	47.4
<£4.00	5.1	27.0	13.7	36.4	11.5	47.5	40.4	71.8
<£4.50	8.3	33.3	21.3	47.4	20.3	59.6	59.6	82.8

Hourly earnings including overtime

	Non-manual				Manual			
	Male		Female		Male		Female	
Percentage earning	Full-time	Part-time	Full-time	Part-time	Full-time	Part-time	Full-time	Part-time
<£5.00	11.3	45.0	29.2	56.3	29.3	70.7	70.2	88.6
<£5.50	15.4	49.5	40.1	63.1	38.2	76.8	79.0	92.2
<£6.50	24.3	55.0	55.3	76.1	56.6	82.8	89.4	96.3
Great Britain								
<£2.50	0.5	5.6	0.6	3.4	0.7	8.0	2.9	6.1
<£3.00	0.9	8.9	1.4	5.2	1.8	15.3	8.5	13.6
<£3.50	1.9	17.8	3.9	15.1	4.9	38.0	22.5	38.9
<£4.00	3.7	27.8	8.4	29.0	10.4	53.4	39.0	61.8
<£4.50	6.2	36.6	14.4	40.7	18.1	64.7	55.0	76.3
<£5.00	9.2	44.1	21.6	50.9	27.7	91.9	67.1	83.6
<£5.50	12.7	49.1	29.9	59.7	37.9	79.1	76.9	89.2
<£6.50	20.5	56.6	45.5	72.0	57.4	85.8	89.0	94.8

Hourly earnings excluding overtime

	Non-manual				Manual			
	Male		Female		Male		Female	
Percentage earning	Full-time	Part-time	Full-time	Part-time	Full-time	Part-time	Full-time	Part-time
Yorkshire and Humberside								
<£2.50	0.7	5.0	0.9	3.3	0.8	7.1	2.9	6.6
<£3.00	1.3	9.4	2.1	5.9	2.2	17.1	10.2	13.2
<£3.50	2.7	17.7	6.1	18.7	6.1	41.2	28.7	40.3
<£4.00	5.2	28.2	11.6	32.5	13.5	56.5	46.8	65.7
<£4.50	8.5	38.7	20.8	46.1	23.3	67.6	63.7	80.8
<£5.00	12.1	45.3	30.1	56.7	33.4	70.6	73.9	86.4
<£5.50	16.5	51.4	39.6	65.2	43.9	75.3	82.2	90.9
<£6.50	25.8	59.1	55.4	74.8	63.8	82.9	93.4	95.8
North Yorkshire								
<£2.50	1.1	6.3	1.3	3.7	1.0	3.4	4.3	4.1
<£3.00	2.2	12.5	2.5	5.8	1.9	6.9	8.5	14.5
<£3.50	3.3	25.0	8.1	16.8	6.9	37.9	39.4	42.1
<£4.00	7.3	46.9	13.4	35.8	15.0	65.5	57.4	62.8
<£4.50	11.7	56.3	22.5	49.5	28.6	79.3	68.1	77.2
<£5.00	13.6	62.5	34.1	59.5	40.5	82.8	76.6	85.5
<£5.50	17.3	65.6	43.1	65.3	50.7	82.8	85.1	89.0
<£6.50	27.1	65.6	60.3	74.7	69.3	93.1	93.6	93.1
North								
<£2.50	0.4	6.3	0.7	3.8	0.9	5.1	3.0	6.3
<£3.00	1.1	9.0	2.0	5.4	2.3	13.1	10.4	17.5
<£3.50	2.7	20.7	7.1	19.2	6.6	34.3	26.6	47.6
<£4.00	5.1	27.0	14.1	37.6	13.7	48.5	42.3	72.2
<£4.50	8.7	34.2	21.9	48.6	22.7	61.6	61.4	84.5
<£5.00	11.8	45.0	30.0	56.8	31.6	68.7	72.5	89.6
<£5.50	16.1	49.5	40.9	63.7	41.2	76.8	79.9	92.5
<£6.50	24.7	54.1	55.9	76.4	59.5	82.8	91.0	96.1
Great Britain								
<£2.50	0.5	5.8	0.7	3.4	0.8	8.1	3.0	6.2
<£3.00	1.0	9.3	1.4	5.4	2.0	15.4	8.9	13.8
<£3.50	2.0	18.2	4.0	15.4	5.5	38.3	23.6	39.5
<£4.00	4.0	28.5	8.6	29.5	11.9	54.0	40.7	62.2
<£4.50	6.6	36.8	14.7	41.1	21.0	65.2	57.1	77.0
<£5.00	9.6	43.6	22.0	51.1	30.9	71.7	68.8	83.9
<£5.50	13.2	49.0	30.4	59.9	41.2	79.3	78.0	89.2
<£6.50	21.1	56.6	45.9	72.0	60.7	85.6	89.7	94.6

Gross weekly earnings including overtime

	Yorkshire and Humberside	North Yorkshire	West Yorkshire	South Yorkshire	Humberside	North of England	Great Britain
<£100	1.2	1.5	1.1	1.4	1.0	1.1	0.9
<£150	9.4	12.2	8.4	9.7	9.6	10.3	7.4
<£200	26.2	29.8	25.3	27.0	24.8	27.8	21.7
<£250	43.5	47.6	43.3	43.4	41.2	45.2	38.3

Gross weekly earnings excluding overtime

	Yorkshire and Humberside	North Yorkshire	West Yorkshire	South Yorkshire	Humberside	North of England	Great Britain
<£100	1.3	1.5	1.2	1.4	1.4	1.1	1.0
<£150	11.3	14.0	10.3	11.3	12.1	12.2	8.8
<£200	32.1	36.1	30.9	32.1	32.0	32.7	26.4
<£250	51.7	56.0	51.1	51.4	50.7	52.0	45.0

WALES

Cryptosporidium

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the recorded number of cases of cryptosporidium in each health authority and in Wales as a whole for the last two years for which information is available; and if he will make a statement. [548]

Mr. Richards: The number of cases of cryptosporidium is not available. However, the numbers of finished consultant episodes recorded for Welsh residents by hospitals in Wales, where the condition was the principal diagnosis, are given in the following table:

Area of residence	1992–93	1994–95
Clwyd	4	3
Gwent	0	3
Gwynedd	0	1
Mid Glamorgan	5	5
Powys	1	0
South Glamorgan	2	7
West Glamorgan	0	1
Pembrokeshire	1	3
East Dyfed	1	0
Wales	14	23

Breast Cancer

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what research he has initiated to examine the causes of the breast cancer rates in Wales in respect of *(a)* East Dyfed and *(b)* Gwynedd. [1149]

Mr. Richards: Research has identified a number of factors which are consistently related to the development of breast cancer, and it is unlikely that breast cancer rates in Gwynedd and East Dyfed are being influenced by some new factor that has not been detected in previous studies. For this reason we do not consider that research into the incidence of breast cancer in individual regions or countries would be of benefit in terms of the treatment or prevention of this disease.

School Budgets

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the percentage of the potential schools budget delegated to schools through the aggregate schools budget in each local education authority for each year for which information is available. [1421]

Mr. Richards: Welsh Office circular 38/91 on local management of schools, published in July 1991, proposed that a minimum of 85 per cent. of a local education authority's potential schools budget should be delegated to schools and that all LEAs would be expected to comply with this requirement by 1 April 1993. The following table shows the levels of delegation since then.

PQ 35/95/96: Percentage of PSB delegated to ASB by LEA

Percentage

	1993–94	1994–95	1995–96
Clwyd	86.3	85.0	85.1
Dyfed	84.5	85.2	85.0
Gwent	84.8	85.0	85.6
Gwynedd	85.6	87.5	88.0
Mid Glamorgan	86.2	87.4	87.8
Powys	92.0	90.0	89.2
South Glamorgan	87.6	87.1	87.7
West Glamorgan	88.0	88.2	89.2
Wales	86.4	86.6	87.0

Note:
The details for 1993–94 are taken from Section 42 outturn statements provided by LEAs; the 1994–95 and 1995–96 details from Section 42 budget statements.

Health Services (Rationing)

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the health authorities in Wales which are rationing *(a)* ear grommets, *(b)* dilatation and curettage for women under 40 years, *(c)* varicose vein surgery, *(d)* screening for osteoporosis, *(e)* fertility treatment, *(f)* screening for aortic aneurysm and *(g)* screening for colon and rectum cancers. [1639]

Mr. Hague: None. Decisions on the appropriateness of a particular treatment are a matter for clinical judgment.

Welsh Language (Cardiff Airport)

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will discuss with the management of Cardiff international airport measures to improve the use of the Welsh language on signs within the airport precinct; and if he will make a statement. [2052]

Mr. Hague: No. This is entirely a matter for TBI, the owner of Cardiff international airport, which I understand is in contact with the Welsh Language Board.

Welsh Islands Conference

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the conference on Welsh islands organised by the Countryside Council for Wales on 15 November. [1813]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The two-day conference brought together for the first time nearly 100 delegates who are involved in managing Welsh islands. A note of the proceedings will be provided by the Countryside Council for Wales in due course.

I understand that the event was considered to have been successful.

Non-NHS Providers

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will itemise how much *(a)* NHS trusts, *(b)* general practitioner fundholders, *(c)* regional health authorities and *(d)* district health authorities spent on health care from non-NHS providers in each year since 1991–92 in each region. [2414]

Mr. Richards: The information is as follows:

£ thousands

	1991–92	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*
NHS trusts	n/a	nil	2,688	2,492
GP Fundholders	11	113	657	1,290
District health authorities	4,384	8,078	11,261	14,309

Notes:

1. Information is not held centrally in respect of individual GP fundholding practices but their expenditure is shown on an aggregated basis in the annual accounts of the Family Health Services Authorities which pay for healthcare purchases on their behalf.
2. There are no regional authorities in Wales.
3. The first NHS trust in Wales, Pembrokeshire NHS Trust was established on 1 April 1992. A further 13 and 10 became operational in 1993–94 and 1994–95 respectively.

Source:

Annual accounts of District health authorities and Family Health Services Authorities and Financial Returns from NHS trusts.

Regional Selective Assistance

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the outturn figures for regional selective assistance *(a)* offers and *(b)* payments for 1994–95; and if he will indicate how these figures related to the original budgeted plans for that year. [2110]

Mr. Hague: The information requested is available in the most recent Welsh Office departmental report, Cm 2815, and Industrial Development Act 1982 annual report, Cm 723. Copies of these publications are available in the Library of the House.

Temporary Traffic Lights

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales where are the longest serving temporary traffic lights on the trunk roads for which he is responsible, how long they have been in use and what has been the total cost so far. [2150]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The longest serving temporary traffic lights are located on the A494 trunk road at Drws y Nant Bala. They have been in use for 16 years. The current annual cost of retaining the lights is approximately £1,800.

North East Wales Institute of Higher Education

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he expects to receive the accounts of the North East Wales institute; and when they will become publicly available. [2151]

Mr. Richards: The annual audited accounts of the North East Wales institute of higher education are expected to be submitted to the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales on 31 December 1995 and will become publicly available from that date.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Debt Write-offs

Mr. Robathan: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what progress has been made on the implementation of Naples terms by the Paris Club; and if he will make a statement about how debts forgiven or abandoned are to be treated in the trading accounts of the Export Credits Guarantee Department. [3070]

Mr. Nelson: In December 1994 the Paris Club—representing leading creditor Governments—agreed to implement write-offs of up to 67 per cent. of official bilateral debt owned by the world's poorest, most indebted countries. This agreement—known as Naples terms—represented the culmination of very substantial efforts by the UK, beginning with the Prime Minister's announcement of his Trinidad terms initiative in 1990, to reduce the debt service obligations of the world's poorest countries to manageable levels. Official creditors have been implementing Naples terms since the beginning of the year. So far 10 countries have had agreements from the Paris Club incorporating debt reduction up to 67 per cent; one of these—Uganda—has been given debt reduction in respect of all its eligible debt to official Paris Club creditors.

In order to put ECGD's trading accounts on to a more realistic footing, the amounts shown in the accounts as owing to the Consolidated Fund, in respect of account 1, will be reduced in line with the extent that debts are forgiven or abandoned; this will apply to both debt forgiveness under Paris Club arrangements, including debt forgiveness for Poland and Egypt, and debts on which recovery is to be abandoned because their further pursuit is no longer justified on grounds of value for money. This has resulted in a reduction of £1,030 million in the balance owed to the Consolidated Fund as at 31 March 1995. Further details are given in ECGD's 1994–95 annual report and trading accounts which are being published on 30 November.

Research Institutes

Mr. Robathan: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement about forthcoming prior options reviews of institutes sponsored by the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council. [3071]

Mr. Ian Taylor: The Government announced on 29 September 1995 that all public sector research establishments would be subject to prior options reviews.

The BBSRC's arrangements for sponsoring the Institute of Grassland and Environmental Research, Institute of Arable Crops Research, Silsoe Research Institute and the John Innes Centre will be reviewed immediately. Other research council research establishments will be reviewed in the course of 1996.

These reviews will take place alongside those of establishments parented or sponsored by other Government Departments which are carrying out work in similar or related fields. The reviews will build on any relevant recent studies.

I should welcome comments from interested parties. Comments should be sent by 8 January 1996 to:

Dr. M. Anderson, BBSRC, Polaris House, North Star Avenue, Swindon, SN2 1UH in respect of the IACR and SRI, and to Dr. Vincent Essex at the same address in respect of IGER and the JIC.

Aerospace Industry

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many jobs have been lost in the aerospace industry in each year since 1980; and what are the equivalent statistics for *(a)* France, *(b)* Germany and *(c)* Italy. [1010]

Mr. Eggar: The figures requested are given in the table:

Change in employment in the aerospace industry

	Job gain/(losses) in thousands			
	United Kingdom	*France*	*Germany*	*Italy*
1980–81	1.3	2.7	3.1	2.7
1981–82	(12.4)	4.0	(0.9)	0.8
1982–83	(10.7)	(0.7)	(1.1)	(0.2)
1983–84	(6.1)	0.0	(0.8)	(0.8)
1984–85	0.2	(0.7)	0.5	(0.7)
1985–86	1.8	(0.1)	3.1	1.0
1986–87	5.8	(3.0)	1.0	2.2
1987–88	(7.6)	(3.0)	3.5	2.0
1988–89	(1.9)	(1.3)	5.5	2.2
1989–90	5.3	3.4	0.4	6.5
1990–91	(6.5)	0.9	2.7	0.5
1991–92	(10.6)	(4.4)	2.0	n/a

Source:
ACOP and Eurostat VISA-DEBA.

Mr. Cunningham: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the level of output of the aerospace industry for each of the years since 1989 in *(a)* real terms and *(b)* as a percentage of GDP; and what are the equivalent figures for *(a)* France, *(b)* Germany and *(c)* Italy. [1012]

Mr. Eggar: The figures requested are given in the table:

Gross value added at factor cost in 1990 prices

£ million

	1989	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*
United Kingdom	5,261	5,620	5,035	3,872
France	3,475	3,265	3,397	3,049
Germany	2,228	2,358	2,598	2,260
Italy	1,257	1,418	1,266	n/a

Source: Eurostat VISA-DEBA.

Contribution to GDP

Percentage

	1989	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*
United Kingdom	1.1	1.2	1.1	0.8
France	0.6	0.6	0.6	0.5
Germany	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.3
Italy	0.2	0.3	0.2	n/a

Source: Eurostat VISA-DEBA and OECD National Accounts.

Invoices (Late Payments)

Mrs. Roche: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) how many (i) orders and (ii) firms are represented by the 16 per cent. of invoices not paid by his Department within 30 days or in accordance with contractual agreements in 1994–95; and how many of these are related to firms with fewer than 500 employees; [913]

(2) what is the amount owed to those businesses whose invoices were not paid within 30 days or within the agreed credit period in each of the last five years; [1121]

(3) how his Department publicises payment practices other than as percentages of invoices paid late; [966]

(4) what is the average length of time it takes for his Department to pay invoices. [921]

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 22 November 1995]:* Much of the information sought either is not available or could be assembled only at disproportionate cost.

My Department's prompt payment performance is checked by means of a random survey which monitors approximately 4,000 invoices over the course of each year with the purpose of identifying invoices paid later than 30 days after receipt, or after the agreed credit period. In 1994–95, 16 per cent., or approximately 640, of these invoices were found to fall into one or other of these categories. As I have made clear before, this was clearly an unsatisfactory performance which we are seeking to address through the introduction of a challenging performance target for this year. The survey does not, however, gather information on the size of the companies involved, the amounts outstanding or the average time taken to make payment.

My Department publishes its payment performance in the form of a percentage figure which gives the proportion of invoices paid either within 30 days or within an agreed credit period. The overall results of the annual survey are published in the departmental report, a copy of which is placed in the Library of the House. The 30-day target for paying invoices is itself published in the DTI standard terms and conditions of contract for supplies.

TREASURY

Corporation Tax

Sir David Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the latest rates of corporation tax applicable to shipping companies in each country of the European Union; and if he will make it his policy to bring United Kingdom rates into line with those elsewhere in the European Union. [2111]

Mr. Jack: The rate of corporation tax in the United Kingdom is kept under frequent review. The UK continues to provide one of the lowest main rates in the European Union. The current main national rates of corporation tax applicable to shipping companies in each European Union country are in the table.

Main national rates of corporation tax applicable to shipping companies in the European Union

Country	Percentage Rate
Austria	34
Belgium	[1]39
Denmark	34
Finland	25
France	[2]33.33
Germany	[3]45
Greece	[4]nil
Ireland	[5]10
Italy	[6]37
Luxembourg	[7]33
Netherlands	35
Portugal	[8]36
Spain	[9]35
Sweden	28
United Kingdom	33

Notes:

[1] There is also a surcharge of 3 per cent., making an effective rate of 40.17 per cent.

[2] There is also a surcharge of 10 per cent., making an effective rate of 36.66 per cent.

[3] There is also a surcharge of 7.5 per cent. and local trade taxes (of an average 20 per cent.) which give an average total effective rate of 58 per cent. For distributed profits, the main rate is 30 per cent., giving an effective rate of 46.25 per cent. Companies engaged in international shipping can elect for certain of their profits (normally 80 per cent.) to be taxed at half the average rates they would otherwise pay provided relief in respect of any foreign tax borne by those profits is forfeited.

[4] Profits from shipping are not subject to corporation tax. Instead a special tax, based on gross tonnage and age, is charged on usage of a vessel.

[5] This special rate of corporation tax applies to manufacturing and the sale of goods. Certain shipping activities are deemed to be manufacturing for this purpose.

[6] There is also local tax at 16.2 per cent., making an effective rate of 53.2 per cent.

[7] There is also a surcharge of 4 per cent. and local trade taxes (in range of 8 per cent.–12 per cent.) which give an effective rate of 40.9 per cent.

[8] The main rate is only applied to 30 per cent. of the profits from maritime transport activities. In Madeira corporation tax does not apply to profits arising from the operation of Madeira-registered vessels in international waters.

[9] There is also a surcharge of 1 per cent., giving an effective rate of 35.35 per cent. In the Canary Islands shipping companies are granted up to a 35 per cent. reduction in corporation tax, giving a minimum possible effective rate of 22.75 per cent.

Heroin and Semtex

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what further actions Customs and Excise is taking to identify heroin and semtex at airports. [1634]

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory *[holding answer 23 November 1995]:* Her Majesty's Customs and Excise continues to assess the risk of smuggling of these commodities and to deploy anti-smuggling teams to address those risks. Training programmes for these teams include the identification and handling of the materials. Detector dogs and scientific aids are used as appropriate.

Tax Revenue

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate, in current prices, the net revenue forgone in each year since 1988–89 as a result of the reduction in personal income tax for higher rate taxpayers introduced by the Finance Act 1988; and what has been the total number of beneficiaries in each year, by region. [87]

Mr. Jack: Available information is in the table. Figures for earlier years were given in the reply to the hon. Member for Darlington (Mr. Milburn) on 17 December 1993, *Official Report*, columns *969-70.* Some regional estimates are based on small samples and all amounts are given to the nearest £50 million.

Number of taxpayers affected and increases in tax revenue resulting from reinstating tax rates over 40 per cent.

Region of residence	1992–93 Numbers Thousands	1992–93 Amount £ million	1993–94 Numbers Thousands	1993–94 Amount £ million
North	40	50	40	50
Yorkshire and Humberside	70	200	70	250
North west	90	200	90	250
East Midlands	70	200	70	150
West Midlands	90	200	80	200
East Anglia	40	100	40	100
South east	620	2,300	650	2,550
South west	90	250	80	250
Wales	30	50	30	50
Scotland	80	200	90	200
Northern Ireland	20	50	20	50
United Kingdom[1]	1,230	3,850	1,260	4,200

[1] Includes members of the forces and merchant navy and a small number of civil servants serving overseas who are not all allocated to regions.

VAT

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list those bodies which are able under section 33 of the Value Added Tax Act 1994 to recover value added tax; and if he will make a statement on how the EC sixth VAT directive restricts changes to eligibility to recover value added tax. [1807]

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The public bodies eligible for refunds of VAT under section 33 of the Value Added Tax Act 1994 are too numerous to be individually identified. In addition to the general categories listed in section 33(3)

(a) to (j), other bodies such as the National Rivers Authority, the Environment Agency and probation and magistrates courts committees have been added from time to time under section 33(3)(k).

Section 33 bodies are treated under the VAT system in much the same way as other taxable persons, except that, where they are carrying out statutory obligations outside the scope of the tax, they may recover their input tax. This accords with the general principles governing the tax treatment of public bodies laid down in the EC sixth VAT directive.

Domestic Fuel

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate, by region, the average weekly expenditure in 1997–98 and 1996–97 of *(a)* all households, *(b)* families with children, *(c)* non-retired households and *(d)* retired households, on domestic fuel, showing separately for 1995–96 the extra expenditure as a result of VAT at 8 per cent. [92]

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Table 5.1 of the CSO report "Family Spending: A report on the 1994–95 Family Expenditure Survey" provides the latest published data. Figures for 1995–96 and subsequent years will depend on the future level of fuel prices, and on what happens to incomes and spending patterns.

Labour Force Survey

Mr. McAvoy: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish the latest annual figures available on *(a)* the number of young people aged 25 years and under in the work force and *(b)* the number and proportion who are not in full-time or part-time employment; and if he will provide comparable information for each of the member states of the European Union. [1790]

Mrs. Angela Knight: Estimates from the spring—March to May—1995 labour force survey show that there were 4,622,000 economically active people in the United Kingdom aged 16 to 24, of whom 706,000—15 per cent.—were International Labour Organisation unemployed.

The latest European comparisons on young people aged under 25 in the labour market are published by Eurostat in "Statistics in focus: Labour Force Survey Principal Results 1994". A copy of the publication is available in the Library.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 27 November 1995

ENVIRONMENT

Capital Receipts

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many local authorities *(a)* have taken and *(b)* are taking advantage of the relaxation in the rules on the application of capital receipts to sell their municipal airports, bus companies and crematoriums. [1992]

Sir Paul Beresford: We understand that the sale of Bournemouth airport has been completed since the relaxation came into force. We do not yet have any information on sales of bus companies, and the relaxation in respect of crematoriums does not begin until 1 January 1996.

Local Government

Mr. Cran: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the periodic electoral reviews that the Local Government Commission must undertake after it has completed the current district reviews. [1905]

Sir Paul Beresford: Decisions on the statutory programme of periodic electoral reviews—PERs—are a matter for the local Government Commission, subject to the time constraints set down in the Local Government Act 1992. We understand that the commission is considering the programme of PERs which it will carry out once it has completed the district structure reviews.

Legislative Repeals

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what legislation from his Department passed in the last five years contains provision for statutory repeal or review. [2039]

Sir Paul Beresford: Within the last five years, this Department has been responsible for two Acts of Parliament which contain provision for statutory repeal or review.

Section 128 of the Leasehold Reform, Housing and Urban Development Act 1993 allows the Secretary of State to provide by order that sections 126 and 127—housing welfare services—should cease to have effect.

Schedule 24 of the Environment Act 1995 provides for the repeal of earlier provisions in the Act which deal with transitional provisions in respect of national parks.

This Department has a programme to review on a regular basis all its legislation which affects business.

Local Authority Political Groups

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many local authority political groups have appointed paid assistants. [2391]

Sir Paul Beresford: My Department neither collects nor holds this information centrally.

Power Cables

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what evaluation his Department has made of the effect on property prices and the difficulties in obtaining a mortgage for properties located beneath power cables; and if he will make a statement. [1964]

Mr. Clappison: My Department has not undertaken such an evaluation. The market value of a property will reflect a variety of factors, including neighbouring development. I am not aware that, as a matter of policy, mortgage lenders are refusing to advance loans on properties in close proximity to overhead power lines.

Small and Medium Enterprises

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what percentage of his Department's expenditure in 1994–95 was spent on procuring goods or services from small and medium enterprises. [1945]

Sir Paul Beresford: Information on the size of suppliers is not held centrally and is obtainable only at disproportionate cost.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many small and medium enterprises benefited from properties made available by English Estates in each of the last five years; and how many small and medium enterprises have benefited from properties made available by English Partnerships in the last year for which figures are available. [1939]

Sir Paul Beresford: Information is not available on the size of companies occupying properties provided by English Estates or English Partnerships. The following table gives the number of new occupancies of properties of less than 1,700m^2 and thus an indication of the take up by small or medium enterprises. The figures relate to a period during which the overall size of the portfolio reduced by some 30 per cent.

Number of new occupancies of properties under 1,700m^2

1990–91: 1,272

1991–92: 1,333

1992–93: 1,343

1993–94: 1,067

1994–95: 1,032.

English Partnerships took over responsibility for English Estates' activities on 1 April 1994.

Single Regeneration Budget

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the total funding for the single regeneration budget in actual terms and adjusted for inflation in each year since its inception; and what percentage of this funding was disbursed through competitive bidding in each of those years. [1938]

Sir Paul Beresford: The single regeneration budget was established in April 1994. Funding has been as follows:

	£ million (cash)	£ million (1995–96 prices)	Percentage disbursed through competitive bidding
1994–95 (estimated out-turn)	1,467	1,500	16
1995–96 (planned expenditure)	1,348	1,348	27

Programmes within the SRB that targeted resources on projects selected by competition included city challenge—in both 1994–95 and 1995–96—and the £125 million SRB challenge fund—in 1995–96. Both programmes seek to maximise investment and support from the private sector over and above public moneys. Since resources are limited, assistance under other support regimes—for example Estate Action—are also concentrated on projects likely to provide the best value for money.

Housing Bill

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make available information about the proposed bill on housing in simple text and pictorial format and on audio tape for people with learning disabilities. [1965]

Mr. Clappison: When the housing legislation is published, my Department will be willing to co-operate with bodies who wish to produce material for people with learning disabilities.

Planning Applications

Sir John Gorst: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what criteria he employs to set the level at which local authorities can charge for a planning permission application; and what is the relationship between this and the actual cost to the local authority of dealing with an application for planning permission. [2261]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The calculation of the proportion of costs deemed to be covered by planning application fees is based on Price Waterhouse's 1994 report for the Department, entitled "The Costs of Determining Planning Applications and the Development Control Service" and on information collected from local authorities on the income derived from fees. We estimate that the proportion of planning application costs recovered through fees in England is now approaching 100 per cent. and we will shortly be making an announcement about future fee levels.

Dearne Valley Partnership

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many permanent jobs have been provided with the involvement of Dearne Valley partnership within the city grant area; and what is the proportion of total expenditure by the partnership which each of these jobs represents. [2380]

Sir Paul Beresford: In the three years to 31 March 1995 the Dearne Valley strategy has helped to create almost 1,100 jobs. Three of the partnership's strategic objects relate to employment creation and have involved 55 per cent. of city challenge expenditure over the same period.

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what sums have spent in or with the involvement of the Dearne Valley partnership in each of the last three years on *(a)* land reclamation, *(b)* creation of employment, *(c)* administration and *(d)* social and community protection. [2379]

Sir Paul Beresford: The Dearne Valley partnership is responsible for overseeing the regeneration of the Dearne valley together with other public and private sector partners. The city challenge action plan has six strategic objectives.

SO1: To develop the local economy;

SO2: To diversify the local economy;

SO3: To improve education and skill levels;

SO4: To build capacity within the community;

SO5: To improve the physical environment;

SO6: To increase and improve the housing stock and its environment.

From a provisional city challenge annual allocation of £7.5 million, expenditure for which the Dearne Valley partnership is directly responsible was as follows:

£ thousands

	1992–93	1993–94	1994–95
Employment creation (strategic objectives 1, 2 and 3)	4,125.2	3,984.2	2,820.1
Administration	300.0	300.0	300.0
Community development (including community safety) strategic objective 4)	634.5	708.5	797.5

Land reclamation was funded through complementary non-city challenge, derelict land grant as follows:

£ thousand

	Land reclamation
1992–93	1,125.0
1993–94	3,561.0
1994–95	6,473.0

Source:
Dearne Valley Partnership.

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what sum has been expended by the Dearne Valley partnership in the fulfilment of its role in each of the last 10 years, and what is the estimated expenditure for the current year. [2381]

Sir Paul Beresford: The Dearne Valley partnership was formed in 1991. It has received city challenge funding since 1992. City challenge expenditure has been as follows:

1992–93: £7.10 million

1993–94: £7.15 million

1994–95: £7.50 million

1995–96: £8.65 million (estimate).

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many persons are employed in either a full or a part-time capacity by or in the Dearne Valley partnership; and what has been the total cost of this employment in each in the last three years. [2378]

Sir Paul Beresford: The Dearne Valley partnership currently employs 15 full-time staff. All city challenge partnerships are required to contain their running costs within 4 per cent. of their total five-year allocation. In the case of the Dearne valley, running costs—which include the costs of 10 staff, office accommodation and equipment, transport, supplies and services, and small consultancies—have been as follows:

1992–93: £300,000

1993–94: £300,000

1994–95: £300,000.

The remaining five staff form part of the marketing team and are funded separately within a marketing budget of:

1992–93: Nil

1993–94: £288,000

1994–95: £458,000.

Ostrich Farms

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many ostrich farms have been licensed under the Dangerous Wild Animals Act 1976, in each appropriate administrative area of Scotland, Wales, England and Northern Ireland. [2162]

Mr. Clappison: This information is not held centrally. Responsibility for the issue of licences under the Act rests with individual local authorities. The 1976 Act does not extend to Northern Ireland.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Royal Ordnance plc

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what was the relationship between his Department, Royal Ordnance and PRB; and which countries were supplied with armaments and defence equipment arising from it. [1032]

Mr. David Davis: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Minister for Defence Procurement on 24 November, *Official Report*, column *344*.

Research and Development

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what were the indicative contributions to the EU budget in respect of research and development for his Department in 1993–94. [1919]

Mr. David Davis: Table 2.1 of the statistical supplement to the "Forward Look of Government—funded Science, Engineering and Technology" contains indicative figures for the United Kingdom's contributions to the EC budget in respect of research and development. This Department does not have any policy responsibilities for Community research and development expenditure.

Fundamental Expenditure Review

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, when he expects to publish the fundamental expenditure review. [2316]

Mr. Hanley: I expect to place copies of the FCO, diplomatic wing, and ODA fundamental expenditure reviews in the Library of the House shortly.

European Free Trade Association

Ms Quin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the progress of negotiations about European Free Trade Association membership by countries of central and eastern Europe. [1233]

Mr. David Davis: No such negotiations are taking place. Slovenia has signed a bilateral free trade agreement with EFTA and Estonia has initialled a similar agreement. However, these agreements do not hold out the prospects of membership of EFTA. The central and east European countries with association agreements with the EU continue to aspire to membership of the EU itself.

EU National Parliaments

Ms Quin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what proposals his Department has to give effect to declaration No. 13 of the Maastricht treaty relating to the role of national Parliaments. [1235]

Mr. David Davis: The Government are committed to enhancing the role of national Parliaments in the EU and are considering a number of proposals to give fuller effect to declaration No. 13. These include proposals put forward by the European Legislation Committee.

UN Convention on Mercenaries

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on Her Majesty's Government's policy in respect of the United Nations convention on mercenaries. [1349]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: We do not intend to accede to the UN convention on mercenaries, as we believe that it would be difficult to enforce its provisions. Only nine states have now acceded to the treaty.

Military Equipment Embargoes

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the countries currently subject to embargoes on the export of British military equipment. [1350]

Mr. David Davis: We observe mandatory embargoes imposed by the United Nations on Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Liberia, UNITA (Angola) and Rwanda.

We will continue to observe the arms embargo on all the states of the former Yugoslavia in accordance with UN Security Council resolution 1021 of 22 November 1995.

We also observe embargoes imposed by the European Union on China, Burma, Zaire, Sudan and Nigeria.

We observe a voluntary embargo agreed by the then Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe on Armenia and Azerbaijan.

In addition, as a matter of declared national policy, we refuse to supply military equipment to Argentina and Iran.

Foreign Affairs Council

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the outcome of the Foreign Affairs Council, held on 20 to 21 November, giving details of all votes and all decisions which were determined by unanimity or without dissension. [1597]

Mr. David Davis: The A items listed in document 11618/95, which will be deposited in the Library of the House as soon as it is available, were adopted, except for that on Nigeria, which was the subject of substantive discussion.

The Council took note of the European Parliament resolutions in document 10794/95 PE-RE 73. A copy of this document will be deposited in the Library of the House as soon as it is available.

On Mediterranean policy, the Council discussed preparations for the Barcelona conference. It also considered the draft MEDA regulation, on assistance to countries in the Mediterranean region. The item was referred back to the Committee of Permanent Representatives for further consideration and will be examined again at the 4 to 5 December Council.

The Council briefly discussed the prospects for the 9 December Paris conference on economic assistance for Palestinians.

The Commission presented draft negotiating directives for a new EU-Chile framework co-operation agreement. This was remitted to COREPER for further work.

The Commission presented an outline of a communication on future humanitarian aid to former Yugoslavia, focusing on aid quantity and quality and the need to ensure success of future rehabilitation and repatriation programmes.

The Commission briefly introduced draft negotiating directives for an agreement between the EC and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. This was remitted to COREPER for further work.

The Commission also presented a paper on reconstruction, co-ordination and financing in former Yugoslavia. The Council took note and asked COREPER to take the work forward. The Council agreed to a fact-finding mission on the needs of the high representative and his staff and the principle of a joint action on the EU contribution to the costs of the high representative and his staff in Sarajevo and Brussels.

On Nigeria, the Council adopted a common position covering a ban on military sales, an extension of the visa regime to civilian members of the Nigerian Government and suspension of EU aid. The Council also agreed to examine further measures.

The Council agreed, by qualified majority, a negotiating mandate which would provide for 5 per cent. increases in agriculture quotas, year on year, for central and east European countries, with a list of exceptions. The UK, Denmark, Sweden and the Netherlands voted against, and issued an explanatory declaration. The Commission expressed strong regret at the Council's decision.

The Council adopted conclusions on EU-Russia relations.

The Council agreed in principle to an EU contribution to the Korean Peninsular Energy Development Organisation—KEDO—but instructed COREPER to consider the matter further, including the size of the EU contribution.

On EU-US relations, the Council agreed an action plan to be endorsed at the EU-US summit on 3 December, including a commitment to a study on ways to reduce and eliminate trade barriers.

The presidency gave a brief progress report on negotiations with third countries for tariff compensation following enlargement, under GATT article XXIV.6.

The Council agreed to the current proposed composition of the WTO appellate body.

The Council had a further discussion of a draft for a new TACIS—Technical Assistance for the Commonwealth of Independent States—regulation. COREPER was tasked to carry out further work and the Foreign Affairs Council will consider the issue again on 4 December.

Only one vote was taken—that on EU-central and eastern European agricultural trade.

The EU-Nepal co-operation agreement and the EU-Israel association agreement were signed in the margins of the Council. There were also meetings with the Foreign Ministers of the EEA and of Cyprus and Malta, in the context of the structured dialogue.

I should also like to take this opportunity to record that at a special meeting of the Foreign Affairs Council on 10 November the Council reached agreement on an EU-Morocco association agreement.

Small and Medium Enterprises

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what percentage of his Department's expenditure in 1994–95 was spent on procuring goods or services from small and medium enterprises. [1946]

Mr. Hanley: Business transacted by the FCO, diplomatic wing, with small and medium enterprises in the United Kingdom in 1994–95 accounted for 43.5 per cent. of its total expenditure on the purchase of goods and services.

The ODA does not collect statistics for procurement that record whether a company is of small or medium size.

Air Strikes, Srebrenica

Ms Quin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the information he has received since 12 July relating

to requests to United Nations headquarters in Zagreb in July for air strikes to protect Srebrenica. [2156]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: We have received no information which adds materially to the statement made in the House by my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary on 12 July.

Guatemalan Police Officers

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what form of training has been given by Britain to Guatemalan police officers in the period since July 1994. [2815]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: Britain has provided no training for Guatemalan police officers since July 1994. We have, however, sent two police experts in handwriting and fingerprinting to assess Guatemalan capabilities in this field. They went in July 1995.

Mr. Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what selection criteria are adopted when choosing Guatemalan police officers for training in Britain; and if this includes consideration of their human rights record. [2813]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: No Guatemalan police officers have been trained in Britain in recent years.

Correspondence

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when the hon. Member for Wallsall, North will receive a reply to his letter of 10 October concerning a constituent. [2725]

Mr. Hanley: The hon. Member's letter of 10 October to the Home Office on behalf of his constituent, Mr. Ashok Singh, was received in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office's migration and visa correspondence unit on 1 November. A reply was sent on 23 November.

International Sanctions

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he has taken, and on what dates, to freeze the personal accounts or assets of members of regimes with whom the United Kingdom is in dispute as part of a national or international sanctions policy. [2565]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor *[holding answer 27 November 1995]:* The United Kingdom has no unilateral sanctions in place against the assets or personal accounts of foreign regimes. However, we do implement the mandatory financial sanctions imposed by the UN Security Council. Such financial sanctions are in place against Iraq, in UNSCR 661—adopted on 6 August 1990—and Libya, in UNSCR 863—adopted on 11 November 1993.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Company Procedures

Mr. Robathan: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on company rescues following the recent consultation on company voluntary arrangements. [3079]

Mr. Oppenheim: The recent company voluntary arrangements consultation revealed continued support for the introduction of a short moratorium that is binding on all creditors. I therefore intend to introduce legislation to effect a scheme broadly as described in consultative document when parliamentary time allows, although usage will be restricted to small companies as defined in section 247 of the Companies Act 1985. However, I am still reflecting on what was said regarding the requirement to give five days' notice of the intention to appoint an administrative receiver. I have yet to decide whether it is necessary to have a mandatory provision, or whether, in response to the invitation I have issued to the British Bankers Association, the banks can come up with a binding code of practice which obviates that need.

Recent rescues of financially troubled companies, where, by agreement, debt is converted into equity, have proved very successful. However, it is evident that many are not aware of the rescue potential of debt equity swaps or how they work. I intend approaching those involved early next year to see how they think awareness and usage, in appropriate cases, can be increased.

I also propose at the same time to seek the views of banks, business and advisers on whether it is feasible to devise a mechanism whereby an administrative receiver, appointed following notice of an administration petition, can be replaced by an administrator in cases where it is clear that a floating charge holder's security can be shown not to be at risk. If this was possible, it would give the ordinary creditors the opportunity of some say in any rescue without prejudicing the secured creditors.

Legislation might provide a tool to achieve a rescue, but it cannot achieve a rescue of itself. The responsibility for that lies squarely on the shoulders of directors and their advisers. Remedial action should be taken earlier rather than later and this is the key to saving more companies. I therefore intend to discuss with business, banks and advisers what they can do to ensure that all those involved are aware of what must be done and when.

I am making arrangements for copies of the responses to the recent public consultation on CVAs to be placed in the library of my Department.

Distance Selling Directive

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will estimate the number of jobs in the United Kingdom arising from the implementation of the proposed European Union distance selling directive; and if he will make a statement. [2063]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: My Department has consulted interested parties on the cost of complying with the proposals tabled in the directive with a view to establishing the potential burden on business, and the extent to which they provide necessary consumer protection. We are content that the common position achieves a satisfactory balance, and we have not been made aware of any potential job losses.

Mr. Carlile: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations he has made to the European Union regarding the distance selling directive; and if he will make a statement. [2062]

Mr. Evans: A European Commission proposal for a directive on distance selling has been under negotiation since 1992. We have participated fully in negotiations in the Council of Ministers and its working group on this matter, and are, as a result, content with the common position adopted in June 1995.

Mr. Carlile: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on mail ordering and telemarketing sales techniques and the effects on British industry of possible changes in the rules governing telemarketing by the distance selling directive. [2064]

Mr. Evans: The Government are concerned that the European Parliament may vote for a proposal to make prior consent from consumers obligatory before unsolicited telephone sales calls can take place, and for other proposals which will prevent distance selling businesses from operating flexibly and efficiently. We have briefed Members of the European Parliament about United Kingdom concerns over the potential impact on industry and will be making further representations.

Research and Development

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what were the indicative contributions to the EU budget in respect of research and development for his Department in 1993–94. [1906]

Mr. Ian Taylor: Table 2.1 of the statistical supplement to the "Forward Look of Government-funded Science, Engineering and Technology" contains indicative figures for the United Kingdom's contributions to the EC budget in respect of research and development. My Department's policy responsibilities are subject to change and can vary from year to year. My Department currently has responsibility for 71.14 per cent. of the Community's research and development budget.

European Centre for Industrial Relations

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the President of the Board of Trade who represented Her Majesty's Government at the opening of the European Centre for Industrial Relations; what consultations took place; and if he will make a statement. [1039]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: Two officials—the head of DTI's industrial relations division, and the head of Department for Education and Employment's European Communities branch—attended the inauguration of the European Centre for Industrial Relations.

As mentioned in the Commission's social action programme for 1995–97, the centre was established at the initiative of the social partners at European level. The Commission issued a communication about the centre to the Council, COM (95) 445 final, on 25 September 1995. This will be deposited in the Library of the House under the usual procedures for depositing EU documentation and I am arranging for a copy to be sent to the hon. Member.

Walker Wingsail Systems

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what financial assistance was given by his Department to Walker Wingsail Systems plc, Plymouth, before 1988. [2303]

Mr. Page: My Department provided £207,500 in financial assistance to Walker Wingsail Systems Ltd. of Hamble, Hampshire under the support for innovation scheme before 1988, prior to the company's move to Plymouth.

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what monitoring has taken place of the grants made by his Department to Walker Wingsail Systems plc, Plymouth. [2302]

Mr. Page: Grants made to Walker Wingsail Systems Ltd. under the support for innovation scheme were monitored at each payment stage, to ensure that payments were in accordance with the approved project. In the case of financial assistance under the enterprise initiative consultancy scheme, payment of a proportion of the cost of consultancy advice provided to the company was made by my Department to the consultants via the external contractors appointed as SFI scheme managers. The company itself paid the balance. The contractors monitored the performance and quality of the consultants' work before agreeing to the payment.

Retail Newsagents

Mr. David Porter: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make it his policy to keep under review a further reference to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission on the supply of newspapers and magazines to the retail newsagents' sector; and if he will make a statement. [2090]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: This is a matter for the Director General of Fair Trading who, under the competition legislation, is responsible for keeping markets under review, and has independent powers to make a reference to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission.

Small Firms

Mrs. Roche: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the current position of the small firms training challenge. [1935]

Mr. Page: The first award winners in the skill challenge for small firms were announced jointly by myself and my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment on 22 November 1995, *Official Report*, columns *208–9*. Fourteen projects have been successful in the first round, involving about 180 companies.

The deadline for the second round of bids is 31 December 1995, with winners to be announced in mid-February 1996. A total of 100 projects will be funded, including the first 14, with an average award of around £50,000.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what advice his Department issues to other Government Departments regarding the tendering process for small firms. [1933]

Mrs. Roche: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many loans were made under the small firms loans guarantee scheme in each year since the scheme began. [1941]

Mr. Page: The number of loans guaranteed in each year since the scheme began is:

Year

1981–82: 3,351
1982–83: 6,045
1983–84: 4,889
1984–85: 2,081
1985–86: 543
1986–87: 1,042
1987–88: 1,222
1988–89: 2,266
1989–90: 3,204
1990–91: 3,387
1991–92: 2,933
1992–93: 2,342
1993–94: 3,886
1994–95: 6,207
1995–96: 3,585 (Estimated to September 1995).

Mr. Page: My hon. Friend the Economic Secretary to the Treasury is responsible for issuing guidance and best practice on procurement issues to Government Departments on the tendering process for all Government procurement.

In addition, this department also produces a guide for Government procurement officers on purchasing from small firms called "Think Big, Buy Small" and a guide for small firms on "Tendering for Government Contracts", which contains advice on and details of the procurement requirements for each of the Government Departments. Both of these publications are currently being updated.

Business Links

Mrs. Roche: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what has been the cost to public funds of the business links freephone number since it began; and how many calls it has taken in that time. [1930]

Mr. Page: The national business link freephone hotline was established in October 1994, utilising the existing 0800 500 200 number previously used for the enterprise initiative. The cost of calls and of the subsequent literature fulfilment to end October 1995, totalled £76,000 and 17,259 calls were handled during the period.

Small and Medium Enterprises

Mrs. Roche: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement regarding his Department's proposals for implementing the European Commission's community initiative for small and medium enterprises. [1937]

Mr. Page: The Community SME initiative programme for England will be implemented as a series of sub-programmes for each of the structural funds objective 1,2 and 5(b) areas in England for the period 1996 to 1999, with total Community funding of 47.4 mecu, £36.5 million. These programmes are being drawn up by Government offices, in consultation with local bodies in each area. The programmes are intended to focus on cross-frontier networking between SMEs in England and other Community member states, with projects normally delivered through business links, regional supply offices and training and enterprise councils. They will complement the additional funding for new, local designed, business development programmes which was announced in the competitiveness White Paper, "Forging Ahead", Cm 2867 last June. It is expected that area programmes will be agreed with the Commission from early 1996 and will open for applications from business support organisations shortly thereafter.

Separate programmes for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland have been adopted by Commission and operate under the responsibility of the Scottish, Welsh and Northern Ireland Offices.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what percentage of his Department's expenditure in 1994–95 was spent on procuring goods or services from small and medium enterprises. [1956]

Mr. Page: The information sought is not available and could be assembled only at disproportionate cost.

Patent Office Services

Mr. Touhig: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what considerations underlay his decision that a private sector organisation would be better equipped to deliver a specific Patent Office service; what will be the performance standard required; and if he will list the required criteria for the award other than value for money. [2099]

Mr. Ian Taylor: A number of Patent Office services are in the early stages of competitive tender to assess whether they can be better provided by the private sector. Any bids will be assessed against the benchmark of continuing in-house provision for higher quality or more cost-effective delivery. Additional criteria will be appropriate to the particular service but commonly include the bidder's understanding of the office's needs, the ability to bring innovative approaches to the delivery of the services, the continuity of services offered and commitment to developing a co-operative partnership with the DTI.

Mr. Touhig: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what systems are in place in the Patent Office to take account of benchmarking procedures when examining bids against in-house provision. [2097]

Mr. Taylor: In any contractorisation project, the Patent Office will draw up a benchmark based on the costs and quality of in-house provision. Guidelines have been developed to ensure that any benchmark is fair and soundly constructed.

Mr. Touhig: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what efficiency improvements have been agreed by staff and management in the Patent Office in regard to *(a)* benchmarking and *(b)* re-engineering; and what consultation procedures are in place with the trade unions. [2098]

Mr. Taylor: The Patent Office is constantly looking for ways to improve efficiency and quality of service through measures such as reorganisation of staff structures, re-engineering of work processes, and contractorisation.

Staff and their trade union representatives are consulted at appropriate stages in the implementation of these measures.

Mr. Touhig: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the proposed cost of Patent Office services currently under consideration for contracting out. [2100]

Mr. Taylor: Areas of the Patent Office which are under consideration for contracting out are the office's information technology services, its marketing and awareness programme, its accommodation and office services, and the operations of its London front office. The overall annual costs of these are £5.888 million, £1.608 million, £2.056 million and £1.125 million respectively.

Labour Statistics (Shipbuilding)

Ms Quin: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the numbers in employment in *(a)* shipbuilding and *(b)* ship repair for each of the last 10 years. [2153]

Mr. Page: The available information is given in the table. The figures are taken from the census of employment which was conducted every three years up to 1987 and every two years thereafter. Ship repairing is not separately distinguished from shipbuilding in the census.

Employment in Shipbuilding[1] in Great Britain

Thousands

	Employment[2]
1984	90.2
1987	58.2
1989	51.2
1991	47.0
1993	37.8

Source:
CSO Census of Employment (SIC 92).
[1] Including ship repairing.
[2] Figures are as at September of each year.

Mr. Michael Johnson

Mr. Sutcliffe: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he will have finished consideration of points of law in the case of Mr. Michael Johnson; and when he hopes to conclude the case. [2260]

Mr. Jonathan Evans *[holding answer 24 November 1995:]:* Consideration of points of law is a matter for the judiciary. I understand that Mr. Johnson won his industrial tribunal case for unfair dismissal and was awarded compensation in lieu of reinstatement. He subsequently applied to the tribunal chairman for a review of two aspects of the decision, but this request was refused. I am advised that Mr. Johnson was informed of this decision on 24 May 1995.

Irish Steel Ltd.

Mr. Hardy: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what action he will take with regard to the approval of the European Commission of state aid *(a)* before and *(b)* after the purchase of Irish Steel Ltd. by a foreign company. [2382]

Mr. Eggar: The European Commission's proposal to allow exceptional state aid for Irish Steel is subject to the unanimous approval of EU member states. The United Kingdom will not give its assent unless conditions are attached that will mitigate the adverse effects of the aid on the UK steel industry. The UK will ensure that the aid, if approved, is strictly monitored to ensure compliance with the agreed conditions.

Chronic Bronchitis and Emphysema

Mr. Clapham: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the total number of miners and former miners made an award for PD12D chronic bronchitis and emphysema, since September, broken down for each region. [1403]

Mr. Roger Evans: I have been asked to reply.

The information is not available in the format requested. The available information is set out in the tables:

Total number of PD 12D awards from October 1994 to September 1995 inclusive, analysed by Benefits Agency Area Directorate

Table 1

Southern England (by Benefits Agency Area Directorate)	*Awards*
AD1 Anglia	Nil
AD2 Chilterns	Nil
AD3 South London and West Sussex	Nil
AD4 West Country	3
AD5 East London and Essex	1
AD6 South East	1
AD7 Wessex	Nil
Total	5

Table 2

Wales and Central England	Awards
AD1 East Midlands	100
AD2 Midlands	1
AD3 West Mercia	21
AD4 Wales	147
AD5 Merseyside	Nil
AD6 Greater Manchester	1
AD7 Lancashire and Cumbria	12
Total	282

Table 3

Scotland and Northern England	*Awards*
AD1 Tyne Tees	49
AD2 South Yorkshire and Humberside	65
AD3 North and West Yorkshire	26
AD4 Glasgow and Paisley	Nil
AD5 North, Central and West Scotland	4
AD6 East Scotland	9
Total	153

Table 4

	Awards
Grand total	440

Note:
Includes 12 awards resulting from aggregation.
Source:
Benefits Agency central data unit 100 per cent. count, subject to amendment.

Mr. Clapham: To ask the President of the Board of Trade of those miners and former miners rejected for an award under the PD12D regulations, how many were refused on grounds of *(a)* X-ray evidence, *(b)* FEV test and *(c)* employment period, broken down for each region. [1404]

Mr. Evans: I have been asked to reply.

The available information is set out in the tables:

Claims for chronic bronchitis and emphysema (PD 12D) refused from October 1994 to September 1995, analysed by reason for refusal and by Benefits Agency Area Directorate

Table 1

Southern England	*X-ray*	*FEV1*	*20 year rule*
AD1 Anglia	2	Nil	2
AD2 Chilterns	1	Nil	Nil
AD3 South London and West Sussex	Nil	Nil	Nil
AD4 West Country	4	5	1
AD5 East London and Essex	Nil	1	3
AD6 South East	9	20	7
AD7 Wessex	Nil	Nil	Nil
Total	16	26	13

Table 2

Wales and Central England	*X-ray*	*FEV1*	*20 year rule*
AD1 East Midlands	169	188	24
AD2 Midlands and South West	6	3	4
AD3 West Mercia	57	68	18
AD4 Wales	287	424	71
AD5 Merseyside	12	13	10
AD6 Greater Manchester	1	3	3
AD7 Lancashire and Cumbria	30	48	14
Total	562	747	144

Table 3

Scotland and Northern England	*X-ray*	*FEV1*	*20 year rule*
AD1 Tyne Tees	105	138	10
AD2 South Yorkshire and Humberside	191	202	21
AD3 North and West Yorkshire	48	89	12
AD4 Glasgow and Paisley	13	9	1
AD5 North, Central and West Scotland	13	30	9
AD6 East Scotland	44	25	3
Total	414	493	56

Table 4

	X-ray	*FEV1*	*20 year rule*
Grand total	992	1,266	213

Source:
Benefits Agency central data unit. 100 per cent. count, subject to amendment.

Asbestosis

Mr. Clapham: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many miners and former miners have been diagnosed to be suffering from asbestosis for which an award has been made in the last 10 years broken down by region. [1173]

Mr. Evans: I have been asked to reply.

The information requested is not readily available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Cable Broadcasting

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage (1) if she will make it her policy to accelerate the introduction of digital terrestrial broadcasting in those rural and semi-rural areas which are not cabled; [2591]

(2) by what date digital terrestrial broadcasting is to reach 95 per cent. of the population of England. [2590]

Mr. Sproat: The Broadcasting Bill, announced in Her Majesty's Gracious Speech, will provide the legislative framework for the introduction of digital terrestrial television services. The Government propose that those who wish to provide these services be required to meet targets, set by the Independent Television Commission, for making them available by a specific time to a specified proportion of the population. The precise potential coverage of the available digital frequencies, and the speed and pattern of the introduction of services on them, will vary, and it is not possible as yet to predict the outcome of the licensing process the Bill will propose to introduce.

Satellite Broadcasting

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will make a statement on the future responsibilities of the ITC in respect of satellite broadcasters promoting television services in the United Kingdom which offend against public decency, following proposed United Kingdom and EC legislation. [158]

Mr. Sproat: The Government have no plans to change the ITC's responsibilities in this area.

Culture Council

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will make a statement on the outcome of the Culture Council, held on 20 November, giving details of all votes and all decisions which were determined by unanimity or without dissension. [1598]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Colchester, South and Maldon (Mr. Whittingdale) on 23 November *Official Report*, column *285–6*.

Legislative Repeals

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what legislation from her Department passed in the last five years contains provision for statutory repeal or review. [2040]

Mr. Sproat: My Department, since its inception in 1992, has introduced no legislation containing provision for statutory repeal or review.

BBC Charter and Agreement

Mr. Robert Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage when the BBC's new charter and agreement will be published. [3161]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: I have today placed in the Library of the House drafts of the BBC's new charter and the agreement between me and the corporation. The House will have an opportunity to consider these documents in the near future. The BBC's transmission services will be privatised. The BBC will retain the proceeds of sale related to licence fee funded transmission facilities.

The future costs of transmission will be regulated to ensure that the BBC does not pay more for the services that it currently needs and benefits from any productivity savings. This is good news for licence fee payers.

The BBC has welcomed these arrangements and said that it will invest the proceeds of sale within the BBC on digital production technology so that it is well placed to reap the benefits of digital broadcasting.

I look forward to a secure long-term future for the BBC's public services within the framework of the proposed new charter and agreement.

BBC

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage (1) what action her Department is currently taking in relation to the production of proposals for the future of the BBC's transmission services; [1744]

(2) when she first anticipated being able to make an announcement on the future of the BBC's transmission services; and what factors underlay the delay in making this statement; [1711]

(3) when her Department expects to be able to make an announcement on the future of the BBC's transmission services; [1713]

(4) what factors underlay the separate timings for *(a)* her announcements on the future of the BBC's transmission services and *(b)* the publication of her Department's guidance on digital terrestrial broadcasting. [1745]

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 23 November 1995]:* As indicated in my answer to the hon. Member for Nuneaton (Mr. Olner) on 20 November *Official Report*, column *44* we will announce our decision on the future of the BBC transmission services shortly. It was always our intention to announce our decision once we had fully explored with the BBC possible options for the future of its transmission services, taking account of the development of its plans for digital broadcasting. The policy document, "Digital Terrestrial Broadcasting", Cm 2946, was published in August to provide an opportunity for comment on the Government's proposals in order to inform the preparation of the Broadcasting Bill announced in the Gracious Speech.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Energy Efficiency

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what progress has been made towards cutting energy consumption in Government buildings for which she has responsibility, in each year since 1990. [1455]

Mr. Robin Squire: Prior to their merger in July 1995, energy consumption was reported separately for the former Employment Department group and the former Department for Education. The percentage changes, as issued by the energy and environment advisory division of the Department of the Environment, for each of the two former Departments, are as follows:

Percentage changes in energy cost per unit area (£/sq m) over base year 1990–91

(corrected for fuel costs and weather)

	1991–92	*1992–93*	*1993–94*
Employment Department Group	+1	+4	+2
Department for Education	+20	+82	+95

The substantial increase in energy consumption in DFE beginning in reporting year 1991–92 resulted from the transfer of London-based staff from a naturally ventilated building to a new building with heating and air conditioning plant, with a smaller floor area. The baseline for the energy-saving exercise applied to the old building.

Raw data for 1994–95 have been reported by both former departments to the energy and environment advisory division. Corrected figures are not yet available.

Degree Courses

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what research her Department has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated on the correlation between grades obtained at A-level and performance in higher education degree examinations. [1267]

Mr. Forth: My Department has not commissioned any research on this topic. There have been a number of such studies, usually small scale, and these have tended to show that there is a positive correlation between individuals' A-level score and degree class but this is small. It is for universities to determine the suitability of applicants for degree courses.

Severe Learning Difficulties

Dr. Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many schools catering for children with severe learning difficulties have invoked the national curriculum disapplication procedure, by local education authority, in each of the last three years. [1816]

Mrs. Gillan: Information is available only for 1994 and does not distinguish disapplication from modification of national curriculum requirements. The following table shows, for each local education authority in England, the number of maintained special schools approved to cater for pupils with severe learning difficulties which reported pupils for whom the national curriculum had been modified or disapplied in January 1994.

Maintained special schools approved to cater for pupils with severe learning difficulties and who have pupils for whom the national curriculum has been modified or disapplied January 1994

Local education authority	*Number of schools*
City of London	—
Camden	—
Greenwich	1
Hackney	1
Hammersmith and Fulham	—
Islington	—
Kensington and Chelsea	—
Lambeth	1
Lewisham	1
Southwark	1
Tower Hamlets	1
Wandsworth	1
Westminster	—
Barking	—
Barnet	—
Bexley	—
Brent	—
Bromley	—
Croydon	1
Ealing	1
Enfield	—
Haringey	—
Harrow	—
Havering	—
Hillingdon	—
Hounslow	—
Kingston upon Thames	1
Merton	—
Newham	—
Redbridge	—
Richmond upon Thames	—
Sutton	—
Waltham Forest	—
Birmingham	3
Coventry	—
Dudley	2
Sandwell	3
Solihull	—
Walsall	2
Wolverhampton	2
Knowsley	1
Liverpool	2
St. Helens	1
Sefton	1
Wirral	—
Bolton	—
Bury	—
Manchester	—
Oldham	2
Rochdale	1
Salford	1
Stockport	1
Tameside	—
Trafford	1
Wigan	—
Barnsley	1
Doncaster	3
Rotherham	1
Sheffield	—
Bradford	1
Calderdale	—
Kirklees	1
Leeds	1
Wakefield	—
Gateshead	—
Newcastle upon Tyne	—
North Tyneside	1
South Tyneside	2
Sunderland	—
Isles of Scilly	—
Avon	3
Bedfordshire	2
Berkshire	—
Buckinghamshire	2
Cambridge	2
Cheshire	—
Cleveland	2
Cornwall	3
Cumbria	3
Derbyshire	5
Devon	—
Dorset	1
Durham	2
East Sussex	1
Essex	1
Gloucestershire	2
Hampshire	4
Hereford and Worcester	3
Hertfordshire	2
Humberside	—
Isle of Wight	—
Kent	1
Lancashire	7
Leicestershire	—
Lincolnshire	6
Norfolk	4
North Yorkshire	3
Northamptonshire	1
Northumberland	—
Nottinghamshire	1
Oxfordshire	2
Shropshire	2
Somerset	—
Staffordshire	6
Suffolk	—
Surrey	1
Warwickshire	2
West Sussex	3
Wiltshire	—
England	121

Dr. Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what guidance she has issued as to the circumstances in which a school for children with severe learning difficulties should apply for the disapplication of national curriculum procedure. [1818]

Mrs. Gillan: The revised national curriculum statutory documents state that study material may be selected from earlier or later key stages where this is necessary to enable

individual pupils to progress and demonstrate achievement. This flexibility should reduce the necessity for formal disapplication or modification of the requirements.

Dr. Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what assessment she has made of the disadvantages for a school catering for children with severe learning difficulties of applying for national curriculum disapplication for some of its pupils. [1817]

Mrs. Gillan: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has made no such assessment. Pupils should be allowed to benefit from the national curriculum to the extent of their abilities, but it is not always possible to reconcile the difficulties of certain children with an entitlement to the full national curriculum. In these cases disapplication or modification may be appropriate.

Research and Development

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what were the indicative contributions to the EU budget in respect of research and development for her Department in 1993–94. [1908]

Mr. Forth: Table 2.1 of the statistical supplement to the "Forward Look of Government-funded Science, Engineering and Technology" contains indicative figures for the United Kingdom's contributions to the EC budget in respect of research and development. Departments' policy responsibilities are subject to change and can vary from year to year. The former Education and Employment Departments had responsibility for 1.5 per cent. of the Community's R and D budget.

Capital Expenditure, Derbyshire

Mr. Hendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will set out the outturn figures for capital expenditure in each Derbyshire school for the last 10 years. [2215]

Mrs. Gillan: This information is not collected centrally.

Teleworkers

Mr. Miller: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what action she intends to take to extend existing employment and health and safety regulations to protect teleworkers. [2117]

Mr. Forth: Teleworkers are covered by existing employment and health and safety regulations in the same way as other workers. The Employment Department published "A Manager's Guide to Teleworking" in May 1995 which contains information and advice on existing regulations. The Government at present see no need for special regulations on teleworkers.

Deregulation

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) what were the costs to public funds involved in preparing the cost-benefit assessment contained in the explanatory memorandum for the Deregulation Length of the School Day Order 1995; [2017]

(2) what estimates she has made of the annual saving to business which accrue from the Deregulation Length of the School Day Order 1995. [2018]

Mr. Forth: As the explanatory memorandum makes clear, there are no cost implications involved in these proposals; so no cost-benefit assessment was required.

The Deregulation Length of the School Day Order 1995 is intended to speed up alterations to school session times. Schools do not receive extra funds for having a longer day or reduced funds for having a shorter day. Any savings to schools and their governing bodies will be measured in time saved in implementing changes to the length of the school day.

Nursery Vouchers

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will make available information about the proposed Bill on nursery education in simple text and pictorial format and on audio tape for people with learning difficulties. [1966]

Mr. Robin Squire: An information leaflet for parents about the nursery voucher scheme is already available in ethnic minority languages, braille and on audio cassette.

A more detailed policy document on the nursery voucher scheme will be published early in the new year, including a version for parents.

Small and Medium Enterprises

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what percentage of her Department's expenditure in 1994–95 was spent on procuring goods or services from small and medium enterprises. [1944]

Mr. Forth: The information is not available in the form requested.

Small Firms

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how much public money has been invested in small firms training loans since their launch. [1934]

Mr. Paice: Between June 1994, when small firms training loans were introduced, and the end of October 1995, £404,000 in Government funding has been spent on the scheme.

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many firms have applied for loans from the small firms training loans programme; and what is the total amount to date out on loan. [2265]

Mr. Paice: At 21 November, 44 small firms training loans had been agreed, with £427,728 on loan. The banks have informed the Department that six applications for loans have been rejected.

Job Sharing

Ms Quin: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what new proposals she has to encourage job sharing. [2157]

Mr. Forth: In the deregulated labour market of the United Kingdom more people work in flexible working patterns than in most other European countries. The Government encourage employers to consider the benefits of flexible working patterns, which can be particularly attractive to people who wish to combine a job or career with family commitments. The Department for Education and Employment and the former Employment Department have published a number of booklets, including "The Best of Both Worlds", "Be Flexible" and "Rising to the Challenge", providing information and advice on flexible working arrangements, including job sharing.

Assisted Places Scheme

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how much has been spent by the Government on the assisted places scheme *(a)* in total, up to but not including the latest available year and *(b)* in the latest available year; what additional money will be made available in the planned expansion of the scheme; and how many pupils are involved in the latest available year in (i) Manchester grammar school, (ii) Manchester high school for girls and (iii) William Hume's grammar school, Manchester. [2740]

Mrs. Gillan: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) on 24 October, *Official Report*, column *623*.

The amount available for the scheme in the supply estimates for the financial year 1995–96 is £104.4 million. Provision for 1996–97, when the scheme's expansion is planned to begin, and for succeeding years will be announced in due course. The numbers of pupils holding assisted places in the current academic year—1995–96—at the three Manchester schools cited are (i) 262, (ii) 179 and (iii) 220 respectively.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Public Interest Immunity Certificates

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will list all those in his Department who have authority to issue public interest immunity certificates; how many such certificates have been issued in each of the last five years; and what were the main reasons for them. [1418]

Mr. John M. Taylor: A claim to public interest immunity relating to departmental documents or information is normally made by the appropriate Minister. No public interest immunity certificates have been signed either by me or the Lord Chancellor since our appointments.

Divorce Reform

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will make a statement on his proposals for divorce reform. [1406]

Mr. John M. Taylor: The Family Law Bill, which was introduced in another place on Thursday 16 November, includes provisions to reform the law on divorce.

Energy Efficiency

Mr. Battle: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary Lord Chancellor's Department what progress has been made towards cutting energy consumption in Government buildings for which he has responsibility in each year since 1990. [1435]

Mr. John M. Taylor: The progress made towards cutting energy consumption in the Government buildings for which I am responsible, in each year since 1990, is as follows:

1990–91: base year

1991–92: + 1.30 per cent.

1992–93: – 3.93 per cent.

1993–94: – 3.98 per cent.

1994–95: – 4.30 per cent.

The total energy consumption savings in real terms to March 1995 in buildings for which I am responsible is 10.91 per cent.

Small and Medium Enterprises

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what percentage of his Department's expenditure in 1994–95 was spent on procuring goods or services for small and medium enterprises. [1949]

Mr. John M. Taylor: The information requested is not held centrally, and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Small and Medium Enterprises

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what percentage of his Department's expenditure in 1994–95 was spent on procuring goods or services from small and medium enterprises. [1950]

Mr. Horam: The information is not held centrally and is available only at disproportionate cost.

Ministerial Transport, London

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many times in the last year he has used *(a)* London Underground and *(b)* London Buses while on official business. [380]

The Deputy Prime Minister: None.

Public Interest Immunity Certificates

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list all those in his office who have authority to issue public interest immunity certificates; how many such certificates have been issued in each of the last five years; and what were the main reasons for them. [1424]

The Deputy Prime Minister: A claim to public interest immunity relating to departmental documents or information is normally made by the appropriate Minister. I have not, nor have others within the Office of Public Service, its immediate predecessors or executive agencies, signed public interest immunity certificates in relation to the Department or its executive agencies in the last five years.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will list all those in his office who have authority to issue public interest immunity certificates; how many such certificates have been issued in each of the last five years; and what were the main reasons for them. [1393]

Mr. Freeman: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister today.

HMSO

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster when he expects to make a statement on the future of HMSO. [2127]

Mr Freeman: As I announced on 17 October, we are currently consulting the authorities in the House and the other place on the safeguards necessary for the future provision of printing and publishing services to Parliament. I also announced that I have appointed Coopers and Lybrand to examine the options for the future of HMSO with a view to privatisation, and I am awaiting its report. I will be making a further oral statement when we have reached a decision on the way forward, which I hope will be before the Christmas recess.

Executive Agencies

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he has met personally the heads of agencies which report to him to discuss the work of those agencies. [3099]

The Deputy Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer that I gave him on 1 November, *Official Report*, column *318*.

PRIME MINISTER

Remuneration

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Prime Minister what considerations underlay the rates of remuneration of *(a)* members of police authorities and *(b)* members of health authorities and non-executive directors of trusts. [2234]

The Prime Minister: Remuneration reflects the duties and responsibilities of the individuals concerned.

Ministerial Statements

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Prime Minister if the statements made by the Minister of State for the Armed Forces on 20 November about the mentality of the Princess of Wales represented Her Majesty's Government's policy. [2409]

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend made it clear that he was speaking in a personal capacity.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Prime Minister if the statement made by the Minister of State for the Armed Forces subsequent to the television broadcast of the Princess of Wales represents the view of Her Majesty's Government. [2081]

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend made it clear that he was speaking in a personal capacity.

EU Finances

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Prime Minister what account he has taken of the *Official Journal* of the European Communities, C303, volume 38, for 14 November 1995 in determining Her Majesty's Government's policy. [2802]

The Prime Minister: I welcome the European Court of Auditors' annual report on the implementation of the 1994 budget published on 14 November. I believe that the court's reports are an important tool in improving the management of the Community's finances and I will continue to insist that the full account is taken of them.

Arms Exports

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Prime Minister what is Her Majesty's Government's policy on assessing the degree to which children have been involved in past conflicts in countries for which export licence applications for military equipment have been made. [2773]

The Prime Minister: We are committed to a responsible policy of defence equipment sales and routinely encourage other arms suppliers to observe similar responsibility in their own export policies. We take into account the human rights record of recipient states when considering applications for an export licence.

The United Kingdom is committed to promoting human rights worldwide.

Human Rights (Turkey)

Mr. Alton: To ask the Prime Minister (1) what priority he will accord to the human rights record of Turkey in respect of its treatment of the *(a)* Assyrian, *(b)* Armenian and *(c)* Greek Christian minorities in determining whether to support Turkey's admission to the European Customs Union; [2577]

(2) if he will make a statement on his discussions in respect of the persecution of *(a)* Assyrian, *(b)* Armenian and *(c)* Greek Christian minorities in Turkey arising during his meeting with Prime Minister Tansu Ciller. [2576]

The Prime Minister: I did not specifically touch on the question of Christian minorities in Turkey with Prime Minister Ciller. We discussed the outlook for human rights in Turkey, and Mrs. Ciller assured me of her commitment to further reforms. We fully support the proposed Customs Union between the European Union and Turkey, and we hope to see it launched on schedule at the start of 1996.

Head of State

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Prime Minister what representations he has received regarding the constitutional position of the head of state. [2667]

The Prime Minister: I have received a number of representations on constitutional matters.

Asylum and Immigration Bill

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Prime Minister if he will place in the Library copies of the letter sent to him by the statutory Newham police communities consultative committee dated 17 November concerning the proposed Asylum and Immigration Bill and his reply. [2689]

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Home Department has replied to the Newham police communities consultative committee.

Crown Estate

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Prime Minister who owns the Crown Estate. [2242]

The Prime Minister: The Crown Estate is held in right of the Crown, but its income forms the major part of the hereditary revenues of the Crown that have been surrendered to the Exchequer in return for the civil list by each monarch since 1760. The Crown Estate is managed by Commissioners under the Crown Estate Act 1961. Copies of the Commissioners' annual reports are available in the Library of the House.

Mr. Prentice: To ask the Prime Minister what official valuation has been made of the Duchy of Cornwall estate. [2241]

The Prime Minister: Information on certain of the Duchy of Cornwall's capital assets is shown in the annual accounts presented to Parliament. The accounts for 1994, presented on 7 June 1995, HC 464 record the net sum as £86,913,196. Assets such as the unique Isles of Scilla have been in the estate for centuries and are regarded as inalienable; these and other long-held assets are not reflected in the figure. By charter and statute, the capital assets cannot be eroded. The Duchy Management Acts 1863–1982 make the Treasury responsible for the capital to generate income for future Dukes.

Crown Jewels

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the items which constitute the Crown Jewels. [2859]

The Prime Minister: By a strict definition the Crown Jewels are the objects used or worn by the Sovereign during the ceremony of the Coronation. The most famous of these are the Imperial State Crown, St. Edward's Crown and the Jewelled Sceptre. However, the expression Crown Jewels is used colloquially to cover the contents of the Jewel House at the Tower of London, an inventory of which is maintained by the royal collection.

Princess of Wales

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Prime Minister (1) if he will make a statement on the constitutional implication of the views expressed by Her Royal Highness the Princess of Wales about the possibility of her becoming Queen; [2080]

(2) if his statement of 9 December 1992, *Official Report*, column *845*, that there is no reason why the Princess of Wales should not be crowned Queen in due course still represents Her Majesty's Government policy. [2079]

The Prime Minister: I have nothing further to add to my statement of 9 December.

Deregulation

Mr. Steen: To ask the Prime Minister what is the total estimated annual saving to business which will accrue in respect of the rules and regulations he identified for repeal in his answer of 6 November, *Official Report*, column *546*. [2065]

The Prime Minister: In addition to the £40 million savings identified in my answer of 6 November, *Official Report*, column *546*, further examples identified include: £30 million a year from simplification of trade marks legislation; £23 million a year from changes in the regime for the slaughter of poultry; £10 to 15 million a year from simplification of the procedures under the Companies Act 1985 for companies which have ceased to trade; cash flow savings of £75 million a year as a result of raising the threshold of the quarterly payment of PAYE and national insurance contributions from £450 per month to £600 per month. The total annual saving to business arising from all regulations identified for amendment or repeal is not available.

Small and Medium Enterprises

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Prime Minister what percentage of his Department's expenditure in 1994–95 was spent on procuring goods or services from small and medium enterprises. [1953]

The Prime Minister: For these purposes my office is part of the Cabinet Office. I refer the hon. Member to the reply given today by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Office of Public Service.

TREASURY

Best Practice Guidelines

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish his Department's best practice guidelines for Government Departments. [1931]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The Treasury issues a great deal of best practice and other guidance in documents such as "Government Accounting", which is published by HMSO, and other guidance notes such as those produced by the Treasury's central unit on procurement.

Deregulation

Mr. Steen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what were the costs to public funds involved in preparing the cost benefit assessment contained in the explanatory memorandum for the Deregulation *(a)* Friendly Societies Act 1992, *(b)* Credit Unions and *(c)* Building Societies Orders 1995. [2022]

Mrs. Angela Knight: It is not practical to estimate the costs to public funds of preparing the assessments contained in the explanatory memoranda, because these, along with the other work involved in preparing the draft orders, were contained within the normal running costs of the Registry of Friendly Societies and the Treasury.

Mr. Steen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the annual saving to business which will accrue from the Deregulation *(a)* Friendly Societies Act 1992, *(b)* Credit Unions and *(c)* Building Societies Orders 1995. [2021]

Mrs. Knight: The estimated savings are included in the explanatory memoranda laid with the three draft orders. These will be significant in some areas, such as removing the requirement for a credit union to demonstrate the existence of a common bond. In others, savings will depend on the extent to which societies and credit unions take advantage of the benefits proposed. In addition, the changes will provide new opportunities for growth by giving institutions increased flexibility in their operations or greater freedom to expand their business.

Small and Medium Enterprises

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what percentage of his Department's expenditure in 1994–95 was spent on procuring goods or services from small and medium enterprises. [1958]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The Treasury does not distinguish between different sizes of supplier: it seeks best value for money in procurement. The information requested, therefore, is not available.

Part-time Work and Job Sharing

Ms Quin: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to alter *(a)* the national insurance and *(b)* the taxation systems to encourage (i) part-time work and (ii) job sharing. [2154]

Mr. Jack: The hon. Lady would not expect me to anticipate my right hon. and learned Friend's Budget statement.

Nigerian Military Regime

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what methods are available to him for assessing the value of the assets in Britain belonging to the Nigerian military regime; [2563]

(2) what methods are available to him for assessing the whereabouts and value of the financial accounts held in Britain belonging to the Nigerian military regime; [2564]

(3) if his Department has details of the value and number of personal accounts held in Britain by members of the Nigerian military regime; [2811]

(4) what is the value of the personal accounts and assets held in Britain by members of the Nigerian military regime. [2815]

Mrs. Angela Knight: Details of bank accounts are always kept confidential unless the authorities have reason to suspect the commission of a crime in the United Kingdom. We have no exchange controls and therefore cannot trace money flowing in and out of such accounts. Access to registers of assets such as shareholdings or property is the same as for any other holder of such assets.

Gardening Leave

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will list the grades of Treasury staff that qualified for gardening leave between 1993 and 1995 indicating the relevant salary bands for each year; [532]

(2) if he will list the number of staff on the grades qualifying for gardening leave for the periods mentioned in his answer of 2 November, *Official Report*, column *428*, excluding any such staff on permanent secondment to other Departments. [973]

Mrs. Angela Knight: Staff do not qualify for "gardening leave". This term is used to cover those not working, but excluding those on statutory paid leave, maternity leave or long-term sick leave. It is Treasury policy to provide opportunities for temporary work for staff between postings whenever possible. This policy applies to staff at all grades but generally it affects only staff at grade 7 and below. The salary bands for these grades are published in the "Civil Service Management Code" which is available in the House of Commons Library. The Treasury staff in post figures for the periods requested are given in the table.

Her Majesty Treasury staff in post by quarter

Full-time equivalents

	1993	1994	1995
1 January	—	1,849	1,305
1 April	—	1,387	1,127
1 July	1,924	1,362	1,092
1 October	1,891	1,349	1,080

1. The table includes Forward, until it was privatised in February 1994.
2. The table excludes staff on loan to other Departments or on secondment but paid directly by outside organisations but includes staff on secondment that are paid by the Treasury and then reimbursed.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the total number of his staff who served on gardening leave during 1994. [974]

Mrs. Knight: The total number of staff who were on "gardening leave"—those not working, but excluding those on statutory paid leave, maternity leave and long term sick leave—during 1994, was 23.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will state the average length of gardening leave periods undertaken in *(a)* 1994 and *(b)* 1995. [531]

Mrs. Knight: The average period of time on "gardening leave"—those not working, but excluding those on statutory paid leave, maternity leave or long term sick leave—was 20 weeks in 1994 and 18 weeks, until 1 October, in 1995.

Taxation

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what would be the cost, in respect of tax revenues forgone, of disregarding one-off payments for long-term care insurance from the current

limits which apply to tax-free capital lump sums taken on retirement; [88]

(2) what would be the cost of making payments for long-term care insurance tax deductible; [89]

(3) what estimate he has made of the current cost of *(a)* men and *(b)* women of long-term care insurance bought in a one-off payment upon retirement. [171]

Mr. Jack: It would not be appropriate for me to comment on tax matters at this stage of the Budget cycle.

Mr. Ainsworth: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the direct revenue yield in a full year at 1995–96 levels of income from restricting *(a)* personal allowances, *(b)* relief from pension contributions and *(c)* other reliefs, to relief at 25, 20 and 15p, giving in each case the numbers of people affected. [82]

Mr. Jack: Estimated full-year yields at 1995–96 income levels based on a projection of the 1993–94 survey of personal incomes and other survey data in line with the assumptions in the summer economic forecast are given in the table. The figures do not take account of any behavioural effects which might result from the introduction of such changes, and show the yield from restricting each allowance or relief separately. If two or more were restricted the total yield would be greater than the sum of the individual figures.

£ million

	Basic Rate		*Restriction to: 20 per cent.*		*15 per cent.*	
Effect of restricting	*Yield*	*Numbers affected*	*Yield*	*Numbers affected*	*Yield*	*Numbers affected*
(a) Personal allowances	1,400	3.2	5,700	26.1	10,600	27.9
(b) Relief for pension contributions	720	1.9	1,410	11.9	2,130	12.9
(c) Other reliefs	160	0.7	[1]n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

[1] Information on reliefs given at source is not available from the survey of personal incomes so it is not possible to estimate the effect to restricting other reliefs to 20 per cent. or 15 per cent.

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much income tax was raised in the financial year 1978–79; and what percentage came from the top rate of income tax and from tax on investment income. [126]

Mr. Jack: The total income tax liability in 1978–79 is estimated to have been £20.3 billion. The other information requested is not readily available. Detailed analytical tables showing the distribution of incomes and of income tax were published in "The Survey of Personal Incomes 1978–79", a copy of which is in the library.

Mr. Ainsworth: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what would be the effect on the number of taxpayers in the financial year 1996–97 and on the number of higher rate taxpayers of *(a)* indexation, *(b)* raising the main personal allowances by five per cent. more than indexation, and *(c)* raising personal allowances by 10 per cent. more than indexation, giving figures separately for each main allowance and a total for main allowances. [81]

Mr. Jack: Estimates based on statutory indexation and with income levels projected to 1996–97 levels using the summer economic forecast are as follows.

Estimated number of income taxpayer 1996–97

Millions

	Total	Of which higher rate taxpayers
(a) Indexation	25.9	2.2
(b) (i) Increasing personal allowance for those aged under 65 by 5 per cent. more than indexation	25.6	2.2
(ii) Increasing personal allowance for those aged 65 or over by 5 per cent. more than indexation	25.7	2.2
(iii) Increasing all personal allowances by 5 per cent. more than indexation	25.5	2.2
(c) (i) Increasing personal allowance for those aged under 65 by 10 per cent. more than indexation	25.4	2.2
(ii) Increasing personal allowance for those aged 65 or over by 10 per cent. more than indexation	25.6	2.2
(iii) Increasing all personal allowances by 10 per cent. more than indexation	25.1	2.2

EU Budget

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what proportion of that expenditure from the EC's 1994 budget which the Court of Auditors has qualified is attributable to the United Kingdom; [168]

(2) what proportion of that expenditure from the 1994 budget which the Court of Auditors qualified is attributable to fraud as against accounting errors by *(a)* each member state and *(b)* the Commission. [169]

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The statement of assurance—SOA—published by the Court of Auditors on 14 November 1995 is global in nature. It does not seek to make an assessment of particular areas of spending nor does it seek to analyse accounting or other errors by member states or by the institutions of the Community. An explanatory memorandum on the SOA will shortly be deposited in Parliament.

Inheritance Tax

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people and what percentage of taxpayers in Lancashire are liable for inheritance tax on estates valued over *(a)* £160,000, *(b)* £200,000, *(c)* £300,000, *(d)* £400,000, *(e)* £500,000, *(f)* £1,000,000 and *(g)* £2,000,000. [1988]

Mr. Jack: I regret that this information is not available.

Labour Statistics

Mr. McAvoy: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the size of the United Kingdom labour force in each of the past five years; what were the activity rates for men and women during those years; and what were the numbers and proportion of self-employed. [1812]

Mrs. Angela Knight: Estimates for the United Kingdom from the labour force survey are shown in the tables following:

	Economically active (thousands)			*Economic activity rate (percentage of all persons aged 16 and over)*		
Spring	*All*	*Men*	*Women*	*All*	*Men*	*Women*
1991	28,592	16,247	12,345	63.5	74.8	52.9
1992	28,581	16,187	12,395	63.1	73.8	53.0
1993	24,447	16,021	12,426	62.7	72.9	53.1
1994	28,433	15,996	12,436	62.5	72.5	53.1
1995	28,426	15,981	12,445	62.4	72.2	53.1

	Self-employed (thousands)			*Self-employed as a percentage of all persons in employment*		
Spring	*All*	*Men*	*Women*	*All*	*Men*	*Women*
1991	3,402	2,582	820	13.0	17.5	7.2
1992	3,227	2,438	789	12.5	17.0	6.9
1993	3,184	2,384	800	12.5	17.0	7.0
1994	3,301	2,480	820	12.8	17.5	7.1
1995	3,355	2,544	811	12.9	17.7	7.0

Correspondence

Sir Ralph Howell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish the letters to the hon. Member for North, Norfolk from the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, dated 13 October 1993, reference cst.ps/dr/11mp12.10. [1669]

Mr. Waldegrave: A copy of the letter has been placed in the Library of the House.

Fuel Duties

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will rearrange fuel duties to reduce the retail prices of the least polluting fuels for motor vehicles. [2145]

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I cannot anticipate my right hon. and learned Friend's Budget statement.

Mortgage Dealers

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the regulatory bodies which oversee the work of firms which sell or offer advice on mortgages which do not include an investment element in them. [2320]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The Bank of England supervises United Kingdom authorised banks; the Building Societies Commission supervises building societies. Credit institutions authorised in other members of the European Economic Area which provide services in the UK are supervised by their home state authorities.

Spirits Duty

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will list the excise duty receipts from spirits in each of the first six months of the present and the last tax year; [2140]

(2) if he has adjusted the forecast duty from spirits; [2142]

(3) if he will estimate the shortfall in estimated duty receipts from spirits for the current year. [2141]

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The table shows spirit duty receipts for the first six months of 1995–96 were approximately 93 per cent. of revenues in the first six months of 1994–95. The outturn for the whole of 1994–95 was £1.776 billion.

HM Treasury's summer economic forecast contained a figure of £1.9 billion spirits receipts in 1995–96. The next set of forecasts will be published on Budget day in the 1996–97 "Financial Statement and Budget Report".

£ million

Month	*1995–96*	*1994–95*
April	112	126
May	106	128
June	129	134
July	121	122
August	115	121
September	128	134

This information is published every month by the Central Statistical Office in "Financial Statistics", table 2.1D.

Mr. Bottomley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when the Treasury model for tax on spirits was last adjusted. [2143]

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The models used for spirits duty receipts are reviewed regularly.

Earnings Rates

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish hourly and weekly wage rates for 1992 and 1995 together with the percentage change between the two, according to data from the "New Earnings Survey" deflated by the retail prices index, for *(a)* full-time manual men on adult rates, *(b)* full-time non-manual men on adult rates, *(c)* full-time manual women on adult rates, *(d)* full-time non-manual women on adult rates and *(e)* full-time men and women on adult rates, giving the figures for 10th, 25th, 50th, 75th, and 90th percentiles and the mean in each case. [2324]

Mrs. Angela Knight *[holding answer 24 November 1995]:* The 10th, 25th, 50th, 75th and 90th percentiles and the mean for the categories requested are published in part A, table 1 of the "New Earnings Survey", for 1992 and 1995. To compare data for the two years in question the retail prices index, all items, should be used. This information is published in the "Central Statistical Office Business Monitor" MM23. Copies of the publications can be found in the Members' Library.

Interest Rates

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what are current interest rates; what was the average for the period February 1974 to May 1979 and May 1979 to date; and if he will make a statement. [1489]

Mrs. Angela Knight *[holding answer 23 November 1995]:* The rate, measured by the clearing banks' base rate, is currently 6.75 per cent.

The average interest rate, represented by the Bank of England's minimum lending rate, between February 1974 and May 1979 was 10.53 per cent. From May 1979 to date minimum lending rate—or clearing bank base rate in periods when MLR was not posted—has averaged 10.92 per cent.

The rates for recent periods can be found in table 7.1J of the CSO's "Financial Statistics", a copy of which is in the Members' Library.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Prisoner Statistics

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many male and female prisoners were held by the Prison Service on *(a)* 27 May 1993 and on *(b)* 27 November 1995. [1084]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Pearson to Mr. Paddy Tipping, dated 27 November 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question asking how many male and female prisoners were held by the Prison Service on (a) 27 May 1993 and (b) 27 November 1995.

Figures for 27 May 1993 are not available. However, on 31 May 1993 there were 42,091 male and 1,494 female prisoners held by the Prison Service. Figures are not yet available for 27 November 1995. I will write to you again with these details as soon as they become available.

Small and Medium Enterprises

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what percentage of his Department's expenditure in 1994–95 was spent on procuring goods or services from small and medium enterprises. [1948]

Mr. Howard: The information required to answer this question is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Prisoner Repatriations

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he intends to take decisions on application by detained Irish nationals to be repatriated to prisons in the Irish Republic; and if he will make a statement. [2427]

Miss Widdecombe: The Council of Europe convention on the transfer of sentenced persons came into effect for the Republic of Ireland on 1 November 1995.

Under the convention, both jurisdictions, as well as the prisoner concerned, are required to consent to repatriation before any transfer can take place. Requests will be determined on their individual merits as and when information is available to all parties to enable informed decisions on consent to be made.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if those British citizens detained in prisons overseas who were received by the United Kingdom in the last five years, including those returned from America, were subject to remission and parole policies prevailing in the United Kingdom; [2429]

(2) how many British citizens detained in prison overseas who have applied to be repatriated to prisons in the United Kingdom have had their applications refused over the last five years to date; and if he will list the countries from which the applications were made. [2426]

Miss Widdecombe: Repatriation requires the consent of both jurisdictions and the prisoner concerned. Information is held only in cases where the United Kingdom withholds consent. In the last five years, one prisoner, a British national imprisoned in Canada, has been refused repatriation.

Under the terms of the Repatriation of Prisoners Act 1984 and the international agreements entered into by the United Kingdom for the repatriation of prisoners, the United Kingdom is responsible for administering the balance of a prisoner's sentence remaining to be served at the date of transfer. Repatriated prisoners are considered for release under the same rules which apply to other prisoners convicted here.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he intends to take a decision on the transfer on compassionate grounds of Patrick Kelly and Michael O'Brien to prisons in Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement. [2428]

Miss Widdecombe: The requests for transfer to Northern Ireland made by Patrick Kelly and Michael O'Brien were refused on 26 September. Their requests did not meet the criteria for transfer. They had no known links with Northern ireland and they were not previously resident there before their present convictions.

Their requests for transfer were, none the less, considered on an exceptional basis. It was not considered that sufficient compelling or compassionate grounds existed for allowing the transfers exceptionally.

Patrick Kelly has submitted fresh evidence in support of his request for transfer to Northern Ireland. This is currently under consideration. Mr. Kelly will be advised as soon as a decision has been made.

Dartmoor Prison

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how often the Governor of HM prison Dartmoor authorised the use of *(a)* bodybelts, *(b)* ankle straps, *(c)* handcuffs and *(d)* special segregation unit cells between January 1990 and the present date; [2092]

(2) on how many occasions since January 1990 prisoners in HM prison Dartmoor were kept in bodybelts for more than 12 hours. [2093]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for these matters has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. David Jamieson, dated 27 November 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Questions about the use of restraints at Dartmoor prison.

Since January 1990, the governor of Dartmoor has authorised the use of a bodybelt on three occasions, once for 4 hours 45 minutes, once for 19 hours 5 minutes and once for 24 hours. The use of ankle straps has not been authorised during the period concerned.

Handcuffs are used routinely when escorting prisoners outside the secure perimeter of the prison to court or to another prison. They have only been used within the prison twice, on a prisoner who had staged a roof-top protest at another prison and had threatened to repeat the protest at Dartmoor. The governor decided that the prisoner would be handcuffed when moving from his cell to the visits area in order to reduce the possibility of him carrying out the threat.

The segregation unit special cells have been used on 331 occasions from January 1990 to date.

Ms Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) on how many occasions in the last five years from which figures are available inmates at Dartmoor prison have been *(a)* detained in a strip cell known as the box and *(b)* restrained by bodybelt for both medical and non-medical purposes; [2263]

(2) what is the *(a)* shortest, *(b)* longest and *(c)* average time during which inmates in Dartmoor prison are detained in a bodybelt or mechanical restraint. [2264]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for these matters has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Ms Jean Corston, dated 27 November 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Questions about the use of restraints at Dartmoor prison.

There are two special cells in the segregation unit at Dartmoor. They contain no furniture other than a low level plinth on which a prisoner may lie down and a small stool on which he may sit, both fastened to the floor of the cell. Since January 1991, the cells have been used on 281 occasions to locate prisoners who have exhibited behaviour which could result in them harming themselves or others. There have been two occasions since January 1991 when a prisoner at Dartmoor has been restrained in a bodybelt.

Since January 1990, the governor of Dartmoor has authorised the use of a bodybelt on three occasions, once for 4 hours 45 minutes, once for 19 hours 5 minutes and once for 24 hours. The use of ankle straps has not been authorised during the period concerned.

Drug Abuse (Prisons)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the average number of disciplinary actions taken against prisoners for illegal drug use in each of the past five years. [2165]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Paul Flynn, dated 27 November 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the average number of disciplinary actions taken against prisoners for illegal drug use in each of the past five years.

Use of a controlled drug by prisoners in Prison Service establishments became a disciplinary offence in January 1995 under Prison and Young Offender Institution Rules. Provisional data for the period from January to October 1995 show that there have been 921 proved adjudications for this offence.

EC Measures

Mr. Ian Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many EC measures impose fines or other criminal penalties on people and businesses in the United Kingdom. [2091]

Miss Widdecombe: EC measures do not impose fines or other criminal penalties directly: they are implemented by means of United Kingdom law.

Information about criminal penalties imposed to comply with our EC obligations is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Immigration

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will place a copy of Commissioner Gradin's proposals on immigration, asylum policy and border controls put to the recent meeting of the Justice and Home Affairs Council in the Library; and if he will make a statement on Her Majesty's Government's policy in respect of these proposals. [2826]

Miss Widdecombe: The meeting of the Justice and Home Affairs Council at La Gomera on 14–15 October 1995 was an informal meeting and as such took no formal decisions. I have, however, provided a summary of the discussions to the Home Affairs Select Committee and the Select Committee on European Legislation.

During the meeting, Ministers considered the prospects for the third pillar of the treaty on European Union at the forthcoming intergovernmental conference. Commissioner Gradin expressed the view that immigration and asylum policy should be transferred into Community competence. She did not, however, put forward any formal proposals.

The Government do not share that view. We firmly believe that the matters dealt with under the third pillar, including immigration and asylum, should remain subject to intergovernmental co-operation. There was broad agreement with this position from other member states at La Gomera.

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish a Green Paper and a White Paper concerning current trends and problems in the fields of asylum and immigration and his proposals for legislation. [2690]

Miss Widdecombe: We have no plans to publish a Green Paper or a White Paper on these matters. The statement that my right hon. and learned Friend made to the House on 20 November identified a number of pressing issues requiring early action. Parliament will shortly have the opportunity to debate the Government's proposals for legislation.

Frontier Controls

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is Her Majesty's Government's policy on the European Commission's three proposed directives on the right to travel and the elimination of controls on persons crossing the internal frontiers of the European Union. [2828]

Miss Widdecombe: The Commission's proposals are not acceptable, as they conflict with our firm determination to maintain the United Kingdom's frontier controls with other member states of the European Union. Explanatory memoranda on the draft directives were laid on 12 October 1995.

Justice and Home Affairs Council

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department who represented Her Majesty's Government at the meeting of the Justice and Home Affairs Council in the Canary Islands on 14 and 15 October. [2825]

Miss Widdecombe: The Government were represented at the informal Council in La Gomera by Mr. Timothy Walker, a deputy Under-Secretary of State at the Home Office and the United Kingdom delegate to the K4 committee.

Police Patrols

Ms Janet Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what evidence he has that beat patrolling by police constables has suffered as a result of greater emphasis on panda car patrols. [1673]

Mr. Maclean: There needs to be a balance between foot and mobile police patrolling to meet the operational requirements of individual forces and the communities which they serve. This is a matter for chief constables to decide.

Ms Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police officers are employed on the beat at any one time, per head of population. [1677]

Mr. Maclean: This information is not centrally collected. At the end of March 1995, 68,240 officers were deployed to patrol duties in England and Wales.

Private Security Industry

Ms Janet Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will be in a position to respond to the first report of the Home Affairs Select Committee of Session 1994–95, HC 17, on the private security industry. [1674]

Mr. Maclean: The Government are looking in detail at the recommendations contained in the Select Committee report and will give a full response as soon as possible.

Ms Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent representations he has received about regulation of the private security industry. [1691]

Mr. Maclean: We have received a total of 16 representations in the last two months.

Vulnerable Prisoner Units

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the number of vulnerable prisoner units that exist in prisons in England and Wales; and if he will list these establishments. [1704]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Tom Cox, dated 27 November 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about vulnerable prisoner units in prisons in England and Wales.

Vulnerable prisoner units, as distinct from segregated accommodation requiring controls under Prison Rule 43 or Young Offender Institution Rule 46, exist in 37 establishments as shown in the list annexed to this letter.

Annexe

Acklington Prison
Albany Prison
Blakenhurst Prison
Brinsford Young Offender Institution and Remand Centre
Cardiff Prison
Castington Young Offender Institution
Channings Wood Prison
Dartmoor Prison
Doncaster Prison
Dorchester Prison
Durham Prison
Elmley Prison
Frankland Prison
Full Sutton Prison
Glen Parva Young Offender Institution and Remand Centre
High Down Prison
Holme House Prison
Lewes Prison
Lincoln Prison
Littlehey Prison
Liverpool Prison
Low Newton Remand Centre
Maidstone Prison
Manchester Prison
Risley Prison
Rochester Prison
Shepton Mallet Prison
Stafford Prison
Styal Prison and Young Offender Institution
[1]Usk Prison
Wandsworth Prison
Wayland Prison
[1]Whatton Prison
Whitemoor Prison
Wolds Prison
Woodhill Prison
[1]Wymott Prison

[1]Establishments holding only vulnerable prisoners.

Prison Costs

Ms Janet Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the average annual cost per prison place. [1697]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Ms Janet Anderson, dated 27 November 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the average annual cost of a prison place.

In 1993–94, the last year for which information has been published, the net operating cost per place per year was £22,712.

Police Force Statistics

Ms Janet Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the average annual change in the number of police officers in England and Wales between *(a)* 1974 and 1979, *(b)* 1980 and 1990 and *(c)* 1991 and 1995. [1678]

Mr. Maclean: The average annual increase in police strength was as follows:

	Number
(i) 1974 to 1979	+2,245 [1] officers
(ii) 1980 to 1990	+1,378 officers
(iii) 1991 to 1995 (March)	+31 [2] officers

[1] This includes an increase in actual police strength of 1,816 between May 1979 and December 1979.

[2] This figure obscures an average annual increase of 424 constables in this period, which has been achieved by a significant delayering of the police service's management structure.

Metropolitan Police

Ms Janet Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what percentage of staff in the Metropolitan police are involved in *(a)* operational duties and *(b)* non-policing functions. [1679]

Mr. Maclean: I understand from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis that all police officers are available for operational duties. Currently, 88.7 per cent. of police officers and 37.2 per cent. of civilian staff are allocated to operational duties, and 11.3 per cent. of police officers and 62.8 per cent. of civilian staff to non-operational support duties.

Prison Reports

Ms Janet Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his estimate of the additional costs of implementing the recommendations of the Woodcock and Learmont reports during 1995–96. [1682]

Miss Widdecombe: The implementation of the Woodcock report is expected to cost about £60 million in 1995–96. Whether the Prison Service will require additional provision to cover these costs will emerge in February 1996 at the time of the spring supplementary estimates. No additional expenditure is forecast in 1995–96 for the implementation of the Learmont report. The Prison Service is now considering General Sir John Learmont's recommendations in detail and until that work is completed the likely cost of implementation cannot be assessed.

Ms Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what progress has been made in implementing the recommendations of the Woodcock report. [1684]

Miss Widdecombe: The timetable for implementation of the recommendations made in the Woodcock report was published on 8 February. To date, 33 recommendations have been implemented and the remaining 31 have been implemented in part.

The majority of the recommendations not yet fully implemented require major construction work. A construction programme—which started with those prisons holding the highest categories of prisoners—is under way. That programme is currently being reviewed in the light of the recommendations in General Sir John Learmont's review of security across the Prison Service.

Remand Prisoners

Ms Janet Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his current estimate of the average length of time for which remand prisoners are held prior to commencing trial. [1698]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Ms Janet Anderson, dated 27 November 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question asking, what is his current estimate of the average length of time for which remand prisoners are held prior to commencing trial.

The available information is for the estimated average time in custody for untried prisoners. Figures for 1994 are given in the attached table.

Estimated average time spent in custody for untried prisoners, in Prison Service establishments in England and Wales in 1994[1] by sex

	Estimated average number of days in custody[3]	
Type of custody	*Male*	*Female*
Untried[2]	59	44

[1] Provisional figures.

[2] Time spent in custody before conviction.

[3] Estimated from number of receptions and average population in 1994.

Sentencing Policy

Ms Janet Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to publish a White Paper on sentencing. [1700]

Mr. Maclean: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to her on 26 October *Official Report*, column 755–56.

Prison Population

Ms Janet Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what is his current estimate of the size of the prison population at 31 March 1995; [1688]

(2) how many prisoners he expects to be held in England and Wales by the end of the current financial year. [1694]

Miss Widdecombe: The latest projection, produced in October, is for the prison population in England and Wales on 31 March 1996 to be around 53,400. The population was projected from current trends and assumptions but past experience has shown the likelihood of unforeseen departures from the trend.

Ms Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what increase in the numbers of prisoners he expects to take place by the end of 1995. [1692]

Miss Widdecombe: The latest projection, produced in October, is for the prison population in England and Wales on 31 December 1995 to be around 50,000. This compares with a population of 52,410 on 22 November 1995. The December figure will be depressed in comparison to other months due to the seasonal downturn at the end of the year. The population was projected from current trends and assumptions but past experience has shown the likelihood of unforeseen departures from the trend.

COPEX Exhibition

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what police presence was provided at the COPEX exhibition at Sandown racecourse in November; and at what cost. [1640]

Mr Maclean: I understand from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis that a total of 22 officers policed the COPEX exhibition at an estimated additional total cost of £1,050.00.

Prison Education Service

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what provision exists in the prison education system to cater for prisoners who *(a)* already have achieved and *(b)* have not achieved educational success. [397]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. George Howarth, dated 27 November 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about what provision exists in the prison education system to cater for prisoners who (a) already have achieved and (b) have not achieved educational success.

A high proportion of prisoners have low educational attainments. Priority in prison education is therefore given to dealing with basic learning deficits. Adult basic education courses in literacy and numeracy are provided at all adult establishments and courses in English for speakers of other languages are provided where required. We are in the process of implementing a national core curriculum which emphasises adult basic education and social and life skills, English for speakers of other languages, information technology, and how to be an effective learner. In addition, courses are made available at the discretion of the individual governor in accordance with orders placed on the education provider (usually a college of further education) which holds the contract for that establishment.

There are opportunities for prisoners who wish to undertake advanced academic studies, including, in some cases, study for A Levels and enrolment as undergraduates with the Open University, or with other universities as external students.

Not all of the courses available to prisoners are geared towards academic or vocational success. Prisoners of all abilities can derive benefit from art and craft classes and activities, or distance learning materials obtainable through the education department for open and flexible learning. More advanced students may study for GNVQs and GCSE in various subjects and some establishments run vocational training and construction industry training courses, with opportunities to achieve National Vocational Qualifications.

Doncaster Prison

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if the use of HM prison Doncaster for immigration detainees is now a permanent arrangement; [479]

(2) who took the decision to hold immigration detainees in Doncaster prison; and on what date the decision was taken. [400]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for these matters has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. George Howarth, dated 27 November 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Questions about the decision to hold immigration detainees in Doncaster prison and whether its use for that purpose is now a permanent arrangement.

The decision to use a unit in Doncaster prison for holding immigration detainees was taken in June 1994 and formally announced on 13 June 1994.

Because of population pressures and reservations subsequently expressed by the Immigration and Nationality Department of the Home Office as to its suitability for holding Immigration Act detainees, only limited use, on grounds of operational expediency, has been made of Doncaster for the holding of persons detained solely under the Immigration Act 1971. There are currently three such persons detained there. It has not been formally removed from the list of Prison Service establishments designated for the holding of such detainees but the Prison Service and the Immigration and Nationality Department are considering possible alternatives.

Mr. Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many detainees Doncaster prison holds at any one time; where the prison detainees are being held; what special facilities have been made available for the detainees; and what provisions there are in the contract signed in February 1994 between the Home Office and the contractor for this arrangement. [401]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. George Howarth, dated 27 November 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about how many detainees Doncaster prison holds at any one time; where the prison detainees are being held; what special

facilities have been made available for the detainees; and what provisions there are in the contract signed in February 1994 between the Home Office and the contractor for this arrangement.

There is no agreed number of detainees held in Doncaster. There are currently three detainees, detained solely under the Immigration Act 1971, held at Doncaster. Two are in normal accommodation and one, who is a paraplegic, in the Health Care Centre.

Detainees at Doncaster have access to the same facilities as other prisoners. There are no special facilities specifically for detainees.

The contract between the Home Office and Premier Prison Services (PPS) requires PPS to hold up to 771 prisoners at Doncaster. A prisoner is defined as "any person for the time being detained in legal custody as a result of a requirement imposed by a court or otherwise that he be so detained". This includes detainees.

Blakehurst Prison

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list steps taken to implement each of the recommendations set out on pages 86 to 97 inclusive of Judge Tumim's inspection report on Her Majesty's prison Blakenhurst published on 1 February 1995 by *(a)* UK Detention Services Ltd. and *(b)* the Prison service. [386]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. George Howarth, dated 27 November 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons on Blakenhurst prison.

The attached note, a copy of which will be placed in the Library of the House, gives details of the steps taken to implement each of the recommendations to the Director General of the Prison Service, the Prison Service area manager responsible for Blakenhurst and the Director of the establishment.

ANNEXE

Recommendations to the Director General

8.01 Deficiencies in meeting the contract should be addressed by all parties in particular as follows:

Examination of Contractor's financial records excluding prisoner earnings (Schedule 1.21 (v))
The Contract (Schedule 1, condition 21(v)) requires the contractor to keep books of account which are made available to inspection. The Contractor complied with the contract by making accounts available as and when requested.

Revision of Schedule 3 price (Schedule 1.21(iv))
Price revision is a commercial matter, subject to negotiation between the Contractor and the Prison Service, and dependent on consideration of the relevant indices issued by Central Statistical Office and their insertion in the price revision formula given in Schedule 3 of the contract. Both parties are complying with this procedure.

Progress reports (Schedule 1.36)
Progress reports have been supplied when requested by the Prison Service in full compliance with the contract. In addition regular meetings have been held between the Prison Service and UKDS, often with the on-site Prison Service Controller and the director of the prison present, to discuss progress as well as performance.

Identify specific records to be kept (Schedule 1.37)
Specific records have been identified and kept by the Contractor including maintenance schedules, prisoner damage reports, escorting and prisoner population records in full compliance with the contract.

Regular reviews of cleaning programme (Schedule 2.20)
A programme was agreed formally on 23 July 1993. Weekly reports are submitted to the Controller, together with frequent reviews held at minuted meetings.

Prisoner compacts (Schedule 2.69)
A system was drawn up and agreed between Contractor and Controller on 25 June 1993 and formally reviewed on 28 April 1994. When the inspection team visited the compact was not being used because of a failure in communication between two UKDS departments. The director put the system back into use during the inspection week.

Prisoners involved in decision making and methods of doing so (Schedule 2.72)
At the time of the inspection prisoners were members of the unit and food meetings, this continues but even more prisoner involvement is planned. This arrangement complies with the contract.

Consultancy/free telephone to Citizens Advice Bureau (Schedule 2.100)
The Citizens Advice Bureau offers a consultancy on Wednesday evenings. Free telephone calls are available house block senior custody officers. This meets the requirements of the contract.

Regime review (Schedule 2.118)
Since Blakenhurst was incorporated into the Prison Service line management in April 1994, regime monitoring has been fully implemented.

Commercial arrangements for prisoners' work (Schedule 2.121) and review of Business Plan (Schedule 2.121)
It has proved difficult for UKDS to generate much commercial work for prisoners because of the shortage of high grade "real wages" work appropriate for prisoners. At present this is offered in the Komatsu Shop, which refurbishes industrial machinery. The "real wage" system began on 21 November 1994 and involves a maximum of ten prisoners.

Continuing review and improvement of the induction/assessment policy (Schedule 2.130)
Revised induction/assessment is now in operation and fully meets the contract.

Contacts by prisoners with the community prior to release (Schedule 2.131)
The arrangements for resettlement have in the past been a cause for concern because the throughcare input lacked sufficient thrust and direction. This has been much improved with the arrival of a new senior probation officer and greater cooperation. The director/chief probation officer contract has been reviewed and action taken to revitalise weak areas. The area manager has requested additional throughcare proposals from UKDS.

Treatment programme for convicted sex offenders (Schedule 2.135)
Although the Contract refers to the national "core" programme, The Prison Service subsequently agreed that this was not appropriate for a local prison. The sex offender treatment programme at Blakenhurst is an assessment programme and the contractual wording has been amended to reflect that.

8.02 The contract document should be strengthened to take fuller account of offers made in the Contractor's tender submission (2.13)
The contractor is obliged by the contract to deliver the services in conjunction with, and in the spirit of, his tender. There would be some difficulty enforcing this—a weakness that has been rectified in subsequent contracts.

8.03 The amount of assistance which can appropriately be given to the Contractor by the Controller should be defined clearly (2.22)
HMCIP felt that the Controllers were taking too active a role in management. In the early days this was the case. But it has not fettered the Controllers' capacity to inspect and monitor. When the Area Manager took line responsibility in April 1994 the Controller's role was reviewed. New job descriptions for the Controller and his deputy were agreed on 4 May 1994. They meet the point made by the Inspectorate.

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RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE AREA MANAGER

8.04 The extent of monitoring local financial information by the Controller and area manager should be reviewed.
Under the contract, UKDS receive a lump sum for running the prison. The Prison Service has no control over how this is spent as long as the contract is not breached in any way.

8.05 The monitoring of each part of the contract should be more methodical and records should be kept of the date on which each aspect is examined.
This formal monitoring is now being carried out.

8.06 Category D prisoners should not be held in secure accommodation.
Six category D prisoners are retained for special work places and all others have been transferred.

8.07 The director should receive copies of all relevant Prison Service instructions, advice to governors and information notices including copies of briefing papers.
This is now done.

8.08 A shower should be provided in the kitchen for the inmate work party.
This is still under consideration by the director.

8.09 Consideration should be given to providing a secure treatment room on the ground floor of the hospital and one in the vulnerable prisoner unit.
This recommendation was considered but rejected by the director.

8.10 The Prison Service should take back unwanted class 1 locks and reimburse the contractor for those not used.
This has been done.

8.11 An emergency exit door should be provided in the education department leading from either the glass engraving or the cookery rooms to the outside walkway.
Automatic closures have been fitted to the door as recommended in the fire safety report of June 1993.

8.12 Technical advice should be sought about the effect of the screening of the vulnerable prisoner spur on the airflow in the event of a fire.
Advice has been received and is being considered.

8.13 Privacy screening should be provided around the bath in reception.
This has been done.

8.14 The facilities in the vulnerable prisoner unit should be upgraded to overcome the claustrophobic atmosphere and provide a proper servery, adequate storerooms and offices, and opportunities for more activities.
A storeroom has been provided together with an improved trolley system. The other recommendations were rejected on cost grounds.

8.15 Equipment required by the optician and physiotherapist should be supplied.
The equipment has been supplied.

8.16 The alarm system for the hospital should be reviewed.
This has been done and the appropriate action taken.

8.17 The use of the special medical room should be reviewed in comparison with other local prisons.
This is now being done.

8.18 The security of the treatment/dispensing room should be improved.
The security of the doors has been improved.

8.19 An ultrasonic instrument cleaner should be supplied for the dentist.
This has now been supplied.

8.20 There should be a doctor's consulting suite on the VP unit with a properly equipped doctor's interview room and a separate treatment room.
This is not required. Prisoners from the VPU attend the health care centre for interviews and treatment.

Racially Motivated Crime

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish a breakdown of the numbers of racially motivated crimes reported over the last 15 years for each police authority in the United Kingdom. [1530]

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 24 November 1995]:* The available information relates to reported racial incidents in England and Wales since 1989 and has been provided by Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary. The figures for 1994–95 will be published shortly. Figures for Scotland and Northern Ireland are matters for the Secretary of State in each Department.

Reported racial incidents by police force area: 1989 to 1993–94

Police force area	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	[1]*1993–94*
Avon and Somerset	71	83	148	98	159
Bedfordshire	25	33	0	57	60
Cambridgeshire	60	71	107	110	100
Cheshire	0	0	3	29	98
Cleveland	55	57	68	73	50
Cumbria	4	1	9	13	17
Derbyshire	20	53	143	60	221
Devon and Cornwall	3	6	9	7	14
Dorset	12	3	9	10	25
Durham	23	41	70	40	32
Essex	26	43	59	80	133
Gloucestershire	20	51	25	33	28
Greater Manchester	40	123	204	401	658
Hampshire	50	42	141	139	212
Hertfordshire	49	51	0	106	117
Humberside	52	67	81	68	79
Kent	81	88	120	56	160
Lancashire	93	201	119	231	262
Leicestershire	190	287	369	338	315
Lincolnshire	2	2	4	5	4
City of London	0	0	0	0	1
Merseyside	123	144	162	134	155
Metropolitan Police	—	2,908	3,373	3,227	[2]5,124
Norfolk	22	23	45	30	33
Northamptonshire	72	66	60	120	102
Northumbria	217	289	376	349	405
North Yorkshire	6	12	20	22	22
Nottinghamshire	27	135	221	222	264
South Yorkshire	52	117	124	151	106
Staffordshire	44	101	158	95	117
Suffolk	62	74	75	55	73
Surrey	7	7	50	61	79
Sussex	141	92	98	98	214
Thames Valley	128	171	201	195	166
Warwickshire	21	44	32	35	87
West Mercia	6	13	3	19	100
West Midlands	169	268	445	379	487
West Yorkshire	306	254	322	218	244
Wiltshire	19	25	29	24	51
Dyfed Powys	0	0	0	0	0
Gwent	4	5	12	31	21
North Wales	1	0	3	4	2
South Wales	94	308	385	311	400
England and Wales	[2]2,397	6,359	7,882	7,734	10,997

[1] Financial year data. Some of the increase in total reported incidents in 1993–94 may be attributable to the implementation of a precise definition of a racial incident when included in the Police Service Performance Indicator Suite.

[2] Adjusted figure (due to a change in classification criteria) from that given in the Official Report (24 June 1994, Column 330).

[3] Excluding Metropolitan Police.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Executive Agencies

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Attorney-General if he will list for his executive agencies for the last financial year in respect of overseas travel by agency staff *(a)* the costs of the travel, *(b)* the countries visited and *(c)* the posts held by the staff concerned. [2286]

The Attorney-General: The one executive agency for which I am responsible is Government Property Lawyers. No member of staff of the agency travelled overseas in an official capacity in the financial year 1994–95.

Small and Medium Enterprises

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Attorney-General what percentage of his Department's expenditure in 1994–95 was spent on procuring goods or services from small and medium enterprises. [1942]

The Attorney-General: The information requested is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Local Government

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Attorney-General if he will list the Acts of Parliament and Consolidation Acts that affect local government that have been introduced by his Department since January 1994. [2831]

The Attorney-General: The Solicitor-General took through the House of Commons the Statute Law (Repeals) Act 1995 which effected the repeal of certain obsolete and unnecessary local enactments. Subject to this, no Acts of Parliament affecting local government have been introduced by my Department since January 1994.

Public Interest Immunity Certificates

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Attorney-General if he will list all those in his Department who have authority to issue public interest immunity certificates; how many such certificates have been issued in each of the last five years; and what were the main reasons for them. [1428]

The Attorney-General: A claim to public interest immunity relating to departmental documents or information is normally made by the appropriate Minister. Any claim relating to my own department would be made by me or, in my absence, the Solicitor-General. I am also responsible for three departments headed by a statutory officer holder: the Director of Public Prosecutions, the director of the Serious Fraud Office and the Treasury Solicitor. They may make a public interest immunity claim relating to their departments, after consultation with me. The following claims have been made inter partes. The director of the Serious Fraud Office made a claim in 1994, by affidavit, to preserve the confidentiality attaching to documents and information relating to the internal decision making process of the SFO.

In addition, I am aware of two certificates used in 1991 and 1992 in proceedings in Northern Ireland. Both were signed by my predecessor and were intended to preserve the confidentiality attaching to exchanges between the Director of Public Prosecutions for Northern Ireland and the Royal Ulster Constabulary.

LORD PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

Lockerbie

35. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will set up a Select Committee to examine the circumstances of the destruction of Pan Am 103 over Lockerbie. [682]

Mr. Newton: As I told the hon. Gentleman in my answer to his similar question on 23 October 1995, *Official Report*, column *458*, there are no plans to do so.

Members' Pay

38. **Mr. Steen:** To ask the Lord President of the Council when he plans to review hon. Members' pay. [685]

Mr. Newton: As I indicated in the debate on ministerial salaries on 26 October, *Official Report*, column 1191, my aim is to maintain arrangements under which hon. Members' pay can be increased annually in a fair and sensible way, without the need for annual debate.

Trade Union Sponsorship

39. **Mr. David Shaw:** To ask the Lord President of the Council when the Privileges Committee last examined the relationship between an hon. Member and any trade union sponsorship applicable to that Member. [688]

Mr. Newton: The function of the Committee of Privileges, which is to be replaced by the Select Committee on Standards and Privileges, is to consider matters of complaint of breach of privilege referred to them by the House.

Complaints relating to trade union sponsorship have been referred to the Committee on a number of occasions. The most recent report of the Committee relating to such a complaint is the first report from the Committee of Session 1990–91—House of Commons Paper No. 420—which contains details of earlier cases.

Legislation (Scrutiny)

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Lord President of the Council what consideration he has given to including departmental Select Committees in the procedures for the scrutiny of legislation. [687]

Mr. Newton: None, but my hon. Friend may wish to draw the matter to the attention of the Procedure Committee.

Energy Efficiency

Mr. Battle: To ask the Lord President of the Council what progress has been made towards cutting energy consumption in Government buildings for which he has responsibility in each year since 1990. [1434]

Mr. Newton: The Privy Council Office is housed within the Cabinet Office estate. I accordingly refer the hon. Member to the reply given on behalf of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment to my hon. Friend the Member for East Surrey, (Mr. Ainsworth) on 17 May 1995, *Official Report*, column *2600*.

Drugs Information

Mr. Rathbone: To ask the Lord President of the Council what plans he has to distribute the leaflet, "Tackling Drugs Together: Information for Parents, Businesses and Communities"; and when the distribution will take place. [1500]

Mr. Newton: Over 5,000 copies of the leaflet, which is intended to involve local communities in the Government's strategy to tackle the misuse of drugs, have already been sent to the 105 drug action teams which have recently been set up across England, in accordance with the White Paper "Tackling Drugs Together". Copies have also been placed in the Library of the House.

The drug action teams are determining the distribution arrangements for the leaflet in the light of their local knowledge and developing plans to engage their communities—including parents and businesses—in tackling local drugs problems. Some drug action teams are, for example, planning to distribute the leaflet to all GP surgeries.

WALES

Air Pollution

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales on how many occasions air pollution levels have exceeded recommended official Government levels in each county and for Wales as a whole, in each of the last three years for which information is available; and if he will make a statement. [470]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: There are currently four European directives on air quality which set mandatory and non-mandatory limits for lead, sulphur dioxide and suspended particles, nitrogen dioxide and ozone levels in the air.

In the last three years the relevant thresholds were breached at Government monitoring sites in Wales as follows:

Limit	*Site*	*Number of Exceedences* *1992*	*1993*	*1994*
Taken on a daily basis:				
Ozone information threshold	Aston Hill	3 days	1 day	1 day
	Cardiff	2 days	—	1 day
Taken on an annual basis:				
Guide value for SO_2	Cwmgwrach	Exc.	—	—
	Port Talbot	Exc.	—	—
	Glynneath	Exc.	Exc.	Exc.
Taken on an annual basis:				
Guide value for suspended particles	Wrexham	—	Exc.	—

Exc.= Exceeded the Guide values, based on the average daily readings taken over the year.

Further information is available in the environmental digest for Wales and the report "Air Pollution in the UK 1993–94", copies of which are in the Library of the House.

Emergency Hospital Beds

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make it his policy to require each NHS trust to publish information regarding the frequency of closure of admittance to emergency hospital beds. [638]

Mr. Richards: I have no such proposals, but I would expect trusts to make this information available locally on request.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the frequency of the closure of admittance to emergency hospital beds, expressing the number of beds so closed as a proportion of the total number of hospital beds and indicating the percentage increase or decrease, in each case, for each NHS trust and for Wales as a whole for the last two years for which information is available. [898]

Mr. Richards: Operational information of this kind is not held centrally.

Out-of-town Superstores

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, if he will list all out-of-town superstores *(a)* for which planning applications were made and *(b)* for which planning consent was granted since 1990, indicating the dates; and if he will make a statement. [1085]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: This information is not collected centrally.

Correspondence

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if it is the policy of his Department for Ministers to reply to hon. Members' letters in the language requested by those hon. Members. [1767]

Mr. Hague: If an hon. Member requests that we reply in Welsh or in English we will comply with that request.

Legislative Repeals

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what legislation from his Department passed in the last five years contains provision for statutory repeal or review. [2039]

Mr. Hague: My Department has been responsible for promoting a small number of Bills in the last five years. None contains provision for statutory repeal or review.

Small and Medium Enterprises

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what percentage of his Department's expenditure in 1994–95 was spent on procuring goods or services from small and medium enterprises. [1959]

Mr. Hague: The information requested is not held centrally.

Dry Stone Walls

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what *(a)* grants and *(b)* other support will be available from his Department for the conservation and protection of dry stone walls from April 1996. [2328]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Grants for the restoration, conservation and protection of dry stone walls are available from the Welsh Office in those parts of Wales which are designated as environmentally sensitive areas and those areas which come under the Tir Cymen pilot scheme administered by the Countryside Council for Wales. Support under these schemes will continue beyond April 1996.

Assistance towards the provision, replacement or improvement of walls is also available throughout Wales under the farm and conservation grant scheme which is currently due to end on 19 February 1996. I have asked my officials to investigate the possibilities that may exist to enable the continuation in Wales of grant aid for capital works—including dry stone walling—that are available under the scheme. We shall make an announcement in due course.

SCOTLAND

Hospital Closures

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many closure proposals are currently being submitted by NHS trusts and boards with regard to long-term stay in Scotland; and if he will list the hospitals targeted for closure. [1272]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I have approved the closure of Gartloch, Woodilee, Gogarburn, Broomhill and Lochmaddy hospitals. All will remain open until such time as the planned reprovision of accommodation and services are in place and available.

Proposals affecting Lochgreen, Lennos Castle, Craig Dunain and Eastbank hospitals have been submitted by the respective health boards for my consideration.

Closure proposals are a matter for the health boards. Before they are presented for my decision the health boards must conduct a public consultation exercise in every case. On receipt of closure proposals I look for confirmation that genuine consultations have taken place; that the reprovision arrangements are appropriate; and that the health board has agreed its proposals with the local social work and housing authorities.

District Nurses and Health Visitors

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what are the numbers of district nurses and the numbers of health visitors employed in Scotland, broken down by real frequency and whole-time equivalents for the years between 1988 and 1995 inclusive. [1269]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The information is set out in the tables.

Health visitors and district nurses[1]: by qualification

Headcount: at 30 September

	1988	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*[2]1995*
Health visitors	1,753	1,793	1,762	1,889	1,843	1,823	1,786	1,758
Health visitors[3]	1,609	1,651	1,612	1,676	1,640	1,630	1,609	1,588
Health visitor with combined duties[4]	144	142	150	213	203	193	177	170
District nurses	[5]3,220	2,727	2,702	2,696	2,687	2,650	2,672	2,691
District nurses[3]	[5]2,575	2,104	2,104	2,101	2,103	2,095	2,143	2,177
District nurse with combined duties[4]	645	623	598	595	584	555	529	514

Notes:

[1] Data from September 1991 are derived using a new occupation classification for nursing staff. This may have caused some discontinuities in the time series as previous misclassifications have been corrected.

[2] Data at 31 March 1995.

[3] The figures for health visitors and district nurses include some staff without an HV or DN qualification working in these fields, probably in a supporting role.

[4] Health visitors with combined duties including district nursing and vice versa are included under both categories in the table. (i.e., double counted).

[5] Data at 30 September 1988 include some qualified nurses working in the community but not necessarily as district nurses. In subsequent years these nurses have been reclassified.

Source:

National Manpower Statistics from payroll (NAMS) Information and Statistics Division.

Health visitors and district nurses[1]: by qualification

Whole time equivalent: at 30 September

	1988	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995[2]*
Health visitors	1,655.3	1,696.3	1,653.5	1,751.2	1,692.4	1,663.7	1,613.5	1,588.3
Health visitors[3]	1,516.0	1,559.6	1,508.6	1,546.2	1,497.4	1,479.1	1,4431	1,424.0
Health visitor with combined duties[4]	139.3	136.7	144.9	205.0	195.0	184.6	170.4	164.4

Health visitors and district nurses[1]: by qualification

Whole time equivalent: at 30 September

	1988	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995[2]*
District nurses	[5]2,555.1	2,318.0	2,281.2	2,239.4	2,201.4	2,187.5	2,177.0	2,188.2
District nurses[3]	[5]1,983.1	1,762.0	1,744.3	1,713.5	1,691.8	1,697.8	1,705.8	1,731.6
District nurse with combined duties[4]	572.0	556.0	536.9	525.9	509.6	489.7	471.2	456.6

Notes:

[1] Data from September 1991 are derived using a new occupation classification for nursing staff. This may have caused some discontinuities in the time series as previous misclassifications have been corrected.

[2] Data at 31 March 1995.

[3] The figures for health visitors and district nurses include some staff without an HV or DN qualification working in these fields, probably in a supporting role.

[4] Health visitors with combined duties including district nursing and vice versa are included under both categories in the table. (i.e. double counted).

[5] Data at 30 September 1988 include some qualified nurses working in the community but not necessarily as district nurses. In subsequent years these nurses have been reclassified.

Source:

National Manpower Statistics from payroll (NAMS) Information and Statistics Division.

Research and Development

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what were the indicative contributions to the EU budget in respect of research and development for his Department in 1993–94. [1915]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: Table 2.1 of the statistical supplement to the "Forward Look of Government-funded Science, Engineering and Technology" contains indicative figures for the United Kingdom's contributions to the EC budget in respect of research and development. The Scottish Office does not have policy responsibility for Community R and D expenditure and makes no direct contribution to the R and D budget.

Criminal Appeals

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland on how many occasions in each of the past four years the Lord Advocate has appealed a sentence passed on conviction on indictment which he is considered to be *(a)* unduly lenient and *(b)* wrong in law; of such appeals, how many led to the imposition of heavier sentences and how many were found to be wrong in law; and if he will make a statement. [1086]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: In terms of section 228A(a) of the Criminal Procedure (Scotland) Act 1975 the Lord Advocate was given the power to appeal against a sentence imposed in respect of an indictment on the ground that it is considered by him to be unduly lenient. This provision came into force on 1 October 1993. To date the power has been exercised as shown in the table.

There have been no appeals by the Lord Advocate thus far in terms of section 228A(b) on a point of law.

	Appeals	*Allowed*	*Refused or abandoned*	*Outstanding*
1 October 1993–31 December 1993	Nil	—	—	—
1 January 1994–31 December 1994	1	1	—	—
1 January 1995–24 November 1995	11	2	6	3

Procurators Fiscal

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what procurator fiscal staff and services are currently in Arbroath; and when he intends to fill any vacancies; [2333]

(2) what were the numbers and locations of procurator fiscal staff in each Angus sheriffdom in each of the past five years; [2331]

(3) what consultations he has had and he intends having before finalising decisions about changes in the procurator fiscal system in Angus and Scotland; [2332]

(4) when he intends to appoint a procurator fiscal based in Arbroath. [2330]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: There were four staff in the Forfar procurator fiscal's office between 1991 and 1993, and from 1994 to date there have been three. There are five staff in the procurator fiscal's office in Arbroath. There has been no change in the staffing level there in the last five years. The holder of the office of procurator fiscal, Arbroath, transferred to the procurator fiscal's office in Glasgow on 23 November 1995, and the procurator fiscal, Dundee, has been appointed procurator fiscal, Arbroath, *ad interim.*

The Lord Advocate is presently giving consideration to the future arrangements for staffing the Arbroath and Forfar offices. In the event that he proposes any change from previous arrangements which would have significant implications, he will consult relevant interests.

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the level of business undertaken by the procurator fiscal service in Arbroath in each of the past five years. [2235]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The following table shows the number of reports received by the procurator fiscal from the police and other reporting agencies for the years 1990 to 1995, and gives details of court proceedings.

Procurator fiscal's office, Arbroath

	Total reports received	*Solemn Pleas*	*Courts trials*	*Summary pleas*	*Courts trials*
1990–91	3,076	13	15	1,520	179
1991–92	3,521	22	12	1,692	185
1992–93	3,767	16	15	1,439	198
1993–94	2,953	19	8	1,545	161
1994–95	3,133	15	6	1,184	125

Dry Stone Walls

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what *(a)* grants and *(b)* other support will be available from his Department for the conservation and protection of dry stone walls from April 1996. [2327]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: Grant assistance for dry stone walling works in Scotland is available from the following sources:

Objective 1 highlands and islands agricultural programme (agricultural business improvement scheme): 70 per cent. grant for dyking works on inbye and hill land, and for the provision of dykes to exclude livestock in association with conservation management;

Crofting counties agricultural grants scheme (Scottish Crofting Counties only): 55 per cent grant for the provision, substantial alteration, restoration and protection of dry stone walls for agricultural purposes;

Scottish Natural Heritage: grants up to a maximum rate of 50 per cent. for dry stone walling works which improve the character and attractiveness of the landscape, and contribute to conservation of biodiversity.

The Government have no current plans to withdraw assistance under these schemes. Grants at the rate of 30 per cent.—within less-favoured areas—and 25 per cent.—outwith less-favoured areas—are currently available in Scotland under the farm and conservation grant scheme, national. However, the legislation governing this scheme is due to expire in February 1996. We are currently considering future arrangements.

Depending on the nature of their management agreements, farmers in environmentally sensitive areas in Scotland can receive payments at varying rates, depending on location, for dry stone walling works. It is likely that this form of support will also continue beyond April 1996.

Departmental Contracts

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many contracts have been awarded by him to the consultancy firm PIEDA in the past 10 years: at what cost and on what subjects. [1224]

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 22 November 1995]:* Detailed information about all consultancy contracts let by my Department is not maintained centrally and a full reply could be provided only at a disproportionate cost. However, two surveys were carried out by my Department in February 1994 and August 1995 from which the following contracts have been identified:

1990–91

Appraisal of business plans

Aerial surveillance operations

1991–92

Housing initiative survey

Interim evaluation of Strathclyde integrated development operation Highlands and island interim evaluation of national programme of community interest.

1992–93

West Nerston retail impact study

Stirling Castle visitors centre study

1993–94

Evaluation of the crofters building grants and loans scheme

1994–95

Staffing and organisational review of sea fisheries inspectorate evaluation of the crofters building grants and loans scheme

1995–96

Staffing and organisational review of sea fisheries inspectorate Financial management review of Scottish Homes

Information on costs is available in relation to the work carried out in 1994–95 and 1995–96 when contracts awarded were valued at a total of £92,500.

Ambulance Service

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what performance targets are set for the Scottish ambulance service for non-emergency calls. [1226]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[Holding answer 22 November 1995]:* Non-emergency patients are taken to routine hospital appointments by the patient transport service provided by the Scottish Ambulance Service NHS trust. This service is purchased by NHS trusts to standards which are sensitive to local circumstances and are agreed as part of the contracting process. To monitor performance and identify possible improvements, each division of the Scottish Ambulance Service NHS trust conducts an annual patient satisfaction survey. In addition the accident and emergency service provided by the Scottish Ambulance Service NHS trust also deals with calls classified by general practitioners or other health care workers as urgent. In such cases the target is for 95 per cent. of patients to arrive at hospital no later than 15 minutes after the time agreed with the caller, this is typically one to two hours but is determined by the caller's assessment of the patients clinical need.

DEFENCE

Bosnia

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement concerning the further deployment of British troops to the former Yugoslavia as part of the international peace plan. [2446]

Mr. Portillo: Contingency planning for a NATO-led force to help implement a peace agreement on Bosnia is well advanced. Britain will make a significant contribution.

Final decisions on the British contribution, and on the time scale of deployment, cannot be taken yet. They depend on the satisfactory outcome of a number of important issues, including signature of the peace agreement by the parties and equitable burden sharing among our allies. Details of the various national contributions to the force, including those from non-NATO countries, remain under discussion with NATO. The commitment of substantial US ground forces will be a pre-requisite for the involvement of our own forces. NATO plans to withdraw the force within 12 months.

Current planning envisages British forces operating in central and western Bosnia, with the headquarters located at Gornji Vakuf, in our present area of operations. In addition, we plan to contribute our existing sea and air assets in theatre, although we would expect our maritime forces to reduce as the embargoes are lifted.

The NATO operation will be run on the ground by the headquarters of NATO's ACE Rapid Reaction Corps, for which we have the lead alliance responsibility. That means that the United Kingdom will provide the commander, General Sir Michael Walker, and about 60 per cent. of the staff.

On top of that we are considering deploying a divisional headquarters—3 UK Division—and a brigade with armour, infantry and artillery elements, under Headquarters 4 Armoured Brigade, together with a number of supporting units.

The forces will incorporate units from our UN contingent already in Bosnia. As my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary said on 22 November, *Official Report*, column *667*, we expect the total land force contribution to be of the order of 13,000.

Such a force is bound to involve the United Kingdom in greater expense than would have been the cost to us from continuing with our role in UNPROFOR, but those extra costs cannot yet be calculated with accuracy.

Along with the forces from other NATO countries, including the US, it will probably be necessary to pre-position a number of personnel to prepare for the deployment of the main forces who will follow as soon as possible after the final signature of a peace agreement. The notice to move all units which may be involved in the deployment as a whole is being reviewed and will be reduced as necessary.

Indonesian Pilots (Training)

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether the pilots of the Indonesian Air Force have been trained at any of the RAF flying schools in the United Kingdom; and, if so, if he will give the numbers of pilots, the years, and the bases at which such training took place. [902]

Mr. Soames: I refer the hon. Member to my answer of 6 November, *Official Report*, column *595*.

Procurement Executive, Abbey Wood

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the compliance with value for money requirement of his Department's Abbey Wood procurement executive headquarters. [2444]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The Abbey Wood project has been assessed against value-for-money criteria at all stages since its inception. Two investment appraisals in 1991 justified the selection of Bristol as the location and Abbey Wood as the site for collating the procurement executive. The late 1992 IA, which reappraised alternative accommodation solutions, justified the decision to proceed with the Abbey Wood construction programme. Subsequent appraisals in 1993 assessed the impact of taxation of relocation allowances, and the implementation of changes in management of the common user estate.

During the 1994 defence costs study, 27 options including the base case were appraised to reconsider the cost-effectiveness of the Abbey Wood project in the light of anticipated reductions in the size of the procurement executive headquarters organisation. IAs have been scrutinised within the Department, by the Treasury at each major approval stage, and by the National Audit Office.

Value engineering has been applied extensively during the development of the design, resulting in some £27 million being saved in acquisition costs compared with less well optimised schemes. Life cycle costing techniques have been applied to inform major design decisions, with investment appraisals being conducted on design options, resulting in energy efficient and low maintenance cost solutions. Construction contracts have been subject to competition, and proposals evaluated against value for money criteria, taking account of risk assessment.

The cost-effectiveness of options proposed by tenderers were assessed in terms of both capital and life cycle costs, and adopted where better value for money would result. Space standards have been subject to two strategic reviews, resulting in tauter space standards being adopted. A strict configuration control regime has been in force to minimise cost variances arising from changes, yet allowing potential additional savings to be evaluated.

Planning for a comprehensive post-project evaluation has been initiated to enable the overall cost-effectiveness of the collocation of the PE to be assessed upon completion of the project.

Dr. Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the working area per square metre for each person at his Department's procurement executive headquarters at Abbey Wood. [2441]

Mr. Arbuthnot: Within the Abbey Wood headquarters office buildings, the basic work space allocation for each employee is:

	Metre^2
All staff up to, and including grade 6	6.75
Staff at grade 5 and grade 4	13.00
Staff at grade 3 and above	27.00

Dr. Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the current total estimated cost for the railway and station at Filton being built to service his Department's Abbey Wood procurement executive; and what was the original total estimated cost of the railway and station. [2443]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The current estimated cost of the new Filton Abbey Wood station which is being built for Avon county council to serve all the new and existing developments in the area is £885,000. The original estimated cost was £1.056 million.

Dr. Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his Department's estimate of the number of employees at his Department's Abbey Wood procurement executive headquarters who will use the railway station on the site each day. [2445]

Mr. Arbuthnot: Surveys conducted within the procurement executive indicate that over 500 staff are likely to use Filton Abbey Wood railway station each day.

Dr. Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many members of the procurement executive were expected to occupy the Abbey Wood procurement executive headquarters when the scheme was first announced; and how many people employed by the procurement executive are now expected to occupy the building. [2450]

Mr. Arbuthnot: When the scheme was first announced, the planning assumption for PE HQ numbers to be accommodated at Abbey Wood was 4,800 plus a further 500 PE project related and integrated logistics support staff.

Current plans envisage 4,300 plus a further 600 PE project related and integrated logistics support staff.

Dr. Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many people were employed in the procurement executive in each of the last three years; and what is his Department's estimate of the numbers to be employed in each of the next five years. [2451]

Mr Arbuthnot: The numbers of staff directly employed—military and civilian—in each of the last three years were:

1 April 1993: 11,230

1 April 1994: 10,760

1 April 1995: 7,540

During the financial year 1994–95 some 3,070 test and evaluation staff were transferred to the Defence Research Agency.

The estimated numbers of staff to be employed to meet the anticipated programme requirement in future years, rounded, are:

1 April 1996: 6,600

1 April 1997: 6,350

1 April 1998: 6,200

1 April 1999: 6,050

1 April 2000: 5,850

(excluding Ministry of Defence police employed to support the nuclear contract programme).

Dr. Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when final planning permission was granted for the Abbey Wood procurement executive headquarters; what is the total size of the site; how many lakes have been built on the site; what is the size of the lakes on the site; if the lakes are stocked with fish; what is the purpose of the suspension bridge situated over one of the lakes; what has been the cost of landscaping the Abbey Wood site; and how many trees were planted as part of the landscaping. [2447]

Mr. Arbuthnot: Detailed planning permission for the Abbey Wood headquarters was granted in March 1993. The total size of the site is 98 acres. One lake has been built on the site, with a surface area of 22,000 m^2 to satisfy National Rivers Authority requirements to contain storm water run-off and prevent flooding of surrounding waterways. Four small ponds, with a total surface area of 600 m^2 are integrated into the landscape scheme to satisfy local planning authority requirements for maintaining wildlife corridors and enhancing the ecology of the local area. There are no plans to stock the water features with fish.

Site planning obligations, suitability of land for buildings, and on-site road infrastructure requirements to access car parks and neighbouring land dictated that land to the north-east of the site had to be annexed from the main development, and used for vehicle parking. The bridge provides pedestrian access to the north-east car park, whilst satisfying security requirements. The estimated cost of soft landscaping is £5 per sq m for a total area of 270,000 m^2. Once complete, some 5,000 trees will have been planted as part of the landscape scheme which life cycle costing has shown to be more cost effective in terms of upkeep than grass.

Dr. Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, when he expects to name a new head of the procurement executive. [2448]

Mr. Arbuthnot: I expect to name a new head of the procurement executive in early 1996, as a result of the open competition which is currently under way.

Dr. Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence who is the prime contractor for the building of the procurement executive at Abbey Wood. [2449]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The main contractor for the shell and core construction of the buildings at Abbey Wood is John Mowlem Construction plc.

Dr. Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the current total cost of staff relocation to his Department's Abbey Wood procurement executive headquarters; what this cost was when the project was first announced; and what are these costs per person. [2454]

Mr. Arbuthnot: Taking account of the post defence costs study restructuring of the procurement executive HQ organisation, the current estimated total cost of relocation of staff to Abbey Wood is £74.5 million. At current economic conditions, and allowing for the changes in taxation of relocation costs announced in March 1993, the original estimated total cost of staff relocation when construction of Abbey Wood was approved was £86.2 million. The current estimated average cost per head is some £22,000. The original estimated average cost per head has been calculated at some £24,000.

Dr. Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what has been his Department's estimates in respect of the total cost of the new procurement executive headquarters at Abbey Wood in each of the last four years. [2455]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The estimated works cost of the Abbey Wood development in each of the last four financial years—inclusive of site acquisition, construction, fitting out, professional works management fees and VAT—has remained within its approved budget of £248.5 million at 1992 prices—£273.4 million at 1995 prices.

Drugs (Army Personnel)

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many drug tests have been carried out by his Department on the Army since the testing scheme was introduced; how many soldiers have been tested for drugs in this period; how many have failed the drug tests; and if he will provide a breakdown by regiment. [2595]

Mr. Soames: As of 15 November 1995, 16,968 Army personnel have been tested. To date, 133 have failed the test and results are awaited for a further 328 tests. The units tested are as follows—some of these have been tested more than once:

Ministry of Defence, (Executive Committee of the Army Board)
Headquarters Scotland
Headquarters Northern Ireland
Headquarters 1st (UK) Armoured Division
Headquarters 3 (UK) Division and Signal Regiment
Headquarters 52nd Brigade
Headquarters 42nd (Northern Western) Brigade
Headquarters Herford Garrison
Headquarters Episkopi Garrison
Headquarters Lisburn Station
Headquarters Kineton Station
Headquarters Joint Support Group Northern Ireland
The Household Cavalry Regiment
The Royal Dragoon Guards
1st Regiment Royal Horse Artillery
7th Regiment Royal Horse Artillery
5th Regiment Royal Artillery
16th Air Defence Regiment Royal Artillery
32nd Regiment Royal Artillery
47th Field Regiment Royal Artillery
Royal Artillery Ranger Hebrides
33 Engineer Regiment Royal Engineer
1st (UK) Armoured division Headquarters & Signal Regiment
7th Signal Regiment
9th Signal Regiment
15th Signal Regiment
16th Signal Regiment
30th Signal Regiment
238 Signal Squadron
241 Signal Squadron
253 Signal Squadron
280 Signal Squadron
Joint Communications Unit (Northern Ireland)
1st Battalion The Grenadier Guards
1st Battalion The Coldstream Guards
1st Battalion The Scots Guards
1st Battalion The Irish Guards
1st Battalion The Royal Scots
1st Battalion The Royal Highland Fusiliers
1st Battalion The Kings Own Scottish Borderers
1st Battalion The Highlanders
1st Battalion The Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders
2nd Battalion The Princess of Wales's Royal Regiment
2nd Battalion The Royal Regiment of Fusiliers
1st Regiment The Prince of Wales's Own Regiment of Yorkshire
1st Battalion The Green Howards
1st Battalion The Queens Lancashire Regiment
1st Battalion The Duke of Wellington's Regiment
1st Battalion The Royal Regiment of Wales
1st Battalion The Royal Gloucestershire, Berkshire and Wiltshire Regiment
1st Battalion The Staffordshire Regiment
1st Battalion The Royal Green Jackets
2nd Battalion The Royal Irish Regiment
2nd Battalion The Parachute Regiment
5th Regiment Army Air Corps
9th Regiment Army Air Corps
3 Base Ammunition Depot
3 Close Support Regiment The Royal Logistic Corps
5 Airborne Brigade Combat Services Support Battalion
6 Supply Regiment Royal Logistic Corps
7 Transport Regiment The Royal Logistic Corps
11th Explosives Ordnance Disposal Regiment Royal Logistic Regiment
12 Supply Regiment Royal Logistic Corps
15 Supply Regiment Royal Logistic Corps
21 Logistic Support Regiment Royal Logistic Corps
23 Pioneer Regiment The Royal Logistic Corps
24 Transport Regiment The Royal Logistic Corps
20 Squadron The Royal Logistic Corps
221 Explosives Ordnance Disposal Squadron Royal Logistic Corps
321 Explosives Ordnance Disposal Squadron Royal Logistic Corps Cyprus Logistic Unit
5 Field Ambulance Royal Army Medical Corps
23 Parachute Field Ambulance Royal Army Medical Corps
6th Battalion Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers
Army Pay and Documents Office (Northern Ireland)
Royal Military Police Training Centre Chichester
2nd Regiment Royal Military Police
174 Provost Company Royal Military Police
115 Provost Company Royal Military Police
36 Detachment Special Investigation Branch Royal Military Police
32 Army Education Centre
45 Army Education Centre
Education Services
7 Dental Group
9 Dental Group
Defence Animal Support Unit
Rhine Area Support Unit
Garrison Labour Support Unit Herford
Army Families and Welfare Services Herford
Army Careers and Information Office Herford
Station Staff Office Herford

Hawk Aircraft (Indonesia)

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the number of Hawk aircraft sold to the Indonesian Government for use by the Indonesian Air Force. [903]

Mr. Arbuthnot: As has previously been confirmed, the Indonesian Air Force purchased 20 Hawk trainer aircraft in the early 1980s. In 1993 a further order was placed for an additional 24 aircraft which have not yet been delivered.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will publish details in the *Official Report* of the number of sales of Hawk trainer aircraft for each of the last available five years, indicating which countries purchased the aircraft and what numbers. [901]

Mr. Arbuthnot: It is not normal Government practice to reveal details of specific exports. These matters are confidential between the customer and the supplier.

Small and Medium Enterprises

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what percentage of his Department's expenditure in 1994–95 was spent on procuring goods or services from small and medium enterprises. [1943]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The information is not available in the form requested and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Departmental Dwellings

Mr. David Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many dwellings owned by his Department are *(a)* currently unoccupied and *(b)* have been unoccupied for six months or more in the counties of (i) Mid-Glamorgan and (ii) Gwent. [2164]

Mr. Soames: As at 30 September 1995 my Department owned 124 vacant dwellings in Gwent, of which 116 were being held for a unit deployment due to commence in December and eight were in the process of being sold. A total of 122 of these dwellings had been vacant for more than six months. My Department owned no vacant dwellings in Mid-Glamorgan.

Flying Training

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what were the dates of arrival and departure of Royal Air Force aircraft deployed to Goose bay for flying training in the 1994 season; [1277]

(2) what were the dates of arrival and departure of Royal Air Force aircraft deployed to Goose bay for flying training in the 1995 season. [1313]

Mr. Soames: Royal Air Force aircraft were deployed to Goose bay for flying training as follows:

	1994	*1995*
Hercules	13–17 March	23–28 January
Tornado GR1	14 April–27 June	6 July–27 September
	1 August–26 September	—

Private Finance Initiative

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence for what reasons the private finance initiative was not considered for the development of his Department's Naval Support Command at Foxhill, Bath. [2442]

Mr. Soames: The scope for a private finance initiative approach to the overall NSC accommodation requirement was considered before the proposals were announced but was not pursued since it was considered unlikely to provide value for money. Proposals to accommodate the NSC HQ at Ensleigh, Bath and at Abbey Wood, Bristol were announced on 14 June 1995. Subsequently, proposals for a PFI solution involving the Foxhill site were put forward by Bath city council in July and August 1995. These proposals were carefully examined. When they were adjusted to meet the NSC requirement, they did not offer better value for money than the planned way ahead which was subsequently confirmed on 6 September.

Low Flying

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many complaints he has received from Northumberland about tactical low-flying sorties over the area in the past five years. [2723]

Mr. Soames: The number of complaints and inquiries about military low flying received by my Department from Northumberland over the past five years are as follows:

1991: 111
1992: 220
1993: 180
1994: 160
1995: 142[1]

[1] Up to 31 October 1995.

Portland Naval Base

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the Serious Fraud Office has contacted his office concerning the sale of Portland naval base; and if he will make a statement. [2694]

Mr. Soames: The Serious Fraud Office contacted my Department on 19 October 1995. All complaints referred to the SFO are subject to a process known as vetting so that the SFO's decision about whether or not to accept the case is properly based on the facts available at the time of the decision. The complaint in this case is at that stage.

Dr. Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the compliance with the correct procedures in respect of the sale of Portland naval base to Portland Port Ltd. [2692]

Mr. Soames: I am completely satisfied that the correct procedures have been adopted in respect of the sale of Portland naval base following a review of the case by my senior officials and the National Audit Office.

Dr. Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when his Department signed a contract with Portland Port Ltd. concerning the Portland naval base. [2691]

Mr. Soames: A contract has not yet been signed with Portland Port Ltd. We are at an advanced stage in finalising the details of the sale contract, which has inevitably been subject to a very complex legal negotiation. When all outstanding issues are finally resolved contracts for sale will be exchanged.

Dr. Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what considerations apart from the bidding price his Department took into account when evaluating bids for the purchase of Portland naval base. [2693]

Mr. Soames: Many factors were taken into account in selecting a purchaser including the availability and source of funding; employment projections; conformity with local aspirations; credibility of the proposed use; short, medium and long-term proposals for use; environmental issues; planning and other necessary consents.

Drugs Tests (Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when a drugs test was last carried out on the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders; how many soldiers

were tested; how many *(a)* officers and *(b)* other ranks failed the test; what actions have been taken against those failing; and if he will make a statement. [2594]

Mr. Soames: A random drugs test was conducted on the 1st Battalion Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders on 31 October 1995. Three hundred and ninety two all ranks were tested of which no officers tested positive, but 22 other ranks did. The commanding officer will consider each of the soldier's cases on their merits before recommending to retain or discharge them.

Expenditure Plans

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence to what extent savings in the equipment budget are being delivered by deferment of projects. [2452]

Mr. Arbuthnot: Our new expenditure plans will be published tomorrow. This Government remain committed to maintaining and enhancing the front-line capabilities of the armed forces, and to providing the support needed to enable them to carry out their wide range of tasks.

Dr. Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence to what extent the expenditure profile has been modified to take account of deferments in *(a)* capital project and *(b)* equipment projects. [2453]

Mr. Arbuthnot: We will be publishing our forecast of expenditure for this financial year as part of the Budget day announcements tomorrow.

Surplus Vessels

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 21 November, *Official Report*, columns *64–66*, if he will list the countries to which the surplus vessels were sold; and what were the values of the contracts. [2695]

Mr. Arbuthnot: Vessels from the list given in my earlier answer were sold to: Chile, Ecuador, Lebanon, Indonesia, Portugal, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Brazil and India, although the vast majority were sold to the United Kingdom commercial market.

The values of the contracts are commercially confidential and could be released only with the permission of the purchasers.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Child Care Facilities

32. **Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, representing the House of Commons Commission when he expects comprehensive child care facilities to be available in the House. [675]

Mr. Beith: Details of child care facilities available to Members and staff of the House were given on 23 October 1995, *Official Report*, columns *458–59*. There has not been any significant change since then.

Copyright

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, representing the House of Commons Commission, what steps are being taken to protect the copyright of parliamentary papers in the creation of an agency to run HMSO. [677]

Mr. Beith: By virtue of sections 165 to 167 of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988, the copyright in any work made by, or under the direction or control of, the House of Commons is owned by the House. The functions of the House as owner of copyright are exercised by the Speaker on the House's behalf. I can assure my hon. Friend that the Commission is well aware of the importance of protecting the House's control of that copyright and will do so vigorously. The statutory provisions I have cited are not affected by the Government's proposals to privatise HMSO.

Radio 5 Live

Miss Hoey: To ask the Chairman of the Information Committee whether he will arrange for Radio 5 Live to be made available on the Parliamentary Data and Video Network in place of London Radio; and if he will make a statement. [2562]

Mr. Waller: Following a notice in the all-party Whip seeking Members' views on the proposal, the Information Committee has endorsed the substitution of Radio 5 Live for London Radio, which will be effected as soon as the necessary technical arrangements can be made. It should be noted that Radio 5 Live broadcasts on AM and thus the sound quality may not be as good as the FM transmissions. In the longer-term, the Committee proposes that the requirement for more television programmes will make it necessary to phase out radio on the Parliamentary Data and Video Network.

Parliamentary Data and Video Network

Mr. Bennett: To ask the Chairman of the Information Committee what assessment he has made of the reliability of the Parliamentary Data and Video Network. [679]

Mr. Waller: The Parliamentary Data and Video Network provides a data network which is operational 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. It has been running continuously since November 1993, although it has grown considerably during that time. For the two years from November 1993 to October 1995 inclusive, downtime for the network has been calculated as follows:

	Hours	*Percentage*
PDVN unscheduled downtime	101.65	0.58
PDVN scheduled downtime	316.25	1.80
Downtime attributable to PWD/works	1,056.00	6.03
Total	1,473.90	8.41

PDVN scheduled downtime and PWD works downtime have almost all occurred over weekends or on other non-sitting days.

On the afternoon of 16 November, a serious fault occurred on the network which resulted in intermittent problems for all users of the PDVN. The cause of the fault has now been located and the E-mail address corruption which occurred as a result of the fault is being remedied. A full investigation is under way into the cause in order to prevent a similar occurrence.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Ministerial Transport, London

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many times in the last year he has used *(a)* London Buses and *(b)* London Underground while on official business. [413]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: For short journeys in London, I usually walk—a practice I recommend to the hon. Member. For journeys outside London, I usually take the train.

Public Interest Immunity Certificates

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list all those in his Department who have authority to issue public interest immunity certificates; how many such certificates have been issued in each of the last five years; and what were the main reasons for them. [1396]

Mr. Boswell: A claim to public interest immunity relating to departmental documents or information is normally made by the appropriate Minister. In the past five years only one such certificate has been issued—in 1993. Its purpose was to make a claim for public interest immunity for certain categories of confidential documents held by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food in the case of Littlewood *v.* Department of Health and MAFF, so as to enable the High Court to decide whether the interests of justice required them to be disclosed in the case.

Arable Area Payments Scheme

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list for each county in England the largest single amount to an individual under the set-aside compensatory payment scheme. [2395]

Mr. Baldry: For reasons of confidentiality, it is not possible to identify separately any payments made under the arable area payments scheme.

Mr. Prentice: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list for each county in England the number of people claiming set-aside compensatory payments in respect of land previously used to grow crops; and if he will give a total amount by county. [2394]

Mr. Baldry: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Sherwood (Mr. Tipping) on 22 November 1995, *Official Report*, columns *199-200*.

Dry Stone Walls

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what *(a)* grants and *(b)* other support will be available from his Department for the conservation and protection of dry stone walls from April 1996; [2325]

(2) what plans he has to introduce a nationwide grant scheme for the conservation and protection of dry stone walls. [2326]

Mr. Boswell: The Department's responsibilities in this area extend only to England. Payments for the restoration of dry stone walls are available under the environmentally sensitive areas scheme. We shall shortly issue a consultation paper giving detailed proposals for the future of the countryside stewardship scheme, which provides payments for environmental purposes in the wider countryside outside ESAs.

Fishing Vessels (Decommissioning)

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many fishing vessel decommissions his Department funded during the year 1994–95; what was the average funding per vessel; what is the average cost of decommissioning a vessel; and how many vessel owners applied to his Department for funding to decommission their vessels during the year 1994–95. [2653]

Mr. Baldry: Under the Fishing Vessels (Decommissioning) Scheme 1994, 471 applications were received, and 162 vessels were successfully decommissioned at a total cost of £8.8 million. The average cost per vessel was some £54,160. Owners submit bids taking account of the cost of the applicant of scrapping. Information on this cost is not available centrally.

Departmental Targets

Ms Armstrong: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the published recommended response time within which his Department is expected to reply to letters from the public. [3000]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: This Department has a recommended response time of 28 days from the date of receipt to reply to letters from members of the public.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Civil Service (Casual Staff)

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will specify the equivalent qualifications to O-Levels for employment as a civil service casual administrative assistant; and what assessment he has made as to whether those qualifications are such as not to constitute a prima facie case of discrimination against women who have brought up children. [1411]

Sir John Wheeler: The following qualifications are accepted as equivalent to the normal eligibility requirement of at least two grade C passes in GCSE-GCE O-Level including English language for the purposes of employment as a casual administrative assistance in the Northern Ireland civil service:

BEC Higher National Diploma
BEC Higher National Certificate
BEC National Diploma
BEC National Certificate
BEC General Diploma
BEC General Certificate
BEC Certificate in Office Studies
TEC Higher Diploma

TEC Higher Certificate
Btec Higher National Diploma
Btec Higher National Certificate
Btec National Diploma
Btec National Certificate
Btec General Diploma
Btec General Certificate
Btec 1st Awards
RSA Certificate/Diploma in Office Procedures
RSA Certificate Office Practice Level II
RSA Certificate Office Studies
RSA Business Administration
NCVQ Level I and II Business Administration
SNVQ Level I and II Business Administration
City and Guilds Technician Certificate.

Other formal qualifications equivalent to a grade C pass in individual subject areas are also acceptable. Formal qualifications not on the above list are considered on a case-by-case basis. It is not evident how the use of such an extensive range of qualifications would constitute a prima facie case of discrimination against women who have brought up children.

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will arrange for satisfactory previous employment as a casual administrative assistant in the civil service to be added to the list of qualifications equivalent to O-levels for future such employment as a casual. [1412]

Sir John Wheeler: No. This concession would only benefit persons erroneously admitted to the civil service without valid educational qualifications in the past and would be unfair to others correctly refused entry by reason of lack of such qualifications.

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many people are employed as casuals within the Northern Ireland civil service; what is the number of such casuals who are currently in receipt of a civil service pension; and what is the average annual present amount of such pensions and the various grounds on which these individuals with such pensions retired. [1410]

Sir John Wheeler: The total number of casual staff employed in the Northern Ireland Office and the six Northern Ireland Departments is 1,420

Information on the number of casuals in the Department of Health and Social Services who are in receipt of a civil service pension could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. In the Northern Ireland Office and the remaining five Northern Ireland Departments there are two casuals in receipt of a civil service pension; the average amount is £5,311. Both officers retired on age grounds.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list those projects which have now been identified as being suitable for the private finance initiative; and if he will make a statement on the private finance initiative. [1159]

Sir John Wheeler: A range of projects across all Northern Ireland Departments and the Northern Ireland Office are under consideration, including schemes covering sewage treatment plants in the Water Executive, IT in the Land Registry and hospital equipment leases. The Department of Finance and Personnel is undertaking a scoping study to identify the application of PFI to all areas within Northern Ireland Departments and the NIO.

Mr. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he proposes to commence the private finance initiative in Northern Ireland, if it will be operational in all the Departments of government and if he will make a statement about progress towards the practical implementation of the private finance initiative. [1158]

Sir John Wheeler: All Northern Ireland Departments, the Northern Ireland Office and their non-departmental public bodies are fully committed to the private finance initiative and a number of projects are already under consideration in Northern Ireland. My right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer has made it clear that capital projects will not be approved unless private finance options have been explored.

Energy Efficiency

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what progress has been made towards cutting energy consumption in Government buildings for which he has responsibility in each year since 1990. [1437]

Mr. Ancram: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my hon. Friend the Minister for Countryside, Planning and Energy Efficiency to the hon. Member for East Surrey (Mr. Ainsworth) on 17 May, *Official Report*, columns *260-62*.

Public Interest Immunity Certificates

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list all those in his Department who have authority to issue public interest immunity certificates; how many such certificates have been issued in each of the last five years; and what were the main reasons for them. [1419]

Sir Patrick Mayhew: As regards the period to March 1994, I refer the hon. Member to the answers I gave the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) on 18 February 1994, *Official Report*, column *1034*, and 3 March 1994, *Official Report*, column *914*.

In October 1994 I signed two certificates. In each case, in connection with civil proceedings I made a claim for certain members of prison immediate reaction forces to be screened from the public and for the protection from disclosure of certain information relating to control and restraint techniques used in prisons.

In January 1995 I signed a certificate in relation to an inquest to protect police intelligence gathering operations and the lives and safety of people involved.

In May and June 1995 I signed two certificates in relation to civil proceedings to protect information relating to three shooting incidents in 1982 and their subsequent investigations.

In June 1995 the Minister of State signed a certificate in relation to civil proceedings, making a claim for certain members of prison immediate reaction forces to be screened from the public.

In October 1995 I signed a certificate in relation to civil proceedings, making a claim to protect certain police documents.

A claim to public interest immunity relating to departmental documents or information is normally made by the appropriate Minister.

Temazepam

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what amount of Temazepam per capita is distributed annually in Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement. [1509]

Mr. Moss: In 1994, 64g of Temazepam were dispensed on prescription per 1,000 population in Northern Ireland.

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many deaths in each of the past five years are attributable to the abuse of Temazepam *(a)* in Northern Ireland and *(b)* in each health district. [1510]

Sir John Wheeler: There have been no deaths recorded in Northern Ireland in each of the past five years attributable to Temazepam abuse.

Stormont Buildings

Dr. Hendron: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) if the cost of the refurbishment of the Stormont buildings will be met by an increased allocation of funds; [1602]

(2) what is the estimated cost of the refurbishment of Stormont buildings following the fire; [1601]

(3) what proportion of the money for the refurbishment of Stormont buildings will be taken from existing departmental budgets. [1603]

Mr. Moss: The estimated cost of refurbishing Parliament Buildings is £20 million. This figure provides for the comprehensive refurbishment of the entire building and includes provision of approximately £1.5 million–£2 million for the restoration of the fire damaged Commons Chamber.

The total cost of the project is being met from existing departmental budgets; no additional allocation of funds has been made.

Trade Union Commissioner

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what recent representations he has received in respect of the objectivity of the commissioner for the rights of trade union members. [1409]

Mr. Ancram: None.

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the annual cost of operating a separate Northern Ireland commissioner for the rights of trade union members over each of the last two years and the equivalent costs of its Great Britain counterpart; and, for both bodies, what were the numbers of inquiries resulting in an application for assistance in those two years. [1408]

Mr. Ancram: The information is as follows:

	Annual operating costs £		*Inquiries resulting in application for assistance*	
	1993–94	*1994–95*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*
Northern Ireland Commissioner for the rights of Trade Union Members	31,741	33,643	7	15
(Great Britain) Commissioner for the Rights of Trade Union Members	274,941	293,716	47	57

Higher Education

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland for how many student places would provision in Northern Ireland need to be increased to match the proportionate provision for Scottish students in Scotland. [1770]

Mr. Ancram: For every Scottish domiciled full-time undergraduate student in the United Kingdom there are 1.274 full-time undergraduate places in Scotland—1993–94 figures. For a similar ratio to hold in Northern Ireland, the number of full-time undergraduate places in the Province would need to increase by 15,500.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what research has been done by his Department to look at the adequacy of the provision of places in higher education for Northern Ireland students within Northern Ireland. [1771]

Mr. Ancram: The Northern Ireland Higher Education Council, which advises the Government on the planning and funding of higher education in Northern Ireland, presented a report to me earlier this year on access, participation and student migration. This report will inform Government's consideration of the adequacy of the provisions of places in higher education for Northern Ireland students within Northern Ireland.

In addition, consultants have been commissioned to undertake an economic appraisal of the university of Ulster's proposal for a new campus in north and west Belfast. One of the aims of this study is to appraise the options for accommodating growth in higher education provision in Northern Ireland. The consultant's final report should be completed shortly.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many Northern Ireland students have higher education places elsewhere in Great Britain; and how many higher education students from Great Britain study in Northern Ireland. [1772]

Mr. Ancram: In 1993–94, 12,300 Northern Ireland domiciled students had higher education places in Great Britain, and 900 students domiciled in Great Britain had higher education places in Northern Ireland.

Small and Medium Enterprises

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what percentage of his Department's expenditure in 1994–95 was spent on procuring goods or services from small and medium enterprises. [1952]

Sir John Wheeler: The information requested is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Springvale Campus Project

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he expects to publish the Planning, Industrial and Economic Development Advisers' evaluation of the Springvale campus project. [1777]

Mr. Ancram: It is not the normal policy of the Government to publish economic appraisals. None the less, given the importance of this case, the Secretary of State and I are considering options as to what information to make available publicly. The economic appraisal is still not complete, and we will wish to see the completed report before deciding on the most appropriate way of informing the public of its findings.

Plastic Bullets

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list all occasions since 31 August 1994 when the RUC has used plastic bullets, giving in each case the number used, the details of the injuries and the circumstances in which such shootings took place. [1961]

Sir John Wheeler: The occasions since 31 August 1994 when the RUC fired plastic baton rounds, the number fired, the number of people allegedly injured and the circumstances in which the plastic baton rounds were fired are listed:

Plastic baton rounds fired by the RUC
1 September 1994–21 November 1995

Date	*Location*	*Number fired*	*Number of alleged injuries*	*Circumstances*
13 September 1994	Belfast	1	—	Hijacking/rioting/petrol bombs thrown
23 October 1994	Cookstown	18	2	Rioting outside hotel
21 March 1995	Belfast	3	1	Disorder following football match
26 June 1995	Belfast	2	1	Rioting/petrol bombs thrown
3 July 1995	Belfast	7	—	Rioting/disturbances/ petrol bombs thrown
4 July 1995	Belfast	6	1	Riots/petrol bombs thrown
4 July 1995	Armagh	1	—	Hijacking/rioting/petrol bombs thrown
5 July 1995	Belfast	7	0	Rioting/petrol bombs thrown
6 July 1995	Belfast	5	0	Rioting/petrol bombs thrown
10 July 1995	Ahoghill	2	—	Rioting in town centre
10 July 1995	Bushmills	6	2	Rioting in village
10 July 1995	Londonderry	—	1	Hijacking/rioting/petrol bombs thrown
10 July 1995	Portadown	51	—	Disorder following parade
11 July 1995	Belfast	5	—	Rioting/petrol bombs thrown
12 July 1995	Belfast	33	—	Rioting/petrol bombs thrown/clashes between rival factions
12 July 1995	Ahoghill	29	—	Rioting/petrol bombs thrown
12 August 1995	Belfast	4	1	Disorder following parade
12 August 1995	Londonderry	100	—	Disorder following parade
27 August 1995	Castlederg	10	—	Clashes between rival factions

TRANSPORT

A5

13. **Mr. Tredinnick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the cost of recent improvements to the A5 from the M69 junction to the Longshoot junction; if he will list the works; and what further improvements are planned. [655]

Mr. Watts: The recently completed scheme cost £610.000.

The works include:

Widening the A5 and installation of new traffic lights;

A turning lane for premises on the north side of the A5;

An extension to Wapping Barn bridge; and creation of a cycleway on the north side of the A5.

Further works in hand and planned are:

Developer funded scheme currently under way;

Extension to A5 cycleway facilities;

Provision of ghost island at Nutts lane.

Rail Services, North-West England

18. **Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what interest has been expressed in running rail services in the north-west of England following privatisation. [661]

Mr. Watts: The franchising director has not yet sought indications of interest in the rail franchises in the north-west of England. Good progress is being made with the franchising programme and the franchising director continues to prepare services for offering to the private

sector in accordance with his objective from the Government to franchise passenger rail services as rapidly as is reasonably practicable.

Heathrow

19. **Mr. Jessel:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what action he proposes to take to reduce aircraft flights from Heathrow during 1997. [662]

Mr. Norris: I do not propose to take action during 1997 to reduce aircraft flights from Heathrow.

Road Building Programme

20. **Mr. Alan W. Williams:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the planned expenditure in the road building programme for 1995–96. [664]

Mr. Watts: The Government plan to spend £1,775 million on trunk roads in England in 1995–96. Roads in Wales are, of course, the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

London Transport (Investment)

22. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received about investment in London Transport. [666]

Mr. Norris: My right hon. Friend has received a number of representations from a variety of organisations and individual members of the public about investment in London Transport.

Fenchurch Street Line

23. **Sir Teddy Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what progress has been made on the privatisation of the Fenchurch Street line. [667]

Mr. Watts: Very good progress has been made, and the franchising director expects to award the LTS Rail franchise in December.

Rail Services (Monitoring)

25. **Mr. Hinchliffe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps he is taking to monitor the performance of providers of rail services. [669]

Mr. Watts: The performance of train operating companies is currently monitored by the British Railways Board and the rail users' consultative committees. Franchises will be required to provide the franchising director with information to enable him to monitor operational performance and customer satisfaction levels.

Fatal Accidents

26. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what new proposals he has to reduce the total of fatal accidents. [670]

Mr. Norris: Fatalities from road accidents are at their lowest level since records began and have fallen for five successive years. The measures that we are taking to reduce road casualties in general should help reduce fatal road accidents still further. These include the introduction of a theory test as part of the driving test in July 1996 and the "Safe Town" initiative announced in July this year.

Buses (Disabled Access)

27. **Mr. Betts:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps he will take to ensure reasonable access for the disabled to public bus services. [671]

Mr. Norris: We have taken powers in the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 to enable us to make regulations to require new buses and coaches to be accessible to disabled people, including those who use wheelchairs. Similar provisions have also been included for taxis and rail vehicles.

Discussions are already under way with the bus and coach industry—manufacturers and operators—on the shape of the regulations which will be introduced as soon as we have determined appropriate technical solutions which are effective and sustainable.

London-Tilbury-Southend Line

28. **Mrs. Gorman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on progress in introducing private competition in the London–Tilbury–Southend Line. [672]

Mr. Watts: Very good progress has been made, and the franchising director expects to award the LTS Rail franchise in December.

Rail Privatisation

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what progress has been made against the Government's timetable for rail privatisation; and if he will make a statement. [647]

Sir George Young: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. and learned Member for Leicester, West (Mr. Janner) earlier today.

East London Line

Mr. Dowd: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects the full restoration of London Underground services on the east London line to occur. [660]

Mr. Norris: London Underground has re-applied to the London Docklands development corporation for listed building consent to strengthen and waterproof the tunnel carrying the east London line under the Thames. The timing of the re-opening of the line depends on the progress of its application.

M62 Relief Road

Mr. Sumberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he will make a decision in relation to the future of the proposals of his Department for a M62 relief road. [665]

Mr. Watts: I have received a large number of representations about the scheme from my hon. Friend and others. From these, it is clear that the majority of people consulted about the relief road do not want it. In the light of consultation I have decided to withdraw plans to build the relief road.

Rail Passengers

Mr. Dunn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many people travel by train in the course of one year. [668]

Mr. Watts: Some 25 million people made at least one train journey in 1991, the latest year for which figures are available.

Research and Development

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what were the indicative contributions to the EU budget in respect of research and development for his Department in 1993–94. [1917]

Mr. Norris: Table 2.1 of the statistical supplement to the "Forward Look of Government-funded Science, Engineering and Technology" contains indicative figures for the United Kingdom's contributions to the EC budget in respect of research and development. Departments' policy responsibilities are subject to change and can vary from year to year. My Department currently has responsibility for 1.77 per cent. of the Community's research and development budget.

Locomotives

Mr. Chris Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what is his estimate for the cost of obtaining information about how many British Rail locomotives since 1992 *(a)* have been scrapped, *(b)* offered for sale and *(c)* are currently in storage as surplus to requirements; [2322]

(2) what discussions he has had with the chairman of the Railways Board about the refusal of British Rail to put up for sale locomotives which are surplus to its requirements; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Watts: The policy agreed between the Government and the British Railways Board is that where freight equipment is identified as surplus to operational requirements, it will be offered for sale by BR on a competitive basis. Operational requirements includes the retention of old rolling stock for spare parts, and holding a strategic reserve for potential future traffic. Detailed questions about the location, value and ultimate fate of old locomotives—and the cost of undertaking surveys—are for BR and its subsidiary companies.

Mr. Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what estimate he has made of the cost of obtaining information regarding the number of British Rail locomotives, currently being stored out of use, which have been offered for sale to operators or potential operators of train services; [3074]

(2) if he will estimate the value of the British Rail locomotives currently stored out of use and surplus to requirements which *(a)* are being offered for sale and *(b)* are not being offered for sale. [3073]

Mr. Watts: I refer the hon. Member to my replies given today.

Mr. Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received from potential operators of train services complaining about the refusal by British Rail to sell surplus locomotives. [658]

Mr. Watts: The Department of Transport has received representations from one potential operator of train services regarding this matter.

Rail Freight

Mr. Chris Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is his Department's policy with regard to the promotion of cross-channel freight traffic by rail. [2685]

Mr. Watts: The Government have supported BR's investment of over £400 million in channel tunnel freight services. This demonstrates our commitment to the development of international rail freight services.

Taxis (Disabled Access)

Mr. Allason: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to introduce regulations requiring taxis to be accessible for wheelchairs. [2104]

Mr. Norris: The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 gives the Secretary of State power to make regulations for that purpose. My right hon. Friend will be preparing regulations and will consult interested parties before laying regulations before the House. One subject of the consultation will be when the regulations should come into effect.

In London, all taxis will have to be wheelchair accessible by 1 January 2000 following a decision announced in December 1988. Outside London some local authorities have already set their own dates for wheelchair accessibility.

Skid Resistance

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will review the method of skid resistance measurement to take account of critical road conditions. [2222]

Mr. Watts: I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Ms Joan Walley, dated 27 November 1995:

The Minister for Railways and Roads, Mr. John Watts, has asked me to write to you in reply to your Parliamentary Question concerning measurement of skid resistance.

We are continually reviewing the method of skid resistance measurement. The United Kingdom os one of the few countries in Europe to have a policy in which road surfaces are designed to provide adequate skid resistance at both low and high speed, and reflecting the different site conditions that occur. This is achieved through specification of polish resistant stone together with a minimum level of surface roughness, supported by regular monitoring of skid resistance during the life of a road.

The Highways Agency also have an active programme of research and international cooperation in skid resistance measurement aimed at improving the accuracy of measurement techniques to reflect all road conditions.

Penzance-Bristol Line

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if it is the Government's policy to promote the designation of the Penzance-Bristol railway line as part of the trans-European rail network. [2356]

Mr. Watts: The inclusion of the Penzance-Bristol line in the draft trans-European rail network map was supported by the United Kingdom Government. The Council of Ministers reached a common position on the trans-European transport network at the June Council. The rail network map, as agreed by the Council, includes the Penzance-Bristol railway line.

Road Accidents

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many *(a)* deaths and *(b)* injuries resulting from road accidents have been recorded in each year for the last 15 years; and how many of those affected were under the age of 15 years. [1804]

Mr. Norris: The information requested is shown in the table.

Road accident casualties in Great Britain: 1979–1994

	All ages	*of which under 15*		
	Killed	*Injured*	*Killed*	*Injured*
1979	6,352	328,161	591	46,832
1980	6,010	322,590	466	45,462
1981	5,846	318,994	504	43,889
1982	5,934	328,362	481	44,117
1983	5,445	303,139	536	44,835
1984	5,599	318,715	521	46,666
1985	5,165	312,359	457	43,187
1986	5,382	316,069	405	41,024
1987	5,125	306,348	416	39,597
1988	5,052	317,253	409	40,641
1989	5,373	336,219	387	42,654
1990	5,217	335,924	368	43,485
1991	4,568	306,701	331	40,051
1992	4,229	306,444	268	40,123
1993	3,814	302,206	270	38,615
1994	3,650	311,539	265	40,761

1. Casualties reported to the Department of Transport by the Police.

Road Building Programme

Mr. Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement about the road building programme. [306]

Mr. Watts: No.

Automatic Ticket Machines

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport at how many underground stations automatic ticket machines have been installed; at what cost; how many stations remain without such machines; and if he will make a statement. [1492]

Mr. Norris: These are operational matters for London Underground Ltd.

Lockerbie

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will place all documents currently held by his Department relating to the destruction of Pan Am 103 over Lockerbie in the Library. [1635]

Mr. Norris: No.

Small and Medium Enterprises

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what percentage of his Department's expenditure in 1994–95 was spent on procuring goods or services from small and medium enterprises. [1957]

Mr. Norris: Information is not available in the form requested.

Legislative Repeals

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what legislation from his Department passed in the last five years contains provision for statutory repeal or review. [2030]

Mr. Norris: The legislation for which my Department had responsibility contains provisions for the repeal or amendment of other enactments in the usual way. The following Acts provide power, exercisable by statutory instrument, to modify or exclude the application of enactments contained in primary legislation:

The Road Traffic (Temporary Restrictions) Act 1991 (section 2)

The Road Traffic Act 1991 (sections 23, 27, 76, 77 and Schedule 3)

The New Roads and Street Works Act 1991 (section 102)

The Transport and Works Act 1992 (section 5)

The Finance Act 1993 (section 21)

The Railways Act 1993 (section 153)

The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (section 33).

International Maritime Organisation

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what new proposals he has concerning the United Kingdom's relations with the International Maritime Organisation. [2152]

Mr. Norris: None.

Bull Bars

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will commission research as to whether bull bars *(a)* inhibit the operation of airbags, *(b)* lead to higher risk of chassis distortion in accidents and *(c)* increase the danger to drivers and passengers in cars fitted with bull bars. [2262]

Mr. Norris: The Transport Research Laboratory is investigating all reported injury accidents involving vehicles fitted with bull bars. Its work covers all aspects of these accidents and an interim report is due at the end of the year.

Trans-Europeans Networks

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what capital projects are to be funded, partially or fully, by the EU TEN programme. [2160]

Mr. Watts: The European Community's financing regulation for TENs provides for the funding of transport and other capital projects in the period 1995–1999. Funding decisions will be taken on an annual basis and so far only the funds for 1995 have been allocated.

In line with the conclusions of the Cannes European Council, just over 75 per cent. of the 1995 funds have been allocated to the 14 priority projects identified by the Essen Council, which are:

High speed rail/combined transport link, Berlin-Verona

High speed rail link, Paris-Brussels-Cologne-Amsterdam-London (includes CTRL)

High speed rail, Madrid-Montpelier

Betuwe line (rail/combined transport), Netherlands-Germany

High speed rail/combined transport, Lyon-Turin-Trieste

High speed rail, France-Germany

Greek motorway schemes

Motorway, Lisbon-Valladolid

Railway/combined transport, Cork-Dublin-Larne

Malpensa Airport (Milan)

Oresund fixed link, Denmark-Sweden

The Nordic triangle (road and rail)

High speed rail, West Coast Main Line

Ireland-UK-Benelux Road Link

The remaining 25 per cent. has been allocated to over 50 other priority projects, mostly involving traffic management studies.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport announced the 1995 allocation of TENs funding to the UK in his reply to the hon. Member for Surbiton (Mr. Tracey) on 26 October, *Official Report* column *732*.

TENs funding for 1996 and beyond cannot be decided until the transport guidelines have been adopted by the European Council and European Parliament. We will, however, shortly be consulting with interested parties as to what schemes might be included in the UK's 1996 bid.

Channel Tunnel Services

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when the first sleeper trains through the channel tunnel are expected to come into service. [2159]

Mr. Watts: European Night Services Ltd., which will operate the sleeper services through the channel tunnel, expects to phase them in starting in the second half of 1996.

A650

Mr. Waller: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what expenditure has been incurred to date on preparatory works for the A650 Bingley bypass; [2817]

(2) what is the number of *(a)* fatal, *(b)* serious and *(c)* minor accident casualties which have occurred during the most recent five years for which statistics are available on the section of the A650 trunk road due to be relieved by the proposed A650 Bingley bypass; [2818]

(3) what is the estimated annual cost to business and industry of traffic delays on the section of the A650 trunk road due to be relieved by the proposed Bingley bypass. [2816]

Mr. Watts: I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency to write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. Gary Waller, dated 27 November 1995:

As you know, the Minister for Railways and Roads, Mr. John Watts, has asked me to reply to your Parliamentary Questions asking about the estimated annual cost to business and industry of traffic delays on the section of A650 trunk road due to be relieved by the proposed Bingley Bypass, the number of accidents in the most recent years on the same stretch of road and the costs incurred to date on preparatory works for the bypass.

The estimated annual cost of delays on this length of the A650 is £1.75m.

Between January 1990 and October 1995, there were 2 fatal, 34 serious and 186 slight accidents resulting in 281 casualties.

The total cost of preparatory works, including design fees, is £18.9m.

Manchester Metro

Mr. Churchill: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on *(a)* the funding of the Manchester Metrolink light rail and *(b)* the environmental benefits achieved by Metrolink. [2829]

Mr. Norris: Bids for light rail schemes are submitted to my Department during the annual transport policies and programmes—TPP—round, and are funded through the package approach. I am prepared to consider supporting light rail schemes, including extensions to the Metrolink, provided they can be demonstrated to be the right and most cost-effective solution to a particular urban transport problem, where they are planned within the context of a strategy or transport package to achieve mode shift away from the private car and where they will attract significant private sector and local investment. It should be remembered, however, that light rail is not the only solution to urban transport problems, and the difficulties and costs associated with developing schemes should not be underestimated.

Manchester Metrolink is currently carrying about 13 million passengers a year, and is estimated to have removed about 1.3 million car journeys a year from the corridor it serves.

QEII

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will publish the report made by the Marine Safety Agency on the QEII before it sailed from Southampton in December 1994. [3116]

Mr. Norris: We intend to publish the report shortly.

Cycle Tracks

Sir Irvine Patnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport by what system the use of cycle tracks is monitored; and if he will make a statement. [2873]

Mr. Norris: It is for each highway authority to judge whether and to what extent it should monitor the use made of its cycle tracks.

Charter Trains

Mr. Riddick: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps the Government are taking to expand the charter train market in the new railways regime. [663]

Mr. Watts: The expansion of the charter train market is a commercial matter for charter train operators and the rail industry. Railtrack welcomes applications from operators seeking to run charter trains on its network.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Child Support Agency

Mr. Cash: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the average monetary value of maintenance assessments undertaken by the Child Support Agency to date, excluding those produced by the implementation of interim maintenance assessments. [1574]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the chief executive, Miss Ann Chant. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Miss Ann Chant to Mr. William Cash, dated 24 November 1995:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about Child Support Agency assessments.

In cases where the absent parent has earned income the average full maintenance assessment, as at May 1995, was £39.69. When absent parents on benefit are included the average figure was £23.53.

Mr. Cash: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the total number of child support maintenance applications which the Child Support Agency has dealt with to date *(a)* where full maintenance assessments have resulted in monetary values less than or equal to the prescribed minimum under the Act, currently £2.35, *(b)* where full maintenance assessments have resulted in monetary values greater than the prescribed minimum under the Act, currently £2.35, *(c)* where interim assessments are currently in force, *(d)* which are currently classed as deferred under the measures announced in December 1994 and *(e)* which are still pending but which are within the CSA's current work load. [1573]

Mr. Mitchell: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the chief executive, Miss Ann Chant. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Miss Ann Chant to Mr. William Cash, dated 24 November 1995:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about Child Support Agency assessments.

The information requested is shown in the table below:

Number of Full Maintenance Assessments with a value between zero and £2.35	*Number of Full Maintenance Assessments with a value greater than £2.35*	*Number of Interim Maintenance Assessments in force*
144,510	166,945	92,998

Data supplied as at 15 September 1995. In addition, you requested information on the number of cases currently classed as deferred under the measures announced in December 1994. The number of cases deferred was in the region of 350,000. The actual number of these still pending is less because some clients have asked the Agency to take on their case, and others are no longer receiving benefit. On this basis we estimate that there are around 300,000 cases remaining to be taken on.

At the end of September 1995, the Child Support Agency had 384,500 applications for child maintenance on hand, pending action.

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security on what date he became aware of the disputes between *(a)* EDS and Computer Associates and *(b)* other parties; and if the supply of the Child Support Agency's computer system was affected by these legal disputes. [2016]

Mr. Mitchell: At the time the contract for the Child Support Agency system was awarded to EDS, there was no knowledge of any dispute between EDS and any other party.

During subsequent development of the system by EDS it became known that it was in dispute with Computer Associates but this had no effect on supply of the system.

The only other dispute known is the dispute between EDS and the state of Florida. Information on this was obtained from the computer press some time after the supply of the system.

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security in how many cases where an absent parent has been approached by the child support agency he has become aware that the absent parent has become unemployed. [2013]

Mr. Mitchell: The information requested is not available. Practical experience has shown that very few absent parents deliberately leave their jobs to avoid paying maintenance for their children. This is because the maintenance assessment formula ensures that all absent parents, and their second families, are at least £30 a week better off after payment of maintenance than they would be if unemployed and receiving income support. No one can now be assessed to pay more than 30 per cent. of their net income in current maintenance. In addition, someone who has left work voluntarily is not entitled to unemployment benefit, and income support is payable at a reduced rate.

Energy Efficiency

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what progress has been made towards cutting energy consumption in Government buildings for which he has responsibility in each year since 1990. [1439]

Mr. Roger Evans: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my hon. Friend, the Minister for Construction and Planning to the hon. Member for East Surrey (Mr. Ainsworth) on 17 May, *Official Report*, columns *260-62*, for details of this Department's energy performance from 1990–91 to 1993–94. My hon. Friend will be publishing details of Departments' performances in 1994–95 shortly and a copy will be placed in the Library.

Housing Benefit

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many of those claiming housing benefit are in *(a)* part-time or *(b)* temporary employment. [1461]

Mr. Roger Evans: The information is not available in the format requested as it is not possible to identify separately the number of housing benefit recipients who are in temporary employment. The available information is set out in the table.

Housing benefit recipients with earnings: Great Britain, May 1994

	Also in receipt of income support	*Not in receipt of income support*	*Total*
Number of housing benefit recipients with earnings	96,000	320,000	416,000

Source

Housing Benefit Management Information System annual 1 per cent. sample, May 1994.

Notes

a) Figures refer to benefit units which may be a single person or a couple.

b) The figure for housing benefit recipients who are also in receipt of income support represents part-time earners only. The figure for housing benefit recipients not in receipt of income support represents full-time and part-time earners.

Public Interest Immunity Certificates

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list all those in his Department who have authority to issue public immunity interest certificates; how many such certificates have been issued in each of the last five years; and what were the main reasons for them. [1392]

Mr. Burt: Public interest immunity certificates relating to departmental documents or information are normally authorised by the appropriate Minister. No such certificates have been issued in respect of the Department of Social Security in the past five years.

Research and Development

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what were the indicative contributions to the EU budget in respect of research and development for his Department in 1993–94. [1916]

Mr. Burt: Table 2.1 of the statistical supplement to the "Forward Look of Government-funded Science, Engineering and Technology" contains indicative figures for the United Kingdom's contributions to the EC budget in respect of research and development. Departments' policy responsibilities are subject to change and can vary from year to year. This Department currently has responsibility for 0.12 per cent. of the Community's R and D budget.

Benefit Savings

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what proportion of the benefit savings cited in his answer of 19 April, *Official Report*, column *181*, were due to *(a)* maintenance paid and *(b)* benefit not paid. [2071]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: All benefit savings are due to benefit not paid.

Legislative Repeals

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what legislation from his Department passed in the last five years contains provision for statutory repeal or review. [2035]

Mr. Heald: The legislation passed within this Department in the last five years which contains provisions for statutory repeal or review is as follows:

Disability Discrimination Act 1995 section 7(5)

Pensions Schemes Act 1993 section 41 (1)—(2)

Pensions Act 1995 sections 137(5) and 138(5)

The Pensions (Polish Forces) Scheme (Extension) Order 1992.

Small and Medium Enterprises

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of Social Security what percentage of his Department's expenditure in 1994–95 was spent on procuring goods or services from small and medium enterprises. [1955]

Mr. Burt: We do not collect information on the size of companies who supply the DSS with goods and services.

However, we are pursuing a number of procurement initiatives which should help small businesses. These include ensuring that we minimise the paperwork burden for prospective suppliers, and involvement in the HM Treasury's central unit on procurement working group on SME's—small and medium enterprises.

Part-time Work

Ms Quin: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to change the benefits system to encourage *(a)* part-time work and *(b)* job sharing. [2155]

Mr. Roger Evans: Family credit already helps 215,000 people working between 16 and 24 hours a week. In 1994 we introduced a child care disregard to remove a stumbling block preventing some parents from taking up work. Disability working allowance also tops up the earnings of some disabled people who work for 16 hours or more a week. From October 1996 we are piloting in eight areas earnings top-up, a new in-work benefit for people without dependant children. This will also help people working 16 hours a week or more to be better off in work.

In October 1996 we are introducing a back-to-work bonus whereby those on income support or jobseeker's allowance who undertake small amounts of work of less than 16 hours a week can accumulate a lump sum of up to £1,000 based on their part-time earnings. This will be paid when either the claimant or partner moves into work which takes them off benefit.

From October 1996 the partner of a claimant receiving jobseeker's allowance or income support will be able to take work of up to 24 hours a week without removing entitlement to benefit. There will also be a £10 disregard in respect of both of these benefits.

Job sharing is a matter which is best left to employers and employees to arrange, but the measures already taken should facilitate it.

Incapacity Benefit

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the benefits which were subsequently claimed by the 18,895 people who were found capable of work following the all work test referred to in his answer of 23 October 1995, *Official Report*, column *485*. [1840]

Mr. Burt *[holding answer 24 November 1995]:* Of incapacity benefit claimants found capable of work following the application of the all work test between April and September, 8,974 have claimed unemployment benefit. Information for other benefits claimed is not available.

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how many people who have been found capable of work between April and October 1995 were undertaking exempt work under regulation 17(a) of the Incapacity for Work (General Regulations); [1752]

(2) how many people in receipt of *(a)* severe disablement allowance, and *(b)* incapacity benefit, undertaking exempt work under regulation 17(a) of the Incapacity for Work (General) Regulations, have subsequently lost benefit because they have earned above the earnings limit; [1830]

(3) how many people in receipt of *(a)* severe disablement allowance and *(b)* incapacity benefit, are also undertaking work which is exempt under regulation 17(a)(i), (ii) and (iii) of the Incapacity for Work (General) Regulations; and what is the average amount of their earnings. [1831]

Mr. Burt *[holding answer 24 November 1995]:* The information requested is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many claimants of incapacity benefit are currently exempt from the all-work test by virtue of *(a)* receipt of the highest rate of the disability living allowance care component, *(b)* in receipt of invalidity benefit and aged over 58 years on 13 April, *(c)* with a serious medical condition and *(d)* a serious mental illness. [1832]

Mr. Burt *[holding answer 24 November 1995]:* Such information as is available is in the table.

Reason for exemption from all work test	*Number exempt*
Receipt of the Disability Living Allowance highest rate care component	20,976
Receipt of Invalidity Benefit between 1 December 1993 and 12 April 1995 and aged 58 or over on 13 April 1995	480,000
Severe medical condition, including severe mental illness	138,828

1. Figures for severe mental illness are not separately available.

2. Figures for exempt incapacity benefit claimants who are also in receipt of Widow's Benefit are not held on the computer system and are not included above.

3. Information available to end of October 1995.

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many claimants of incapacity benefit between April and October 1995 have had their benefit suspended for undertaking work which is not exempt. [1833]

Mr. Burt *[holding answer 24 November 1995]:* Claimants are treated as capable of work for any week in which they do work which is not in one of the permitted categories.

Information is not available on the number of people who leave incapacity benefit for work, and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many claimants of invalidity benefit failed to attend a medical examination to assess their incapacity for work in each of the quarters ending December 1994 and March 1995. [1747]

Mr. Burt: This is a matter for Peter Mathison, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member with such information as is available.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. Keith Bradley dated 24 November 1995:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your Parliamentary Question about how many claimants of Invalidity Benefit failed to attend a medical examination to assess their incapacity for work in each of the quarters ending December 1994 and March 1995.

Information is not available in the format requested. This is because separate statistics for each benefit were not kept on the numbers failing to attend a medical examination.

The total number of customers who failed to attend a medical examination, in respect of Invalidity Benefit and Sickness Benefit, to assess their incapacity for work in the quarter ending December 1994 was 17,750 and for the quarter ending March 1995, the figure was 20,066.

I hope you find this reply helpful.-

Income Support

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his estimate of the cost of raising the £15 earnings disregard to £44 per week for people entitled to the disability premium in each of the benefits *(a)* income support, *(b)* housing benefit and *(c)* council tax benefit. [1754]

Mr. Roger Evans *[holding answer 24 November 1995]:* The information is set out in the table.

Benefit	*Cost £ million*
Income support	10
Council tax benefit	10
Housing benefit	20
Total	35

1. Based on data taken from the 1994 Annual Statistical Enquiry and from the 1991–92–93 Family Expenditure Surveys uprated to 1995–96 prices, benefits and earnings levels.

2. For HB/CTB cases the estimate of the proportion of disability premium cases with earnings is based on data taken from the 1994 HBMIS data.

3. As it is not possible to model changes in hours worked due to the suggested increase in the earnings disregard, any costs/savings arising from changes in hours worked have not been included.

4. Lone parents in receipt of the disability premium are assumed to benefit from the change. Disabled pensioners have not been included as they are in receipt of a Pensioner rather a disability premium.

5. Figures have been rounded to the nearest £5 million.

HEALTH

Nurse Resignations

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many nurses have resigned from their positions within the national health service in the last 12 months. [179]

Mr. Sackville: This information is not available in the form requested.

Nurses who resign from their posts, for whatever reason, are not necessarily lost from the national health service as many are likely to resume an NHS post after a career break. As nursing is a predominantly female profession this is to be expected. People take career breaks for a wide variety of reasons ranging from having a family to extending their skills and experience by exploring other fields of employment. Naturally the Government are keen to harness this invaluable body of training, skills and experience and bring them back into the NHS.

Ministerial Transport, London

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many times in the last year he used *(a)* London Buses and *(b)* the London Underground while on official business. [416]

Mr. Dorrell: I have not travelled on London Buses or the London Underground in an official capacity in the last year.

Mental Hospitals

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to commission another survey of English mental hospitals to monitor their closure, comparable to those commissioned by the mental health task force in 1993 and 1994. [1920]

Mr. Bowis: None.

Residential Places and Hospital Beds

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* local authority residential places, *(b)* independent sector residential places, *(c)* national health service long-stay geriatric and psycho-geriatric beds and *(d)* independent sector nursing home places there were in (i) 1970 and (ii) 1990. [1127]

Mr. Bowis: The information available centrally is shown in the table. The figures for 1970 are not strictly comparable with those for 1990 due to a variety of changes in recording practices.

Residential places and hospital beds

	1970[1]	*1990*[1]
Local authority residential places[2]	n/a[3]	105,400
Independent sector residential places[2]	54,900	180,500
NHS geriatric hospital beds (annual average available)[4,5]	39,591[6]	48,734
NHS psycho-geriatric long-stay hospitals beds (annual average available)[5]	n/a[7]	18,879
Independent sector nursing home places[8]	n/a[9]	94,313

Notes:
[1] Figures for 1970 relate to 31 December; those for 1990 relate to 31 March.
[2] Places in homes for elderly people and people with physical and/or sensory disabilities.
[3] Information on places was not collected in 1970; there were 99,700 elderly residents in local authority residential homes at 31 December 1970.
[4] Figures are for long and short stay beds.
[5] 1970 classification based on clinical specialty; 1990 based on ward classification.
[6] Figure is for England and Wales.
[7] Figures for geriatric and long-stay not separately identified in 1970.
[8] Beds for elderly people and elderly people with mental health problems.
[9] Information not collected centrally.
Source:
Department of Health statistical returns RAC5, KO36.

Wheelchairs

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to ensure that NHS community trusts do not require insurance cover for wheelchairs loaned to patients. [1786]

Mr. Bowis: Patients are not required to insure their wheelchairs. Patients issued with a powered indoor-outdoor wheelchair may be advised to take out third party insurance so that they are covered against personal liability in the event of an accident.

Network of Access and Child Contact Centres

Mrs. Golding: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make it his policy to fund the work of the Network of Access and Child Contact Centres. [1903]

Mr. Bowis: The Network of Access and Child Contact Centres may apply for section 64 funding from the Department of Health in the same way as any other voluntary organisation, but it has not done so in the current round.

Consultants

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will place in the Library the results of the national survey of the work load of 274 NHS consultants. [540]

Mr. Malone: I refer the hon. Member to the Medical Workforce Standing Advisory Committee's second report, which refers to a survey conducted by the Hospital Consultants and Specialists Association in 1992–93 on the amount of time spent by its members on purely management activities. The committee's report is available in the Library.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will institute an inquiry into the arrangements for and costs of *(a)* each retirement of consultants and *(b)* their subsequent re-employment on a part-time basis. [1800]

Mr. Malone: Most pension arrangements cover all staff groups, including consultants. Data on the cost of consultant retirements, and their subsequent re-employment on a part-time basis, are not available centrally. I have no plans to institute an inquiry on costs for consultants as a separate group.

Mental Health

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what is the average percentage of local

authority personal social services budgets currently spent on mental health services; [1922]

(2) how many local authorities' expenditure falls below the average currently spent on mental health services; and if he will list those authorities, giving the percentage of their budgets devoted to such services, in descending order. [1923]

Mr. Bowis: Local authorities' budget returns for 1995–96 show that, overall, planned expenditure on mental health services in England represents 5.6 per cent. of the total of personal social services budgets.

The 57 authorities who have budgeted to spend below that percentage on mental health services are shown in the table.

Personal social services: percentage of total budgeted expenditure on mental health services 1995–96

	Percentage
Hereford and Worcester	5.5
Avon	5.3
Cheshire	5.3
Bromley	5.1
Hillingdon	5.0
Sheffield	4.9
Newham	4.9
Knowsley	4.8
Devon	4.7
Barking and Dagenham	4.7
Redbridge	4.7
East Sussex	4.7
Dorset	4.6
Cleveland	4.6
South Tyneside	4.6
North Yorkshire	4.5
Coventry	4.5
Suffolk	4.4
Dudley	4.4
Derbyshire	4.4
Bexley	4.2
Wakefield	4.2
Sefton	4.2
Rochdale	4.1
Cumbria	4.1
Tameside	4.1
Humberside	4.1
Salford	4.1
Wirral	4.0
Lancashire	4.0
Berkshire	3.9
Wiltshire	3.9
Leeds	3.9
Kent	3.9
Cornwall	3.9
Barnsley	3.8
Havering	3.7
Sunderland	3.7
Wolverhampton	3.6
Cambridgeshire	3.5
West Sussex	3.4
Durham	3.3
Calderdale	3.3
Bedfordshire	3.3
Stockport	3.2
St. Helens	3.2
Essex	3.2
Gloucestershire	3.1
Hertfordshire	3.0
Walsall	2.8
Doncaster	2.6
Bury	2.6
Lincolnshire	2.4
Northumberland	2.2
Wigan	2.2
Staffordshire	1.8
Isles of Scilly	0.5

Percentages based on figures from local authorities' budget returns on form RA96.

Dr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for health if it is his policy that places for mentally ill people in residential homes are interchangeable with psychiatric hospital beds. [1921]

Mr. Bowis: Our policy is that mentally ill people should be placed in the accommodation best suited to their assessed needs.

Bed Availability

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health on what basis of usage, survey or projection he has instructed or advised district health authorities of the number of beds per unit or population; and what adjustments in those levels are made for observed and recorded variations in needs for acute health care. [1796]

Mr. Sackville: We have not issued any central guidance. It is for individual health authorities and trusts to determine local bed requirements in accordance with local needs and circumstances.

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was for each NHS trust and for England as a whole for the last available two years the frequency of closure of admittance to emergency hospital beds, expressing the number of occasions of such closure as a proportion of the total number of hospital beds and indicating the percentage increase or decrease in each case. [639]

Mr. Sackville: This information is not available centrally. Information on the average daily number of available beds for each NHS trust for the years 1993–94 and 1994–95 is published in "Bed availability for England", copies of which are available in the Library.

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information his Department maintains on the number of *(a)* rehabilitation, *(b)* convalescent, *(c)* respite and *(d)* continuing care beds available in the NHS and the private sector. [2779]

Mr. Bowis: Information collected from the national health service is published in "Bed Availability for England," copies of which are available in the Library. Data are collected by broad ward classification rather than by clinical specialty and returns are made on a financial year basis. Information from the independent sector does not identify the purpose for which beds are provided.

Chiropody Services

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to issue further instructions to health authorities on the provision of chiropody services to men aged between 60 and 65 years. [1799]

Mr. Bowis: None.

Cow's Milk

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research his Department has *(a)* evaluated and *(b)* commissioned into the effect of cow's milk on the health of those who are intolerant to it; what consideration he has given to making lactolite available via the national health service; and what inter-departmental discussions have been held about the extension of the welfare food scheme to include alternatives to cow's milk to those on income support. [2003]

Mr. Sackville: My Department has not commissioned any specific research into cow's milk intolerance but it keeps under review the scientific literature on the general issue of food intolerance, including cow's milk intolerance. I have given no consideration to making lactolite available via the national health service. The Department has held no inter-departmental discussions about any extension of the welfare food scheme to include alternatives to cow's milk.

Family Health Services Authority, Doncaster

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the severance payment made to the last chief executive of Doncaster FHSA. [1785]

Mr. Malone: There was no severance payment made. The employment contract was allowed to run to expiry. On retirement, appropriate superannuation benefits were paid.

GP Lists

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to require general practitioners to provide patients whom they remove from their lists with detailed reasons for that removal. [2235]

Mr. Malone: None.

NHS Doctors

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many hospital doctors have left the national health service in each year since 1991 who qualified *(a)* five years previously and *(b)* 10 years previously. [2278]

Mr. Malone: Data are not available in the form requested. Evidence of doctors leaving the profession prematurely is available from studies published in 1991 by Professor James Parkhouse. These studies suggested that although about 20 per cent. of doctors were not practising in the national health service five years after qualification the majority of these were not lost permanently to medicine. Many were working in short-term postings overseas to further develop their skills, while others were working in United Kingdom medical work outside the NHS, or taking short career breaks.

Support Force for Children's Residential Care

Mr. Couchman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress has been made by the support force for children's residential care since September 1993; and if he will make a statement. [3083]

Mr. Bowis: The support force for children's residential care completed its two-year programme of activity in September 1995. It has produced a report of this work. Copies of the report have been placed in the Library.

This report demonstrates the significant contribution made by the support force in its two-year span. I am committed to a continuing programme of action to safeguard the future of quality residential child care as an option of choice. My Department is considering the most appropriate and effective means of taking forward and reviewing the work that the support force has started.

Deregulation

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what legislation from his Department passed in the last five years contains provision for statutory repeal or review. [2034]

Mr. Sackville: Section 3 of the Health Authorities Act 1995 which enables district health authorities and family health services authorities to act jointly in preparation for the reorganisation of health authorities provides for that section to cease to have effect on 1 April 1996.

Small and Medium Businesses

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of his Department's expenditure in 1994–95 was spent on procuring goods or services from small and medium enterprises. [1947]

Mr. Sackville: This information is not available centrally.

Electro-magnetic Fields

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research his Department has commissioned into the possibility that exposure to electro-magnetic fields is a cause of cancer; and if he will make a statement. [1963]

Mr. Sackville: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Normanton (Mr. O'Brien) on 3 November 1994 *Official Report*, columns *1274–5*.

Community Care (Direct Payments) Bill

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make available information about the Community Care (Direct Payments) Bill in simple text and pictorial format and on audio tape for people with learning difficulties. [1967]

Mr. Bowis: A consultation document on the Community Care (Direct Payments) Bill, explaining the Bill and setting out proposals for regulations, will be published shortly. It will be available in a variety of formats.

Dudley Group of Hospitals NHS Trust

Mr. Pearson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what stage the Dudley Group of Hospitals NHS trust's proposed capital investment plan has reached;

and what further stages must be passed for it to obtain approval. [2163]

Mr. Sackville: I understand that Dudley health authority is conducting a public consultation on the implications of the proposed capital development by the Dudley Group of Hospitals NHS trust. When this is complete the trust will need to prepare and submit an outline business case to the NHS executive west midlands regional office and then, providing it is content, test the project for private finance. Assuming these stages proceed satisfactorily, the next step will be to prepare a full business case for consideration by the NHS executive headquarters who will decide whether the project needs to be submitted to HM Treasury for approval.

Video Surveillance

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what consultations he has had with the chairman of North Staffordshire NHS trust about the use of covert video surveillance in cases of suspected child abuse; if the hospital has now terminated the practice of the covert video surveillance; for how long was it in use; and if he will make a statement. [2824]

Mr. Bowis: None. I refer the hon. Member to the trust chairman for details.

Out-sourcing Research

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research his Department has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated in respect of out-sourcing by (i) BUPA and (ii) other private hospital and healthcare providers for the purposes of comparison with proposals for out-sourcing under the private finance initiative; and if he will make a statement.. [2820]

Mr. Sackville: None.

Nursing Homes

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list those trusts with registered nursing homes indicating the numbers registered in each of the last four years.. [2777]

Mr. Bowis: This information is not available centrally.

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information his Department maintains on the number of people moving between residential and nursing homes. [2783]

Mr. Bowis: None.

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many jointly registered residential and nursing homes there have been in each region in each of the last five years.. [2420]

Mr. Bowis *[holding answer 24 November 1995]:* Information as recorded by local authorities on the number of residential homes registered under the terms of the Registered Homes Act 1984 for the provision of nursing care as well as residential care is shown in the table.

Dual registered residential care homes

Numbers

Regional health authority	*Year ending 31 March*				
	1991	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*
England	446	519	602	745	880
Northern	19	25	29	46	49
Yorkshire	32	33	41	59	80
Trent	24	31	42	56	73
East Anglian	5	7	10	19	37
North-West Thames	18	19	18	25	21
North-East Thames	18	19	23	31	29
South-East Thames	40	44	45	53	55
South-West Thames	59	66	71	78	83
Wessex	46	65	72	86	95
Oxford	25	28	31	32	34
South Western	49	64	88	103	135
West Midlands	40	44	52	61	64
Mersey	35	36	33	32	34
North Western	36	38	47	64	91

Hospital Discharges

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information his Department maintains about the destination of geriatric discharges from hospital. [2781]

Mr. Bowis: The latest centrally held information, 1993–94, on the destination on discharge of patients treated by consultants in geriatric medicine in national health service hospitals in England is as follows:

Destination on discharge	*Percentage*
Usual residence	69.18
Deaths	17.23
NHS hospital outside district—general ward/younger physically disabled	5.70
Non-NHS institution	4.34
Local authority residential home	1.30
Temporary residence eg Hotels, residential educational institutions	1.22
NHS hospital outside district—mentally ill/handicapped ward	0.34
NHS nursing home	0.32
Not known	0.19
Special hospital	0.13

Figures do not add to 100 due to rounding.

National Health Service Assets

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proposals he has to cover the transfer of national health service assets beyond the actual capital projects being financed to the management of facilities management consortia under the private finance initiative. [2822]

Mr. Sackville: National health service bodies are expected to obtain value for money from any transaction involving the sale or transfer of assets to a third party. General guidance on the disposal of national health service assets is included in the publication "Estatecode: Property Transactions—A Management Guide for NHS Trusts" published by HMSO, copies of which are available in the Library.

Correspondence

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the hon. Member for Walsall, North will receive a reply to his letter of 26 October, ref. POH(2)4593/52. [2724]

Mr. Malone: I will write to the hon. Member.

Community Care Services

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been the level of spending on community care services in each *(a)* district and *(b)* region in each of the last four years. [2778]

Mr. Bowis: The information is not currently available centrally in the form requested.

Elderly People

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment his Department has made about changes in the costs of providing NHS treatments or services to elderly people *(a)* over the last 10 years and *(b)* over the next 10 years. [2782]

Mr. Bowis: The available information on the costs to the hospital and community health services of changes in the number of elderly people is contained in the departmental report. Copies of the report are available in the Library.

Chernobyl

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what contribution his Department made to the conference held by the World Health Organisation in Geneva on 20 to 25 November on the consequence of the Chernobyl accident; how his Department was represented; what British papers were submitted; and if he will make a statement on the outcome of the conference. [2775]

Mr. Sackville: At the World Health Organisation conference, on 20 to 23 November, on the consequences of the Chernobyl accident my Department was represented by an official and also by the medical assistant director of the National Radiological Protection Board who assisted in the organisation of the conference. The NRPB assistant director was a member of the technical advisory meeting held in February 1995 and the paper selection meeting in July 1995. The medical department at the NRPB has also contributed to the production of the technical summary of the international programme of the health effects of the Chernobyl accident and the forthcoming full report to be published in April 1996.

British papers were presented by Professor D. Williams of Cambridge university and Professor T. Lee of St. Andrews university, on thyroid cancer and psycho-social effects respectively.

The conference was attended by over 350 participants from 38 countries. The most important aspects were thyroid cancer, psycho-social effects and epidemiological studies. There is a real increase in childhood thyroid cancers in Belarus, the Russian Federation and the Ukraine. The conference agreed that there is a need to continue the co-ordinated international support to determine the exact nature of causation and ensure optimal therapy. The non-radiogenic psycho-social impact resulting from extensive relocation of the populations from contaminated areas has produced the most significant overall morbidity so far. Participants agreed with the need to continue with well controlled epidemiological studies of those affected.

NHS Trusts

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much each NHS trust spent on non-NHS provision in each year since 1991–92. [2776]

Mr. Sackville: This information is not available centrally.

Bed Occupancy

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information his Department maintains on bed occupancy rates. [2780]

Mr. Sackville: Information on occupied bed days is published each year in volume 1 of "Hospital Episode Statistics", copies of which are available in the Library.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 28 November 1995

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Hotels

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what is her Department's definition of a hotel; what representations she has received *(a)* for the use of the word to be brought within the Trade Descriptions Act 1968 and *(b)* for all hotels to be registered with the local authority; and if she will make a statement. [1266]

Mr. Sproat: There is no accepted definition of the term "hotel". In our publication "Hotels: The Consumer View" published on 14 November 1995, we used the term in its generic sense to cover all accommodation which has full or limited service, including bed and breakfast accommodation, guest houses and inns.

There have been no representations for the use of the word to be brought into the terms of the Trade Descriptions Act 1968.

Opinion within the industry is divided on whether compulsory registration is the appropriate way to ensure that hotels meet a minimum standard. I believe that this is better done by means of an effective, consumer led, voluntary scheme and I have asked the English tourist board for proposals to strengthen the crown accommodation classification and grading scheme.

Football Licensing Authority

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will list the annual income of the Football Licensing Authority from *(a)* fees, *(b)* charges and *(c)* fines; what was the total number of staff employed (i) part time and (ii) full time; and what contribution her Department has made towards the annual running costs in each of the past three years. [2748]

Mr. Sproat: In the year ended 31 March 1995 the Football Licensing Authority received fees of £9,400; these have been paid to the Consolidated Fund via the Department of National Heritage. The authority employs nine full-time inspectors, seven full-time administrative staff and two part-time typists. The Department's grant to the authority was £870,000 in 1994–95, £860,000 in 1993–94 and £800,000 in 1992–93.

Statutory Instruments

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how many statutory instruments her Department sponsored in the last Session of Parliament; and how many of these *(a)* constituted a new rule or regulation, *(b)* were introduced to implement European Community directives and *(c)* amplify the minimum standards set out in an original European Community directive. [2460]

Mr. Sproat: My Department sponsored 12 statutory instruments in the last Session of Parliament. Two of these are new regulations—the Open Spaces: Hyde Park and Regent's Park (Vehicle Parking) Regulations 1995, controlling parking in the royal parks, and the Football Spectators Seating Order 1995 extending the regulations affecting seating at football grounds. None of the statutory instruments was introduced to implement European Community directives, and none amplifies the minimum standards set out in an original European Community directive.

Sporting Events (Broadcasting)

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage (1) what plans she has to prohibit the exclusive transmission of major sporting events on satellite channels; [2502]

(2) what plans she has to extend the broadcasting of major sporting events to a wider audience. [2501]

Mr. Sproat: I refer the hon. Member to my answer to his earlier question on television rights on 22 November 1995, *Official Report*, column *160*.

Research and Development

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what were the indicative contributions to the EU budget in respect of research and development for her Department in 1993–94. [1913]

Mr. Sproat: Table 2.1 of the statistical supplement to the "Forward Look of Government-funded Science, Engineering and Technology" contains indicative figures for the United Kingdom's contributions to the EC budget in respect of research and development. Departments' policy responsibilities are subject to change and can vary from year to year. My Department currently has responsibility for 0.20 per cent. of the Community's R and D budget.

National Lottery

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what plans she has to allow lottery funds for revenue support; and if she will make a statement. [2086]

Mr. Sproat: National lottery funding is already available for revenue support. The National Lottery Charities Board makes revenue grants available to caring charities. The millennium award scheme will invest in people's talent. Revenue and endowment funding is also available in association with capital projects receiving grant, where other funds cannot be found.

The Government have always made clear that the lottery is being kept under review. It is still early days. As the lottery unfolds naturally, we see it investing in human as well as physical capital.

Local Community Television

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what studies her Department has commissioned into the possible introduction of local community television using analogue technology. [2592]

Mr. Sproat: None. However, the Government are keen that local television services are allowed to develop and are considering making provision in the forthcoming broadcasting legislation.

Agency Travel

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will list for each of her executive agencies for the last financial year in respect of overseas travel by staff of the agency *(a)* the cost, *(b)* the countries visited and *(c)* the posts held by the staff involved. [2360]

Mr. Sproat: Listed are details in respect of overseas travel for the last financial year for my two agencies.

Historic Royal Palaces Agency

Cost	*Country Visited*	*Post held by staff involved*
961.92	Chicago, USA	Business Development Manager
374.86	Geneva, Switzerland	Business Development Manager
592.00	Switzerland	Deputy Palace Manager
330.90	Germany	Curator
195.00	Brussels, Belgium	Curator
700.00	Canada	Head Housekeeper
226.90	Munich, Germany	Assistant Curator
195.00	Brussels, Belgium	Assistant Curator
140.00	Amsterdam, Netherlands	Assistant Curator
2,492.00[1]	USA	Travel Trade Manager
3,155.00[1]	USA	Travel Trade Manager
739.00	Germany	Travel Trade Manager
4,051.00[1]	Germany	Travel Trade Manager
250.00	Barcelona, Spain	Interpretation Manager
201.40	Amsterdam, Netherlands	Member of the Textile Conservation Studio

[1] These trips were for exhibitions in which HRPA was taking part. The costs of the exhibition (including stand hire etc) and membership fees to necessary associations, are included in this figure.

The Royal Parks Agency

During the last financial year no one in the employ of the Royal Parks Agency went overseas on agency-related business.

Television Licences

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage when the hon. Member for Islington South and Finsbury will receive a substantive reply to his letter of 16 August on the subject of television licences. [2722]

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 27 November 1995]:* My Department is looking into the issues raised in the hon. Member's letter. I hope to let him have a substantive reply shortly.

Small and Medium Enterprises

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what percentage of her Department's expenditure in 1994–95 was spent on procuring goods or services from small and medium-sized enterprises. [1951]

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 27 November 1995]:* Neither my Department nor its agencies keep a specific record of a suppliers size. The information could therefore be obtained only by incurring disproportionate costs.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Local Government

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list the Acts of Parliament and consolidated Acts that affect local government that have been introduced by his Department since January 1994. [46]

The Deputy Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster on 20 November 1995, *Official Report*, column *21*.

Risk Assessment

Mr. Neil Hamilton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what progress has been made in the work of the independent panel of scientific experts on risk assessment. [2048]

Mr. Freeman: I have been asked to reply. The panel receives papers from time to time on individual topics and more general matters of principle and advises the deregulation task force. The task force's first report recommended that a risk assessment should be required for all regulatory proposals affecting business; that Ministers should be required personally to sign off all risk assessments; and that no regulatory proposals should be considered collectively by Ministers without a certificate signed by the responsible Minister that he has read the risk assessment and that he believes that the balance between cost and benefit has been approximately struck. The Government have accepted these recommendations and new guidance on risk assessment methodology for use by Government Departments is currently being developed.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Boateng: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department from whom his Department is seeking legal advice in relation to private finance initiative schemes. [1657]

Mr. John M. Taylor: Masons solicitors are advising the Court Service on contractual issues surrounding the local county court procurement project. No other current Departmental procurements have obtained such support.

Mr. Coe: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when the MORI Survey, "Public Attitudes to Marriage, Divorce and Family Mediation," will be made available in full. [3235]

Mr. Taylor: The survey was conducted as part of the detailed process of consultation on the divorce reform proposals. The results of the survey were considered in the White Paper, "Looking to the Future-Mediation and the Ground for Divorce," Cm 2799, published in April this year, and were included in the summary of the

consultation analysis published at the same time. The survey has been made available in full today, and copies have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Mr. Boateng: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what is the estimated cost of the legal advice his Department is seeking in relation to private finance initiative schemes; and on what terms that advice is being sought. [1658]

Mr. John M. Taylor: Legal advice to the local county court—LOCCS procurement project is likely to cost up to £25,000. The contract with Masons is subject to normal departmental terms and conditions.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Nuclear Testing

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how the United Kingdom ambassador to the United Nations voted on the draft resolution in committee on 17 November concerning proposals to oppose nuclear testing; what consideration underlay the vote; and if he will list the nations which voted with the United Kingdom on the draft resolution. [2735]

Mr. David Davis: The United Kingdom voted against the resolution. We do not believe that the current testing programmes are inconsistent with commitments made by the nuclear weapon states at the non-proliferation treaty review and extension conference. We have made clear that it would be hypocritical and wrong for us to condemn the French decision to undertake a final limited series of tests, based on scientific advice that these tests are necessary to preserve the safety and reliability of French nuclear weapons. We regret that the resolution failed to mention either the good progress made towards achieving a comprehensive test ban treaty, or the commitment of all five nuclear weapon states to conclude these negotiations no later than 1996. Eleven other countries voted with the United Kingdom; 45 abstained and 33 did not take part in the vote. The full list of votes has been placed in the Library of the House.

Gibraltar

Mr. Jopling: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what extra equipment has been purchased recently for the Royal Gibraltar police to combat drugs and tobacco smuggling. [2666]

Mr. David Davis: Equipment provided to the Royal Gibraltar police over the last 12 months to combat drugs and tobacco smuggling includes technical equipment, vehicles and spares, computer equipment, a fast patrol launch and night vision goggles.

Mr. Jopling: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what were the reasons for the early termination of the contract of the Gibraltar Attorney-General. [2569]

Mr. Davis: Mr. Blackburn-Gittings, former Attorney-General of Gibraltar, decided to resign because a difference of views arose between himself and the governor.

EU Commissioners (Earnings)

Mr. Michael Spicer: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the rules covering outside earnings and the public disclosure of income for members of the Commission of the European Communities. [2729]

Mr. David Davis: Article 157 of the European Community treaty states that the members of the Commission may not, during their term of office, engage in any other occupation, whether gainful or not.

International Peacekeeping

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations he has received regarding international peacekeeping efforts; and if he will make a statement. [827]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: The United Kingdom is in constant dialogue with the United Nations, and other international organisations, on a wide range of peacekeeping issues. As the second largest troop contributor to the United Nations peacekeeping operations, with troops in four separate missions, we continue to take an active part in discussions to develop international peacekeeping capabilities.

BBC World Service

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans there are for funding the BBC World Service in the last year of the current triennium. [3095]

Mr. Hanley: My right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary will write to the hon. Member immediately after the Budget statement.

International Sanctions

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he has taken and on what dates, to freeze the personal accounts or assets of members of regimes with whom the United Kingdom are in dispute as part of a national or international sanctions policy. [2565]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor *[holding answer 27 November 1995]:* The United Kingdom has no unilateral sanctions in place against the assets or personal accounts of foreign regimes. However, we do implement the mandatory financial sanctions imposed by the UN Security Council. Such financial sanctions are in place against Iraq, in UNSCR 661 adopted on 6 August 1990, and against Libya in UNSCR 863 adopted on 11 November 1993.

The financial sanctions imposed on the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in UNSCRs 757 and 820 adopted on 30 May 1992 and 17 April 1993, respectively were suspended with immediate effect by UNSCR 1022 adopted on 22 November, with the exception that certain assets frozen or impounded by UNSCRs 757 and 820 shall remain frozen or impounded. A copy of UNSCR 1022 is available in the Library of the House.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he is satisfied with the existing measures to ensure that specified bovine offals do not enter the human food chain. [3372]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The controls in place require the specified bovine offals, the potentially BSE infected tissues, to be removed from all cattle at slaughter and be destroyed. These controls are kept under continual review. The independent spongiform encephalopathy advisory committee again looked at all the controls to protect public health from any remote theoretical risk from BSE at its meeting on 23 November. It concluded:

> "Earlier in 1995 SEAC had concluded that 'provided in the slaughtering process the removal of the spinal cord was done properly, the mechanically recovered meat (MRM) process was safe and there was no reason for the Committee to change its advice'.
>
> In the light of the current audit reports [reported to Parliament in my answer to the hon. Member for Scarborough (Mr. Sykes) on 22 November (*Official Record* columns *192–193*)] showing failure to remove parts of the spinal cord in a small number of carcases the Committee expressed its grave concern.
>
> It noted the further tightening up of controls but felt that unless and until it was clear that the removal of SBO, particularly spinal cord, was now being undertaken properly in all cases it would be prudent, as a precaution, to suspend the use of vertebrae from cattle aged over six months, in the production of MRM."

Taking account of practical considerations, I have decided to make regulations which would prohibit the use of bovine vertebral column from cattle of any age in mechanically recovered meat. Most MRM is made from poultry, pig and sheep meat and the committee therefore made no recommendation for any other action in respect of products containing MRM. The committee also reiterated its advice that beef, including cuts such as rib of beef and T-bone steak that include backbone, was a safe product.

I must emphasise that these, like all our controls on BSE, are precautionary measures and that there is no evidence of a link between BSE and the human disease Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease.

Research and Development

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what were the indicative contributions to the EU budget in respect of research and development for his Department in 1993–94. [1910]

Mr. Boswell: Table 2.1 of the statistical supplement to the "Forward Look of Government-funded Science, Engineering and Technology" contains indicative figures for the United Kingdom's contributions to the EC budget in respect of research and development. Departments' policy responsibilities are subject to change and can vary from year to year. My Department currently has responsibility for 3.93 per cent. of the Community's R and D budget.

Badger Setts, Paignton Zoo

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many badger setts there are known to be in the boundaries of Paignton zoo; how many of these have been interfered with; in respect of how many a licence to interfere has been issued; and for what reasons the licences were issued. [2277]

Mrs. Browning: I refer the hon. Member to the letter I sent him on 11 May 1995; there has been no change in the situation.

Apples

Sir Roger Moate: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what is the likely timetable for decisions in European Community negotiations about the definition of co-operatives or producer organisations with particular reference to the intervention regime for apples; what are his objectives in these negotiations; and if decisions will be taken by majority voting; [2436]

(2) what is the timetable for likely decisions in European Community negotiations about the intervention regime for apples; what are his objectives in these negotiations; and whether decisions will be taken by majority voting. [2437]

Mr. Boswell: I understand that the Spanish presidency hopes to reach agreement at the December Council of Agriculture Ministers. Any decisions will be taken by qualified majority voting.

Our objectives include seeking a clear signal that intervention will come to an end altogether. We will also seek to ensure that the recognition criteria for producer organisations do not discriminate against those which exist in the United Kingdom.

Farming (New Entrants)

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations his Department has received on the subject of offering financial assistance to new entrants into farming in the last three years; and if he will make a statement. [2528]

Mr. Boswell: A number of suggestions have been made to the Department for supporting new entrants to farming. These include modifications to the taxation regime, lower interest rates, quota allocation arrangements and the introduction of assistance under EC regulation 2328/91. This measure enables member states to provide assistance in the form of installation premia or interest rate subsidies on loans for new farms; it has not been taken up in the United Kingdom. We believe that such measures are more appropriate in cases where member states' inheritance laws may lead to the breaking up of agricultural holdings and hence the need for additional infrastructure investment to maintain viability. In the UK, holdings tend to pass intact from one generation to the next. Our recent deregulatory steps on tenancy reform, in the Agriculture Tenancies Act 1995, are designed to encourage new entrants to farming, and have been widely welcomed across the industry.

Crofting

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on low intensity croft farming; and if he will list the pilot schemes his Department has assessed. [2572]

Mr. Boswell: Crofting is not a system of farming which is practised in England. The Department has not therefore made any assessment of its impact.

Poultry (Gas Stunning)

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he expects to be able to lift the prohibition on the gas stunning of poultry. [2114]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 27 November 1995]:* The killing of poultry by exposure to specified gas mixtures has been permitted since 1 April 1995 under the Welfare of Animals (Slaughter or Killing) Regulations 1995.

Ostrich Farms

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what proposals he has to monitor and control ostrich farms. [2161]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 27 November 1995]:* The State Veterinary Service inspects ostrich farms in Great Britain to check that the welfare standards are satisfactory. A total of 23 welfare inspections have been made since 1 April 1994. In making the inspections, the state veterinary service takes account of the guidelines on the welfare of ostriches prepared by the Farm Animal Welfare Council.

Alport Dale

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if English Nature has stated any formal objection to Forest Enterprise's proposals for Alport dale. [2377]

Mr. Boswell *[holding answer 27 November 1995]:* Yes. Forest Enterprise is now reviewing its proposals and is, jointly with English Nature, developing a management plan for the land within the sites of special scientific interest.

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what options are being considered as alternatives to putting underground the electricity line supplying Alport Hamlet; and what is the estimated cost of each of these options. [2375]

Mr. Boswell *[holding answer 27 November 1995]:* It is for Yorkshire Electricity to decide what options to consider.

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many letters of objection have been received by *(a)* the Peak Park joint planning board and *(b)* the Forestry Authority opposing Forest Enterprise's proposals for Alport dale; and on what dates his Department received these figures. [2376]

Mr. Boswell *[holding answer 27 November 1995]:* I have no current information on the number of letters of objection received by the Peak Park joint planning board. The Forestry Authority arm of the Forestry Commission has received two letters opposing the proposals.

Deregulation

Mr. Steen: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what estimate he has made of the annual saving to business which will accrue from the deregulation of the *(a)* Salmon Fisheries (Scotland) Act 1868, *(b)* Slaughterhouses Act 1974 and Slaughter of Animals (Scotland) Act 1980 and *(c)* Corn Returns Act 1882 Orders 1995. [2025]

Mr. Boswell *[holding answer 27 November 1995]:* The annual saving to business accruing from deregulation of the Acts at *(b)* above has been estimated to be in the region of £100,000. This relates to the reduction of licensing-registration requirements in respect of slaughterhouses. Other benefits and non-recurring cost savings for business are detailed in the explanatory document which accompanies the draft deregulation order. The annual cost saving to business accruing from deregulation of the Corn Returns Act 1882 *(c)* has been estimated at £100,000. As regards the Salmon Fisheries (Scotland) Act 1968, I refer my hon. Friend to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland, who is responsible for this legislation.

Mr. Steen: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what were the costs involved in preparing the cost-benefit assessment contained in the explanatory memorandum for the deregulation of the *(a)* Slaughterhouses Act 1974 and Slaughter of Animals (Scotland) Act 1980, *(b)* Salmon Fisheries (Scotland) Act 1868 and *(c)* Corn Returns Act 1882 Orders 1995. [2026]

Mr. Boswell *[holding answer 27 November 1995]:* The costs associated with the identification of the cost savings to business and other benefits arising from the proposed amendments to the Slaughterhouses Act 1974 and the Slaughter of Animals (Scotland) Act 1980, and the Corn Returns Act 1882 have not been estimated. As regards the Salmon Fisheries (Scotland) Act 1868, I refer my hon. Friend to my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Scotland, who is responsible for this legislation.

Small and Medium Enterprises

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what percentage of his Department's expenditure in 1994–95 was spent on procuring goods or services from small and medium-sized enterprises. [1960]

Mr. Boswell *[holding answer 27 November 1995]:* The information requested is not available for 1994–95. In the current year, MAFF cannot separately identify medium-sized suppliers, but small businesses are being identified and the relevant information regarding the Ministry's spend with such enterprises during 1995–96 will be sent to the hon. Member in due course.

MAFF's executive agencies do not maintain records regarding the size of their supplier companies.

Local Government

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the Acts of Parliament and Consolidation Acts that affect local government that have been introduced by his Department since January 1994. [30]

Mr. Boswell *[pursuant to his reply, 21 November 1995 c. 79]:* My earlier reply should have made clear that the Land Drainage Act 1994 was introduced by the Earl of Lindsay, and was supported by the Government.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Photography

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chairman of the Administration Committee what proposals the Commission has for allowing photography in the Commons. [676]

Mr. Michael J. Martin *[holding answer 27 November 1995]:* The Administration Committee reviewed the regulations governing filming and photography in the Palace of Westminster earlier this year and no amendments were considered necessary.

TREASURY

Local Government Finance, Nottinghamshire

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many representations he has received about the financial settlement for Nottinghamshire county council in 1996–97; if he will summarise these representations; and if he will list the individuals and organisations that have sent them. [2755]

Mr. Waldegrave: The Treasury has received representations from a number of individuals and organisations concerning the financial settlement for Nottinghamshire county council for 1996–97.

Private Finance Panel

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the members of the private finance panel, their remit and the interests they have been required to declare. [3087]

Mr. Jack: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 1 November to the right hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett), *Official Report*, columns *260–61*.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much private capital has been invested in public investment projects since the 1992 autumn statement. [84]

Mr. Jack: Over £16 billion by the end of 1995–96, including over £1 billion under the private finance initiative.

European Communities (Fraud)

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what actions have been taken in the last 12 months to combat fraud and maladministration within the European communities. [170]

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: At the Essen European Council on 9 and 10 December 1994, the Prime Minister made a number of proposals to help tackle fraud, waste and mismanagement. These included a requirement that each member state should report on what it is doing to combat fraud against the community Budget on its own territory. Member states have now submitted their reports and the Commission has produced a framework for further work which will be considered by the Madrid European Council on 15 and 16 December.

Separately, the new Commission has centralised anti-fraud work within its services, in particular reinforcing its anti-fraud unit and extending its remit.

Full details of developments in this area will be published in the next "Annual Statement on European Finances". The Commission also publishes an annual report on the fight against fraud.

Single European Currency

Mr. Hain: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the cost to business of converting equipment and systems in the event of the United Kingdom joining a single European currency; and if he will make a statement. [1572]

Mrs. Angela Knight: If the UK participates in stage 3 of economic and monetary union, there will be transitional costs to business associated with the changeover to the single currency. The Government do not have an assessment of the potential size of these costs, because no decision has been taken as to whether the UK will join the single currency, and costs would depend on decisions taken individual businesses.

European Union (Gross National Products)

Mr. McAvoy: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the gross national product per head of population in each of the member states of the European Union for the last year for which comparable figures are available. [1811]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The information for these countries is available in the OECD publication "National Accounts", available in the House of Commons Library.

Inheritance Tax

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer on how many estates in each county in England inheritance tax was paid in each year since its introduction. [2244]

Mr. Jack: The information is not available at county level.

Mr. Prentice: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many estates in each county in England were allowed conditional exemption from inheritance tax in each year its introduction. [2247]

Mr. Jack: The information requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Enterprise Centre of Europe

Mr. Legg: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the position of the United Kingdom as an enterprise centre of Europe. [1348]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 23 November 1995]:* The Government will continue to create the economic conditions where business can flourish by further encouraging enterprise and competitiveness, through the development and growth of small and large businesses alike and promoting further deregulation. Our firm financial policies directed towards low inflation on a permanent basis and sound public finances, together with our intention to reduce the share of national income taken by public spending will help us to achieve this.

Unemployment, London

Ms Bridget Prentice: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the level of unemployment amongst ethnic minority *(a)* men and *(b)* women in each of the London boroughs; and how many are in (i) full-time employment and (ii) part-time employment. [2732]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The most recent available information is from the 1991 census of population, and can be obtained from the NOMIS data base in the Library.

Fuels

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the retail prices and the tax elements of the ranges of petrol, liquified petroleum gas and diesel fuels, including the reduced pollution varieties, for motor vehicles. [2144]

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Average retail selling prices and the respective tax elements are as follows:

	RSP pence per litre	*Total Tax as percentage of RSP*	*Excise Duty as percentage of RSP*	*VAT As percentage of RSP*	*Excise Duty in per pence litre*	*VAT In pence per litre*
Leaded	57.79	77.43	62.54	14.89	36.14	8.61
Super unleaded[1]	58.52	68.41	53.52	14.89	31.32	8.72
Unleaded	51.56	75.64	60.74	14.89	31.32	7.68
Diesel	52.01	75.11	60.22	14.89	31.32	7.75
City diesel[2]	51.4	75.83	60.93	14.89	31.32	7.66
LPG auto[3]	42.0	54.35	39.45	14.89	16.57	6.26

[1] The most recent RSP available for super unleaded is for September 1995.
[2] The small market in this product is dominated by one supermarket chain which retails it at 2 pence per litre more than its own price for normal diesel. This latter price is considerably lower than the average price for diesel shown in the table.
[3] This RSP is very much a 'best estimate' by the LPG Association. All other figures are correct for 20 November 1995.

Value Added Tax

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will assess the cost of the VAT exemption for cultural activities. [2504]

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: It would be premature to do so. The outcome of the recent consultation exercise on the scope of an exemption for certain cultural services is still under consideration.

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimates he has as to the cost of the VAT exemption to voluntary sports clubs, including the interest paid on overcharged VAT. [2506]

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The total amounts refunded to non-profit-making organisations supplying sporting services are estimated at £140 million plus £30 million interest.

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the cost of the VAT exemption for sports centres with charitable status. [2505]

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: No separate figures are available.

Deregulation

Sir Michael Grylls: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the deregulation measures agreed by his Department during 1995. [285]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 22 November 1995]:* The Chancellor's Departments have introduced a large number of deregulatory measures during 1995. Among the most significant are the orders which the Treasury has laid before Parliament, under the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act 1994, to provide new flexibility in the operation of building societies, credit unions and friendly societies respectively. The Inland Revenue and Customs and Excise, together with the Contributions Agency, have developed closer working relations. This has resulted in, for example, trials of a new shared telephone helpline, together with a joint notification form and leaflet for businesses starting up. Initiatives undertaken by the Central Statistical Office, which are being co-ordinated under a new compliance planning system, include reductions in duplication between surveys, and simplification of the forms sent to business.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Internal Market Council

Mr. Barnes: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the outcome of the Internal Market Council, held on 23 November, giving details of all votes and all decisions which were determined by unanimity or without dissension. [1599]

Mr. Oppenheim *[holding answer 27 November 1995]:* My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, and the deputy UK permanent representative represented the UK at the Internal Market Council in Brussels on 23 November.

The council reached unanimous political agreement on the customs 2000 programme on which Germany abstained, and on the flavourings directive, on which France abstained. The required simple majority were in favour of the directive on collection of statistical information in the field of tourism, which Germany opposed. Political agreement was reached on the draft directives amending public procurement directives, though a common position awaits the European Parliament's opinion.

The council also agreed common positions on the pressure equipment directive, on which Italy abstained, and on the motor-cycle multi chapter directive, which Austria opposed. Although the UK voted against, political agreement was reached on the mineral water proposal. Denmark and Sweden also voted against and the Netherlands abstained.

There was also an informal lunchtime discussion with Ministers from central and eastern European countries.

Women and Ethnic Minority Staff

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what percentage of *(a)* women and *(b)* ethnic minorities are employed in the highest 10 per cent. of paid staff in his Department. [1515]

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 22 November 1995]:* The figures for the DTI, excluding its executive agencies, are as follows:

Breakdown of top 10 per cent. salary earners in DTI (excluding its executive agencies)

	Number	*Percentage*
Women	78	15.0
Staff of ethnic minority origin	13	2.5
Total number of staff	521	—

The figures exclude casual staff and staff currently out of the Department. The figures do not take account of staff transferring to the DTI from the Cabinet Office and the former Employment Department in the latest machinery of government changes.

The chief executives of the following executive agencies will respond direct to the hon. Member—Companies House, the Insolvency Service, the Laboratory of the Government Chemist, the National Weights and Measures Laboratory, the Patent Office and the Radiocommunications Agency.

Letter from David Durham to Mrs. Margaret Beckett, dated 28 November 1995:

You tabled a Parliamentary Question regarding the percentage of women and ethnic minorities employed in the highest 10% of staff in DTI. I have been asked to reply to you directly as Chief Executive of Companies House Executive Agency.

The total number of staff in Companies House as at 23 November 1995 was 1087 on headcount and 937 on full time equivalent. The percentage of women employed in the highest 10% of paid staff is 28%, and of ethnic minorities employed in the highest 10% of paid staff is 5.5 %.

I hope this is helpful.

Letter from Peter Joyce to Mrs. Margaret Beckett, dated 28 November 1995:

The President of the Board of Trade has asked me to reply to your question about the percentage of women and ethnic minorities employed in the highest 10% of paid staff in The Insolvency Service.

The relevant figures at 20 November were:

Number of permanent staff	*Females in highest 10% of paid staff*	*Ethnic minorities in highest 10% of paid staff*
1,411	14–9.9%	10–7.1%

Letter from R. D. Worswick to Mrs. Margaret Beckett, dated 20 November 1995:

I have been asked to answer your question PQ26N to the President of the Board of Trade tabled on 16 November 1995 with respect to the Laboratory of the Government Chemist.

Of the highest 10% of paid staff employed at the Laboratory of the Government Chemist, 4% are women and 4% are from ethnic minorities.

Letter from Seton Bennett to Mrs. Margaret Beckett, dated 28 November 1995:

The President of the Board of Trade has asked me to reply on behalf of the National Weights and Measures Laboratory to your question about the employment of women and ethnic minorities in the highest 10 per cent of paid staff.

There are no women or ethnic minorities employed at that level in the National Weights and Measures Laboratory.

Letter from P. R. S. Hartnack to Mrs. Margaret Beckett, dated 28 November 1995:

You asked for information about the percentage of women and ethnic minorities employed in the highest 10% of paid staff in the Department of Trade and Industry. This reply covers the Patent Office which is an Executive Agency of the Department.

The relevant information is that the Patent Office has 88 staff in the top 10% salary bracket. Of these, 4.5% are women and none are from ethnic minorities.

Letter from Jim Norton to Mrs. Margaret Beckett, dated 28 November 1995:

I am replying on behalf of the Radiocommunications Agency to your written question to the President of the Board of Trade about the percentage of women and ethnic minority staff employed in the highest 10% of paid staff in the Agency.

To ask the President of the Board of Trade what percentage of (a) women and b) ethnic minorities are employed in the highest 10% of paid staff in his Department.

Of the highest 10% of paid staff in the Agency, women and staff from ethnic backgrounds account for 4% each.

Disused Mineshafts

Mr. Berry: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what steps he has taken to ensure the accuracy of the Coal Authority's records of disused mineshafts in the Kingswood parliamentary constituency. [2941]

Mr. Page: This is a matter for the Coal Authority.

Export Licences (Guatemala)

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the President of the Board of Trade under which EG(C)O category the licence issued for export of arms and ammunition to Guatemala between 1 January and 31 August 1995 falls. [2422]

Mr. Oppenheim *[holding answer 24 November 1995]:* Earlier this year, there were placed in the Library of the House detailed statistical analyses of exported licences which were granted for military, paramilitary and security equipment in the calendar years 1993 and 1994. These analyses included all countries of destination for which these licences were issued, including Guatemala. Early in 1996, I intend to place in the Library of the House a similar analysis for the full calendar year 1995. I shall write to the hon. Member when this is done.

Export Licences (Nigeria)

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what British companies have applied for export licences to supply arms to Nigeria in each year since 1993. [2876]

Mr. Oppenheim: It has been the practice of successive Administrations not to reveal details of export licences or applications for licences unless the requirements of commercial confidentiality are outweighed by the public interest.

Post Office Closures

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many closures of post offices in rural areas have been notified to his Department in the past five years. [2651]

Mr. Oppenheim: In September 1990 there were 10,166 post offices in rural areas. In September 1995 there were 9,494.

Defence Exports

Mr. Duncan: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what proportion of British exports is defence related. [882]

Mr. Oppenheim: Goods identified as being defence equipment accounted for 1.3 per cent. of British exports in 1994.

Irish Steel Ltd.

Mr. Hardy: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment he has made of the conformity of state aid to Irish Steel Ltd. with the provision of the treaty of Paris and EU policy. [2835]

Mr. Eggar *[holding answer 27 November 1995]:* The Commission's proposal to authorise state assistance to Irish Steel contains a proposal for financial assistance which is not permitted by either article 4(c) of the treaty of Paris or the steel aid code. The Commission has therefore requested a derogation from the steel aid rules under article 95 (ECSC), which is subject to the unanimous assent of the Council of Ministers.

Nigerian-British Society

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations his Department has received and what meetings it has had with the Nigerian-British Society since November 1993; and if he will make a statement. [2814]

Mr. Oppenheim *[holding answer 27 November 1995]:* My Department has not had any contact with the Nigerian-British Society.

Training Schools (Textile Businesses)

Mr. Orme: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what funds are available for textile businesses in the north-west to set up training schools. [2883]

Mr. Eggar: There are no funds directly available to textile businesses to set up training schools. Training facilities are available to support the textile industry in colleges in the north-west. Their provision is kept under review by the Further Education Funding Council in consultation with north-west training and enterprise councils, which are responsible for assessing the local labour market needs.

Consortex

Mr. Orme: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what grant was made to Consortex in the last year; and how it has been spent. [2884]

Mr. Eggar: A sum of £92,500 of European funding under the RETEX programme was awarded to Consortex in the last year. Of that amount, £12,835 was spent on staff costs in respect of work carried out before the project was terminated. Attempts are being made to re-allocate the balance.

Regional Selective Assistance

Mr. Morgan: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the outturn figures for regional selective assistance *(a)* offers and *(b)* payments for 1994–95; and if he will indicate how these figures relate to the original budgeted plans. [2108]

Mr. Oppenheim *[holding answer 24 November 1995]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 23 November 1995, *Official Report*, column 255. These publications also provide information on offers.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the average time taken by each integrated regional office to process regional selective assistance grants to *(a)* all businesses and *(b)* small and medium enterprises in the last year for which figures are available; and if he will list the minimum and maximum time taken by those offices. [1928]

Mr. Eggar *[holding answer 27 November 1995]:* Reliable data are not available on the size of businesses applying for grant. The figures provided for small and medium-size enterprises relate to firms with grant applications for less than £1 million. Processing times are based on decision taken during 1994–95.

Integrated regional offices

Working days

	All businesses			*Small and medium enterprises*		
	Minimum time	*Average time*	*Maximum time*	*Minimum time*	*Average time*	*Maximum time*
East	1	26	196	1	26	196
East Midlands	2	61	253	2	61	253
London	5	45	102	5	45	102
Merseyside	5	50	237	5	50	237
North-East	1	23	187	1	23	107
North-West	1	39	222	1	39	222
South-East	2	42	173	2	42	173
South-West	1	51	135	1	51	135
West-Midlands	1	27	330	1	26	330
Yorkshire/Humberside	2	31	177	2	31	177

Mrs. Roche: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the total sum paid in regional selective assistance to *(a)* British-owned firms and *(b)* foreign-owned firms, (i) where firms had 0 to 9 employees, (ii) where firms had 10 to 49 employees, (iii) where firms had 50 to 99 employees, (iv) where firms had 100 to 249 employees, (v) where firms had 250 to 499 employees and (vi) where firms had more than 500 employees, indicating for each category what proportion this constituted of the total awarded for each financial year since 1990–91. [1929]

Mr. Page *[holding answer 27 November 1995]:* Reliable data are not available on the size of businesses applying for grant. The figures provided are based on the size of the grant requested.

Expenditure on regional selective assistance in England

Size of grant application	*1990–91*				*1991–92*				*1992–93*			
	UK owned		*Foreign owned*		*UK owned*		*Foreign owned*		*UK owned*		*Foreign owned*	
	£000	*Percentage*	*£000*	*Percentage*	*£000*	*Percentage*	*£000*	*Percentage*	*£000*	*Percentage*	*£000*	*Percentage*
£25,000 or less	6,725	98	148	2	5,266	99	58	1	4,658	98	93	2
Greater than £25,000 or less than £100,000	13,1169	96	485	4	10,294	94	668	6	10,743	97	286	3
£100,000 or less than £1 million	21,485	70	8,995	30	14,069	64	7,927	36	16,562	74	5,797	26
£1 million or more	16,373	43	21,771	57	7,471	21	28,575	79	8,837	27	24,124	73
Total	57,699	65	31,399	35	37,100	50	37,228	50	40,800	57	30,300	43

Size of grant application

	1993–94				*1994–95*			
	UK owned		*Foreign owned*		*UK owned*		*Foreign owned*	
	£000	*Per cent.*	*£000*	*Per cent.*	*£000*	*Per cent.*	*£000*	*Per cent.*
£25k or less	5,010	98	83	2	6,542	98	115	2
Greater than £25k or less than £100k	11,020	95	640	5	15,228	96	566	4
£100k or less than £1m	21,547	69	9,638	31	30,663	70	12,956	30
£1m or more	15,224	33	31,452	67	17,867	38	29,163	62
Total	52,801	56	41,813	44	70,300	62	42,800	38

Restrictive Practices (Retail Newsagents)

Mr. David Porter: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will undertake a review of the workings of the Restrictive Trade Practices Act 1976 as far as retail newsagents are concerned; and if he will make a statement. [2089]

Mr. Jonathan Evans *[holding answer 27 November 1995]:* The Restrictive Trade Practices Act 1976 is designed to prevent agreements restricting competition and acting against the public interest. I see no reason to treat retail newsagent differently from others

Statutory Fees and Charges

Mr. Steen: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the annual income from *(a)* fees, *(b)* charges and *(c)* Companies House fines; what was the total number of staff employed (i) part-time and (ii) full-time and what contribution his Department has made towards the annual running costs in each of the past three years in respect of (1) Companies House, (2) the Radio Communications Agency, (3) the Office of Fair Trading, (4) the Export Licensing Unit, (5) the National Weights and Measures Laboratory and (6) the Engineering Inspectorate. [2741]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The amount of statutory fees and charges that were appropriated in aid of my Department's gross running cost provision in 1994–95 was £37.8 million. The late filing penalties collected by my Department's Companies House executive agency amounted to £16.7 million in the same period. These are treated as Consolidated Fund extra receipts and are therefore surrendered to the Treasury.

The information requested on total staff numbers is set out in the table: Disaggregated figures for (4) are not available.

	1992–93		*1993–94*		*1994–95*	
	Full-time	*Part-time*	*Full-time*	*Part-time*	*Full-time*	*Part-time*
Companies House	917	356	880	347	878	340
Radiocommunications Agency	526	[1]—	534	[1]—	541	[1]—
Export Licensing Unit	Disaggregated information is not available					
National Weights and Measures Laboratory	44	7	40	8	41	8
Engineering Inspectorate	7	0	7	0	[2]7	0

[1] Part-time figures for the Radiocommunications Agency could only be provided at disproportionate cost.
[2] The number of full-time staff in the Engineering Inspectorate in 1994–95 reduced from 7 to 6 after 30 November 1994.

With the exception of my Department's funding of the late filing penalties scheme administered by the Companies House agency, no contributions have been made to its or the Radiocommunications Agency annual running costs in the past three years. This is because Companies House was established as an off-vote trading fund in October 1991, and the Radiocommunications Agency has retained its income to offset against its running cost expenditure since becoming a net controlled agency in April 1990. The Office of Fair Trading is independent of my Department. It is not funded from the DTI's vote. The information requested in respect of (5) and (6) is set out in the table: Disaggregated figures for (4) are not available.

£000

	1992–93	*1993–94*	*1994–95*
Export Licensing Unit	Disaggregated information is not available		
National Weights and Measures Laboratory	2,043	2,008	2,015
Engineering Inspectorate	383	433	459
Running cost contribution to Companies House for late filing penalties work	2,100	1,700	1,500

Deregulation

Mr. Steen: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what estimate he has made of the annual saving which will accrue to business from the deregulation *(a)* Fair Trading Act 1973 Amendment, Merger Reference Time Limits Order 1995, *(b)* Restrictive Trade Practices Act 1976 (Amendments) Variation of Exempt Agreements Order 1995, *(c)* Restrictive Trade Practices Act 1976 (Amendment) Time Limits Order 1995 and *(d)* Resolutions of Private Companies Order 1995; and what were the costs involved in repairing the cost-benefit assessment contained in the explanatory memorandum in respect of each. [2027]

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 27 November 1995]:* The estimates of cost savings have been considered in the respective explanatory documents. For the first two orders, savings are not readily quantifiable but include savings in management time, the cost of legal advice, and, for the second order, the potentially high cost of remaking an entire agreement; for the third order, the estimated saving is around £100,000 per year. All three orders provide substantial benefits for business by reducing uncertainty or the consequences of accidental error or oversight. The fourth order will also bring significant but not precisely quantifiable savings from speedier decision-taking, including reduced administrative and legal costs. Each cost-benefit assessment derived from the mandatory consultation with business and other interested bodies. The costs involved in preparing them were the normal costs of officials' time associated with any such exercise.

National Coal Board Superannuation Fund

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the President of the Board of Trade who are the new trustees of the NCB superannuation fund; what are their qualifications and backgrounds; what they are each being paid as trustees; and who selected them. [2495]

Mr. Page: The current trustees of the British Coal staff superannuation scheme are:

Mrs. S. Gleig (chairman)
R. Dennis
D. Brandrick
M. Atkinson
P. McNestry
B. Chappell
D. McIntosh
B. Hancock

Mrs. Gleig and Mr. Dennis are professional pensions managers from the TSB and the John Lewis Partnership respectively. Mr. Brandrick was formerly secretary of the British Coal Corporation. Mr. Atkinson is an assistant secretary in the DTI. All the above have been selected and appointed by me, in accordance with the scheme's rules.

Mr. McNestry is General Secretary of the National Association of Colliery Overmen, Deputies and Shotfirers. Mr. Chappell is a treasurer of the British Association of Colliery Management. Each has been appointed as trustee by his union.

Mr. McIntosh is a former senior accountant with British Coal. Mr. Hancock is General Secretary of the south Wales area of NACODS. Both were elected trustees by ballots of scheme members in their respective areas in September 1995.

Mrs. Gleig, as chairman, receives remuneration of £15,000 per annum. No remuneration is currently paid to other trustees.

European Funds (East Midlands)

Mr. Tipping: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what delays have occurred in the handling of bids for European funds at the Government office for the east midlands; and what are the reasons for these delays. [2758]

Mr. Oppenheim: Delays to agreeing single programming documents with the European Commission have accounted for the majority of time lost to dealing with bids for European structural funds under the programmes administered by the Government Office for the east midlands. Such delays are similar to those experienced by objective 2 and objective 5b programmes across the country. Offers of European social funds and European regional development funds are now beginning to flow on all east midlands mainstream programmes.

Mr. Tipping: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what timetable the Government office for the east midlands has set out to deal with the RECHAR II programme; and when successful projects will be announced. [2757]

Mr. Oppenheim: Two funds contribute to the RECHAR II programme: the European regional development fund and the European social fund.

The deadline for first-round east midlands ERDF RECHAR II applications is 31 December 1995. A total of £10.3 million will be available. The exact timetable for announcing successful projects will depend on the number of bids received and the degree of competition for funds. It is anticipated that the working group to consider ERDF project bids will first meet in March 1996 and that the Government office will make its first formal offers shortly afterwards. A second bidding round for an ERDF allocation of £9.1 million will have a deadline of 31 May 1996.

The position with the ESF is more complex. Because of delays to the RECHAR II programme, it is likely that there will be no ESF bidding round in 1995. The Government have sought a derogation from the European Commission from rules preventing their making retrospective awards of 1995 ESF allocations in 1996. Although no official decision has been received, we understand that such a derogation is unlikely. In this case, 1995 ESF allocations will be rolled forward into 1996 giving a total fund of up to £4.1 million. The closing date for bids for this tranche will be 19 January 1996. The timetable for announcing successful ESF projects will be similar to that for ERDF.

Medical Examination

Mr. Clapham: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the total number of miners and former miners examined under the PD12D regulations from September 1993 to date, broken down for each region. [1402]

Mr. Roger Evans: I have been asked to reply.

The information is not available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 28 November 1995. [1493]

The Prime Minister: This morning, I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Lockerbie

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minster if he will discuss with the UN Security Council the offer by the Government of Libya of a trial in The Hague of two Libyan suspects accused of the destruction of Pan Am 103. [1637]

The Prime Minister: At its 11th review of sanctions against Libya, held on 22 November, the UK's permanent representative reminded the Security Council that proposals for the trial of the Lockerbie suspects in The Hague or elsewhere were unacceptable alternatives to trial in Scotland or the United States.

Disabled People (Policies)

Ms Lynne: To ask the Prime Minister which minister has the overall responsibility for co-ordinating policies in relation to access to the built environment for people with disabilities throughout all Government Departments; and if he will make a statement. [3012]

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend the Minister of State for Social Security and Disabled People is the focal point for issues affecting disabled people.

Ministerial Visits

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Prime Minister what plans he has to visit the Czech Republic in the next 12 months. [2514]

The Prime Minister: I look forward to having the opportunity to visit the Czech Republic, but as yet have no firm plans.

Cyprus

Mr. Cox: To ask the Prime Minister when he last met President Clerides of Cyprus; and what issues on Cyprus were discussed. [845]

The Prime Minister: I have met President Clerides on several occasions in recent months. We had a substantive discussion at No. 10 this year, addressing the range of issues affecting the UK and Cyprus.

We met again at the VE day commemoration in May, at the Cannes European Council in June, and again at the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting earlier this month.

TRANSPORT

Railtrack

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the representations he has received regarding the level of track access charges levied by Railtrack; and if he will make a statement. [472]

Mr. Watts: The approval of access charges is a matter for the Rail Regulator.

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much money has been received by Railtrack in track access charges for each operating division area of British Rail and for the corporation as a whole; and if he will make a statement. [474]

Mr. Watts: In 1994–95 Railtrack's access related income from passenger train operators was £1,995.2 million and freight revenue was £191.1 million.

The Rail Regulator has decided that track access agreements available for public inspection should exclude details of access charges in line with his duties under section 72 (3) of the Railways Act 1993. Consistent with this policy Railtrack does not publish income figures by train operator.

Chiltern Trains

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received regarding the cancellation of rail tours in Wales by Chiltern Trains; and if he will make a statement. [473]

Mr. Watts: The Department received a number of representations about Chiltern Trains last year. The cancellation of rail tours is a commercial matter for Chiltern Trains.

Departmental Cars

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what was the total cost of chauffeur driven cars used by this Department for each of the last five years. [419]

Mr. Norris: Expenditure on chauffeur driven cars was as follows:

Financial Year	*£*
1990–91	236,746
1991–92	280,200
1992–93	340,846
1993–94	345,138
1994–95	356,599

Figures include VAT.

Deregulation

Mr. Dover: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the effects of bus deregulation in the last ten years. [2833]

Mr. Norris: Bus deregulation continues to be a great success. Recent statistics confirm the continuing trend of more operators running more bus miles at lower cost and involving significantly less public subsidy than previously. In addition, the long term decline in bus patronage appears to have begun to flatten out.

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what were the costs involved in preparing the cost-benefit assessment contained in the explanatory memorandum for the Deregulation (Parking Equipment) Order 1995; [2880]

(2) what is the estimated annual saving to business from the Deregulation (Parking Equipment) Order 1995. [2882]

Mr. Watts: The assessment of benefits to business and administrative cost savings was developed in the course of consultation. The cost of preparing this assessment cannot be identified separately.

The order will bring savings in costs and other benefits to business as a result of reduced delay in introducing new equipment and the removal of a disincentive to innovation. However, it has not been possible to quantify these benefits.

Executive Agencies

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the Driving Standards Agency's annual income from *(a)* fees, *(b)* charges and *(c)* fines; what was the total number of staff employed (i) part-time and (ii) full-time; and what contribution his Department has made towards the annual running costs in each of the past three years in respect of (1) the Driving Standards Agency, (2) the Civil Aviation Authority, (3) the Vehicle Inspectorate, (4) the Vehicle Certification Agency, (5) the Traffic Commissioners office and (6) the Surveyor Generals Organisation. [2744]

Mr. Norris: In 1992–93, 1993–94 and 1994–95 the Driving Standards Agency's income from fees and charges was £47.2 million, £50.2 million, and £54.8 million respectively. This income is treated as extra

receipts payable to the Consolidated Fund. DSA does not receive income from fines. In the same years the agency employed 1,867, 1,783, and 1,728 full-time staff; 267, 285 and 289 part-time staff; and, in 1994–95, 31 driving examiners on a contract basis.

The size of the running costs contributions made by the Department depends on the nature of the financial regime under which the organisations operate. VI, DSA and VCA cover most of their expenditure through fees collected from services provided. My Department's contributions in 1992–93, 1993–94 and 1994–95 were nil in the case of VCA and VI, although the Department did purchase enforcement and other services from VI and VCA at a cost of £16.1 million, £15.3 million, and £15.1 million respectively. My Department made contributions of £1.6 million, £1.5 million, and £1.5 million to DSA; £11.9 million, £12.0 million and £11.4 million to the Traffic Commissioners' offices; and £14.1 million, £14.9 million and £14.9 million to the Surveyor General's Organisation which became an executive agency on 1 April 1994 under the new title of the Marine Safety Agency.

The Civil Aviation Authority is a nationalised industry and my Department makes no contribution towards its running costs.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list for each of his executive agencies for the last financial year in respect of overseas travel by staff of the agency *(a)* the cost, *(b)* the countries visited and *(c)* the posts held by the staff involved. [2359]

Mr. Norris: The information requested is in the table.

Agency	*Total gross cost of overseas travel in 1994–95* £	*Countries visited*	*Grade of staff involved*
Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency	31,632	Sweden Latvia USA Holland Germany France Belgium Spain Finland	Grade 3 Grade 5 Grade 6 Grade 7 SEO HEO
Driving Standards Agency	Nil	None	n/a
Highways Agency	142,386	EC countries Austria Sweden Hungary Poland Finland Iceland Australia USA	Various but usually Senior Professional and Technical Officer level or above
Marine Safety Agency	295,546	Various	Various but generally all staff except clerical grades
Transport Research Laboratory	564,395	Bangladesh Belgium Botswana China Colombia Ghana Hong Kong India Indonesia Kenya Malawi Malaysia Austria Czechoslovakia Norway Japan Italy Luxembourg Sweden France Germany Denmark Singapore Iceland Switzerland Australia Mauritius	Various, from G3 to Scientific Officer

Agency	Total gross cost of overseas travel in 1994–95 £	Countries visited	Grade of staff involved
		Nepal	
		Pakistan	
		Papua New Guinea	
		Philippines	
		South Africa	
		Tanzania	
		Thailand	
		Turkey	
		USA	
		Vietnam	
		Zambia	
		Holland	
		Spain	
		Portugal	
		Finland	
		Greece	
		Jordan	
		Jordan	
		Dubai	
		Jamaica	
		St. Lucia	
		Egypt	
		New Zealand	
Vehicle Certification Agency	103,183	Belgium	Various but mostly Senior
		Sweden	Professional and Technical
		France	Officer and Higher Professional
		Italy	and Technical Officer
		Spain	
		Switzerland	
		Holland	
		Greece	
		Poland	
		Hungary	
		Portugal	
		Hong Kong	
		Singapore	
		Malaysia	
		Korea	
		China	
		USA	
		Canada	
		Japan	
The Coastguard Agency	33,709	France	Grade 4
		Denmark	Grade 5
		Sweden	Grade 6
		USA	Grade 7
		Canada	SEO
		Uruguay	HEO
		Germany	EO
		Belgium	AO
		Norway	
		Holland	
		Portugal	
		Spain	
		Iceland	

The Vehicle Inspectorate records of travel expenditure are not separated between United Kingdom and overseas travel and so the answer to this question for VI could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Road Programme

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list those schemes in the national road programme for which statutory pre-construction procedures have been completed and orders have been made, the dates on which the orders were made and the dates on which they will expire. [1809]

Mr. Watts: I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. Alan Howarth, dated 28 November 1995.

As you know, the Minister for Railways and Roads, Mr John Watts, has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking the Secretary of State for Transport, if he will list those schemes in the national road programme for which statutory

pre-construction procedures have been completed and orders have been made, the dates on which the orders were made and the dates on which they will expire.

The relevant schemes are listed below together with the dates when the Compulsory Purchase Orders were made. Notices to Treat, warning interested parties that the Highways Agency intends to exercise its powers, have to be served within 3 years from the date of making of such orders.

Scheme Title	*CPO Made*
A40 Western Circus Junction Improvement	July 1991
A40 Gypsy Corner Improvement	July 1991
A406/A1/A598 Regents Park Road Junction Improvement	January 1992
A12 Hackney Wick–M11 Contract 1	July 1992
A12 Hackney Wick–M11 Contract 3	July 1992
A13 West of Heathway–Thames Avenue Improvement	July 1992
A13 Wennington–Mar Dyke Improvement	September 1992
M66 Denton Middleton Contract 3	March 1993
M66 Denton Middleton Contract 1	March 1993
A43 Silverstone Bypass	April 1993
A65 Hellifield and Long Preston Bypass	May 1993
A65 Gargrave Bypass	August 1993
A27 Polegate Bypass	September 1993
A34 Newbury Bypass	October 1993
A406 Golders Green Junction Improvement	February 1994
A34 Chieveley/M4 J13 Improvement	February 1994
A650 Bingley Relief Road	March 1994
A564 Derby Southern Bypass Contract B	March 1994
A11 Roundham Heath–Attleborough Improvement	June 1994
A500 Basford–Hough–Shavington Bypass	May 1994
A550 Deeside–A5117 (S)	October 1994
A1 (M) Wetherby–Walshford	October 1994

M4 (Heavy Loads)

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the nature and the laden weight of the heavy loads notified to his Department which have created bottlenecks on the east-bound M4 on each of the last three Tuesdays; where the loads originated and terminated; how long they were on the M4 and at what speed they travelled; for what reasons they were not transported at night; who owns the loads; what costs associated with the escorts and delays are met by *(a)* the transporter and *(b)* the owner; how many more similar loads are planned; what (i) warnings and (ii) advice were given to motorists by his Department on avoiding the delays; at what times future similar loads will be on the M4; and what assessment has been made of potential road damage. [2730]

Mr. Norris: The loads in question are electrical generating equipment for a new power station at the National Power plc site at Didcot in Oxfordshire. The weights of the loads vary between 135.6 tonnes and 455 tonnes. They originated at Siemens factories in Germany and entered the United Kingdom at Avonmouth docks. Each load is timed to minimise both inconvenience to other road users and the overall cost to the project. The journeys from the docks to the power station site consist of two night-time moves and a day-time move conducted outside the peak traffic hours on the M4. The day-time movement is required because all other traffic has to be stopped when two particular bridges are traversed and the police rightly believe that this can be done safely only in hours of daylight. The loads are restricted to a maximum speed of 12 mph, but in practice the speed and therefore the time taken is limited by the gradients on the roads. A further 17 loads are planned over the next 11 months. They are required to be carried on multiple axle trailers to minimise the potential damage to roads and highways structures.

Contractual arrangements and costs are a matter between National Power plc as the customer and Siemens plc as the supplier; they, rather than public funds, have met the cost both of assessing structures on the route and the police escorting the loads.

I am satisfied that National Power and the police forces involved on the route have provided satisfactory advance notice including warnings broadcast on national and local radio, advertisements in local media, notification to the main road haulage and passenger transport groups and the provision of recorded information on a free telephone number–0800 241 504.

Changes between years largely reflect changes in the Government car service charges to recover the full economic cost of the service.

ENVIRONMENT

Government-owned Empty Properties

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his latest estimate of the total number of empty residential properties owned by each Government Department, together with the average length of time that these properties have been empty; and what were the equivalent figures for last year. [315]

Mr. Curry: My reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) on 23 November 1995, *Official Report*, column *238*, included the number of homes owned by Government Departments which were empty on 1 April 1995, and targets for 1995–96 aimed at reducing the number. The table shows the number which were empty at 1 April 1994. Information is not available about the average length of time properties are empty.

Department	*Empty at 1 April 1994*
Department of Transport	887
Home Office	498
Ministry of Defence	11,006
Scottish Office	158
Welsh Office	43

Secondary Liquid Fuel (Burning)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make it his policy to stop the burning of secondary liquid fuel in cement kilns where there is persistent plume grounding. [1985]

Mr. Clappison: No. The Environmental Protection Act 1990 already provides sufficient controls for each site to be judged on its own merit.

Mr. Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Atkins) if the letter sent by the right hon. Member for South Ribble (Mr. Atkins) to the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) on 13 June constituted the Government's reply to the second report of the Environment Committee on the Burning of Secondary Liquid Fuel in Cement Kilns (HC 479) of session 1994–95. [1987]

Mr. Clappison: The letter contained initial comments and indicated that the Government would be considering and responding fully to the committee's report.

Air Pollution

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment at what level of ozone his Department issues health warnings. [1794]

Mr. Clappison: EC directive 92/72/EEC on air pollution by ozone sets a population information threshold of 180μg/m^3 or 90ppb and a population warning threshold of 360μg/m^3 or 180ppb. If either of these thresholds is exceeded, the directive requires member states to inform the public.

In the United Kingdom, my Department provides information on levels of ozone and other pollutants through the air quality helpline, the Internet, Ceefax, Teletext and the media. Ozone levels are described as "poor" when over the population information threshold, and very poor when over the population warning threshold. In addition, my Department and the Department of Health issue occasional press notices.

Both the helpline and the press notices contain appropriate health advice when air quality is poor or very poor.

Mr. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what is the number of *(a)* rural and *(b)* urban areas covered by air monitoring stations; how his Department determines each; and if he will make a statement; [1808]

(2) what is *(a)* the number of air monitoring stations currently in operation, *(b)* the percentage of the country covered by air monitoring stations and *(c)* the percentage of the population covered by air monitoring stations; and if he will make a statement. [1810]

Mr. Clappison: The Government have established a number of air quality monitoring networks to monitor air pollutants in rural and urban areas. The number of monitoring stations currently in operation in each of the national networks is shown in the table.

About three quarters of local authorities in the United Kingdom—based on 1993 boundaries—have at least one air quality monitoring site in their area. These sites are either wholly funded by the Government or run in collaboration with local authorities. Since the majority of monitoring is undertaken in urban areas a significant proportion of the population are covered by air quality monitoring.

The objectives of the Government's air quality monitoring programmes are to understand air quality problems in order that cost-effective policies and solutions can be developed; to monitor compliance with European Community directives; to assess how far guidelines and targets are being achieved; to provide public information on current and forecast air quality; and to assist the assessment of personal exposure to air pollutants. The Government establish air quality monitoring sites to meet these criteria, drawing on advice from their expert review groups.

Further details of the Government's monitoring programme are given in "Air Pollution in the UK: 1993–94", a copy of which has been placed in the House of Commons Library.

Network and Pollutants measured	*Urban stations*	*Rural stations*	*Total*
Automatic Urban[1] (sulphur dioxide, nitrogen dioxide, ozone, carbon monoxide and monoxide and fine particles (PM_{10}))	27	—	27
Automatic Hydrocarbon (25 hydrocarbons including benzene and 1,3-butadiene)	11	—	11
Automatic Rural[1] (ozone, sulphur dioxide, nitrogen dioxide)	0	15	15
Non-Automatic Urban Nitrogen Dioxide	1,216	—	1,216
Non-Automatic Urban Smoke and sulphur dioxide	227	—	227

Network and Pollutants measured	Urban stations	Rural stations	Total
Non-Automatic Lead and Multi-Element	20	4	24
Acid Deposition	—	32	32
Rural sulphur dioxide	—	39	39
Toxic Organic Micropollutants (dioxins and polyaromatic hydrocarbons)	3	1	4
North Sea (organochlorines and metals)	—	4	4
Total	1,504	95	1,599

[1] Not all sites monitor all pollutants.

Mr. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what comparisons his Department has carried out of the levels of *(a)* ozone, *(b)* nitrogen dioxide and *(c)* sulphur dioxide in the United Kingdom and other parts of Europe. [1806]

Mr. Clappison: My Department does not compile statistics of the measured concentrations of ozone, nitrogen dioxide or sulphur dioxide in countries outside of the United Kingdom. A summary of all UK monitoring data for these pollutants is presented in the Department of the Environment, "Digest of Environmental Statistics No. 17, 1995", a copy of which has been placed in the Library of the House of Commons.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the latest available figures for carbon dioxide emissions for each member state of the EU and the EEA, together with the equivalent figures for 1990; and if he will indicate the targets which have been agreed internationally for reducing them. [1792]

Mr. Clappison: The framework convention on climate change, which the UK ratified in December 1993, commits developed countries to adopt policies and take corresponding measures aimed at returning anthropogenic emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases to their 1990 levels by the year 2000. The UK is on target to meet this commitment.

The table gives figures for carbon dioxide emissions by EU member states and EEA countries in 1990 and 1993, based on data published by the International Energy Agency.

Carbon dioxide emissions, 1990–1993

Country	1990 CO_2 emissions (MtC)	1993 CO_2 emissions (MtC)
(EU)		
Austria	15.9	15.5
Belgium	30.3	30.9
Denmark	14.4	16.1
Finland	14.5	15.0
France	101.9	100.4
Germany	269.2	244.5
Greece	19.8	20.3
Ireland	9.1	9.1
Italy	112.4	111.9
Luxembourg	2.9	3.1
Netherlands	43.4	46.6
Portugal	11.2	12.5
Spain	59.7	60.8
Sweden	14.6	14.1
United Kingdom	159.2	152.3
(EEA)		
Norway	8.4	8.6
Iceland	0.7	0.6
Liechtenstein	[1]—	[1]—

[1] Figures not included in relevant IEA data.
Figures converted from IEA for energy-related CO_2 emissions. 1990 figures: *Climate Change Policy Initiatives—1994 Update: Volume I—OECD Countries.* 1993 figures: *Energy Policies of IEA Countries—1994 Review.*

Mr. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment which of the air pollution sites referred to on his answer of 31 October 1995, *Official Report*, column *177–78*, are classified as *(a)* urban and *(b)* rural. [1803]

Mr. Clappison: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 31 October. Column 3 of the table states whether the sites are rural or urban. All of the sites marked hydrocarbon are classified as urban.

Mr. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list, for each of the last 10 years, the areas in which EC guidelines on levels of nitrogen dioxide have been exceeded. [1793]

Mr. Clappison: EC directive 85/203/EEC on air quality standards for nitrogen dioxide sets a mandatory limit value and two non-mandatory guide values for nitrogen dioxide. The latter two are 135μg/m^3 (70.6ppb) expressed as a 98th percentile, and 50μg/m^3 (26.2ppb) expressed as a 50th percentile, both of hourly values over a year.

The table lists the sites of the national monitoring network and the years where either of these guide values has been exceeded.

Year	Site
1985	London Roadside
	London Victoria
1986	London Roadside
	London Victoria
1987	London Victoria
	London Earl's Court
	Stevenage
	Glasgow
	Manchester
	Walsall
1988	London Victoria
	London Earl's Court
	Glasgow
1989	London Roadside
	London Victoria
	London Earl's Court
	Walsall
1990	London Roadside
	London Victoria
	London Earl's Court
	Manchester
1991	London Roadside
	London Victoria
	London Earl's Court
1992	London Roadside
	London Victoria
	London Earl's Court
	London Bloomsbury
	Manchester

Year	Site
	Sheffield
	Edinburgh
1993	London Roadside
	London Victoria
	London Earl's Court
	London Bloomsbury
	Sheffield
	Newcastle
1994	London Roadside
	London Victoria
	London Earls' Court
	London Bloomsbury
	Manchester
	Sheffield
	Edinburgh
	Leeds

Mr. Roy Thomason: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what action he is taking to implement the recommendation of the Government's expert panel on air quality standards for a standard for ozone of 50ppb. [3125]

Mr. Clappison: The Government's national air quality strategy, which we intend to publish within the next few months, will include objectives for particular air pollutants, including zone, and the steps which we will expect local authorities and others to take in order to meet them.

About half the ozone affecting the UK has its origins abroad. Therefore, the UK believes that the most sensible approach is to act internationally to reduce emissions of the precursors of ozone. The United Kingdom has already signed the United Nation economic commission for Europe protocol on the reduction of volatile organic compounds, and is currently preparing for the negotiation of a new agreement on the reduction of oxides of nitrogen.

EU Research and Development Budget

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what were the indicative contributions to the EU budget in respect of research and development for his Department in 1993–94. [1907]

Mr. Clappison: Table 2.1 of the statistical supplement to the "Forward Look of Government-funded Science, Engineering and Technology 1995" contains indicative figures for the United Kingdom's contributions to the EC budget in respect of research and development. Departments' policy responsibilities are subject to change and can vary from year to year. My Department currently has responsibility for 8.04 per cent. of the Community's R and D budget.

Climate Change

Mr. Mathew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if the next report from the intergovernmental panel on climate change has been sent to his Department for comment; what is the timetable for its publication; and if he will make a statement. [1814]

Mr. Clappison: The reports of the three working groups of the intergovernmental panel on climate change were sent to my Department for comment following extensive scientific peer review. Comments were sought from other Departments and, where appropriate, external experts. Comments were provided on early drafts and as input to discussion at plenary sessions of the working groups.

The summary reports of working groups II and III of IPCC were approved last month in Montreal and the working group I report will be addressed at a meeting on 27 to 29 November in Madrid. All three summaries and the underlying reports are due to be accepted formally by the IPCC at its plenary session in Rome in December. An overall synthesis report will also be considered for approval in Rome.

Final published forms of the full reports should be available in spring 1996.

Asbestos (Building Demolition)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what obligations there are for an organisation or person demolishing a building that is known to contain asbestos to report to a local authority that it is their intention to demolish such a building; and if he will make a statement. [1703]

Mr. Clappison: Any organisation or individual intending to demolish certain types of buildings is required to notify the local authority of their intention to do so. Buildings covered by this requirement are listed in section 80 of the Building Act 1984.

The local authority may respond to the notice by imposing conditions on the demolition work including removal of material or rubbish from the site and measures for the protection of the public and preservation of public amenity. Depending on the nature of the conditions, the organisation or individual must notify the local authority again 24 or 48 hours before the required action is taken.

For buildings containing asbestos, additional requirements depend on the nature and position of the asbestos in the building. If the building contains asbestos insulation or coating this should be removed wherever possible before any other demolition work begins. Such removal should be undertaken only by contractors licensed under the Asbestos (Licensing) Regulations 1983.

Inland Waterways (Speed Limits)

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment for what reasons he has given advice that speed limits on inland waterways shall henceforth be notified in kilometres per hour; what consultations were made prior to such notification; what is its statutory basis; and to what rivers, canals or tidal waterways such advice applies. [1797]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Under the Units of Measurement Regulations 1995, which took effect from 1 October 1995, certain references to imperial units of measurement were converted to their metric equivalent. My Department had kept British Waterways and the National Rivers Authority informed on the proposed regulations. The regulations

apply to all waterways except those used for sea transport, where units of measurement are laid down in international conventions or agreements.

Assured Shorthold Tenancies

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) how many cases have been referred by tenants of assured shorthold tenancies to rent assessment committees in each year since the introduction of the Housing Act 1988; how many determinations have been made as a result of such referrals; and what has been the average reduction of rent consequent on those determinations; [2406]

(2) in how many cases involving referrals by tenants of assured shorthold tenancies under section 22 of the Housing Act 1988, in each year since the introduction of that Act, the rent assessment committee declined to make a determination *(a)* on the grounds that there were insufficient similar lettings in the locality and *(b)* because the rent was not considered significantly higher than that which the landlord might reasonably be expected to obtain. [2405]

Mr. Curry: The number of referrals by tenants of assured shorthold tenancies under section 22 of the Housing Act 1988 in each year since the introduction of that Act and action taken by the committees is as follows:

Rent assessment committees, England—caseload for rent referrals under section 22 Housing Act 1988 since 1989

	1989	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*[1]1995*
Number of referrals	166	423	638	765	994	1,583	1,520
Number of determinations	33	77	237	240	284	444	519
Average rent reduction (pa)(£)[2]	813	979	763	728	834	1,359	1,246
Number of determinations declined (insufficient similar lettings)	22	14	15	10	16	8	3
Number of determinations declined (rent not significantly high)	36	129	144	173	194	378	424

Determinations may also be declined on the grounds that the Committee has no jurisdiction to make a determination and where a referral has been withdrawn.

[1] To date.

[2] These exclude the London and South Western committees where the figures were unavailable.

My Department's consultation paper "The Legislative Framework for Private Renting" issued in June 1995, proposed to repeal the right of assured shorthold tenants to refer to committees for a rent determination under section 22 of the Housing Act 1988. In the light of responses to that paper, I have decided to retain this right of referral.

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his estimate of the total number of tenants in assured shorthold tenancies who have been receiving housing benefit in each year since the introduction of the Housing Act 1988; and how many of these have had their rents determined by a rent assessment committee. [2407]

Mr. Curry: The estimated number of tenants in assured shorthold tenancies in England receiving housing benefit is as follows:

1989: figures not available

1990: 25,000

1991–92: figures not available

1992–93: figures not available

1993–94: 300,000

1994–95: 300,000

These estimates are from the 1990 private renters survey and the survey of English housing. Like all estimates from sample surveys, they are subject to sampling error.

Tenants seeking a rent determination by a rent assessment committee are not required to inform the committee whether they are in receipt of housing benefit.

Toxic Waste Shipments

Ms Eagle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what permits his Department has issued to allow the shipment of toxic waste into Liverpool in the last five years; and what quantities of toxic waste have entered the port in this period. [2135]

Mr. Clappison: Day-to-day administration of controls over imports and exports of waste is the responsibility of waste regulation authorities. Authorisation of hazardous waste imports is a matter for the waste regulation authority for the area where the destination facility is located. This may not be the same as the authority for the port of entry.

The following table shows the quantities of hazardous waste entering the United Kingdom through the port of Liverpool since 1989:

Year	*Tonnes[1]*
1989–90	754
1990–91	573
1991–92	1,362
1992–93	1,081
1993–94	4,566

[1] Imports under the Transfrontier Shipment of Hazardous Waste Regulations 1988.

Source:

Digest of Environmental Statistics, Nos. 13–17, HMSO.

No imports of hazardous wastes were notified for disposal at facilities within the jurisdiction of Merseyside waste regulation authority during this period.

Housing Bill

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will incorporate measures in the forthcoming housing Bill to remedy problems confronting leaseholders. [2403]

Mr. Curry: I am aware of the concerns which have been expressed. We are considering the possibility of framing appropriate measures.

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what parliamentary timetable he envisages for the forthcoming Housing Bill; and if it is his intention that it will include measures relating to construction contracts. [2404]

Mr. Curry: We are finalising legislation to make better provision for housing and to lay the foundations for a construction industry based on partnership and co-operation, and hope to publish it shortly.

Planning Guidance (Shopping Centres)

Mr. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to publish his new planning guidance on shopping centres. [2867]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: We hope to publish the revised PPG6 early next year.

Home Energy Efficiency Scheme (Scotland)

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what are the criteria used for selecting companies to be placed on the long list of contractors suitable for selection as network installers under the home energy efficiency scheme in Scotland; [2119]

(2) what was the value of work carried out under the home energy efficiency scheme by each network installer in Scotland in the latest year for which figures are available; [2120]

(3) who are the network installers used under the home energy efficiency scheme for each region in Scotland. [2132]

Mr. Clappison: All applicants for the long list are selected by competitive tender. Applicants are required to demonstrate their willingness and continuing ability to meet specified performance standards for grant work set by Eaga Ltd. and approved by my right hon. Friend. They are also required to carry out work sensitively with proper regard to the needs of clients; and to operate in accordance with Eaga's code of conduct.

The same criteria are applied in England and Wales.

Information about the value of work of individual installers is commercially confidential. A breakdown for 1994–95 by geographical area is shown in table 1. Table 2 shows the installers operating in each area.

Table 1: Value of HEES work carried out in each operating area of Scotland, 1994–95

	£
Roxburgh, Berwickshire, Ettrick and Lauderdale, Tweeddale, Midlothian, East Lothian	301,012.45
West Lothian and Edinburgh	591,223.28
Wigtown, Stewartry, Nithsdale, Annandale and Eskdale, Kyle and Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley	505,371.67
Kilmarnock and Loudoun, Cunninghame	452,178.88
Eastwood, Renfrew, Inverclyde, Dumbarton Argyll and Bute	592,840.86
Monklands, Motherwell, Hamilton, East Kilbride, Clydesdale	1,117,191.97
Glasgow North	427,725.56
Glasgow East	386,129.47
Glasgow South	267,937.60
Clydesbank, Cumbernauld and Kilsyth, Strathkelvin Bearsden and Milgavie, Falkirk, Stirling, Clackmannan	390,646.35
Dunfermline, Kirkcaldy, North East Fife	445,677.16
Dundee, Perth and Kinross, Angus	303,737.37
Kincardine and Deeside, Gordon, Aberdeen, Banff and Buchan	229,544.84
Moray, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey, Inverness, Lochaber, Skye and Lochalsh, Ross and Cromarty, Sutherland, Caithness	244,091.88
Orkney Islands	49,154.12
Shetland Islands	76,855.80
Total	6,381,319.26

Table 2: HEES network installers for each operating area in Scotland

Area	*Installers*
Roxburgh, Berwickshire, Ettrick and Lauderdale, Tweeddale, Midlothian, East Lothian	Everwarm KNW
West Lothian and Edinburgh	McSence Heatwise Ltd.; Everwarm
Wigtown, Stewartry, Nithsdale, Annandale and Eskdale, Kyle and Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley	Phoenix Energy Conservation Everwarm
Kilmarnock and Loudon, Cunninghame	BEST Ltd. Kendon Holdings
Eastwood, Renfrew, Inverclyde, Dumbarton Argyll and Bute	Solas Insulation Ltd. Everwarm Heatwise Glasgow
Monklands, Motherwell, Hamilton, East Kilbride, Clydesdale	Homes Consortium Microcom Insulations Everwarm
Glasgow North	Heatwise Glasgow; Solas Insulation Ltd.; Everwarm
Glasgow East	Heatwise Glasgow; Everwarm
Glasgow South	Heatwise Glasgow; Everwarm Miller Pattison Ltd.
Clydebank, Cumbernauld and Kilsyth, Strathkelvin	Microcom Insulations Heatwise Glasgow
Bearsden and Milgavie, Falkirk Stirling, Clackmannan	EU Insulation Ltd.
Dunfermline, Kirkcaldy, North East Fife	Heatwise Fife Ltd. Clyde Insulation Contracts (UK)
Dundee, Perth and Kinross, Angus	Claverhouse Services Tayside Energy Training Co. Ltd.
Kincardine and Deeside, Gordon Aberdeen, Banff and Buchan	SCARF
Moray, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey, Inverness, Lochaber, Skye and Lochalsh, Ross and Cromarty, Sutherland, Caithness	Rosswise Ltd. BEST Ltd.
Orkney Islands	Keep Orkney Warm
Shetland Islands	Shetland Heatwise

Local Government Finance

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what are his plans for local government revenue spending in 1996–97; and if he will make a statement. [2796]

Mr. Gummer: Every year, the Government announce the sum of money which local authorities are expected to spend. Next year's figure is £44.92 billion, up

3.3 per cent. on last year. This means an increase of £1.4 billion, and when the transitional costs of local government reorganisation are taken into account, represents a cash improvement of 3.1 per cent.

In allocating this sum between services, I have decided to give the main priority to education. My proposal is therefore that education spending should increase year on year by 4.5 per cent. The amount actually spent on schools remains a matter for individual local authorities, but I have no doubt that parents, governors and teachers will wish to ensure that the whole of the increased funding feed through into schools' budgets.

I propose that the level of aggregate external finance distributed to local authorities in 1996–97 should be £35.62 billion. This represents an increase of some £960 million—2.8 per cent.—compared with this year's figure.

I also propose that the national non-domestic rate poundage for 1996–97 should rise to 44.9, reflecting the annual increase in the retail price index to September.

I propose to set the distributable amount of non-domestic rates at £12.74 billion. I propose that the total of revenue support grant should be £18 billion. Special and specific grants within AEF will amount to £4.88 billion.

I shall announce shortly my proposals for the distribution of Government grants, including my proposals for changes in the standard spending assessment methodology. At the same time, I shall announce my capping intentions.

It is essential that local and central government continue to play their part in restraining expenditure. My proposals for total standard spending, aggregate external finance and the non-domestic rate poundage represent a balanced approach to funding the demands on local authority services in 1996–97.

I look to local authorities to scrutinise their priorities and to take every opportunity to increase their cost efficiency in the delivery of services. If they do so then, even in the climate of a tight settlement, the provision I have announced will enable authorities to meet priority needs across the range of their functions.

Advisory Committee on Protection of the Sea

Mr. Illsley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment for what period his Department will continue funding the Advisory Committee on Protection of the Sea. [2652]

Mr. Clappison: My Department currently provides support to the Advisory Committee on Protection of the Sea through the environmental action fund. ACOPS has applied for further funding for the financial year 1996–97. My Department is considering this, along with all other requests for environmental action fund support and we hope to announce our decisions on all applications early in 1996.

Rebuilding Grants

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the results of the pilot project for rebuilding grants carried out under the terms of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989. [3097]

Mr. Clappison: We expect to publish the results of the study early in the new year.

Social Housing

Mr. Sutcliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what measures he proposes to ensure equality in terms of competition and regulation as between housing associations and the proposed independent social landlords. [2697]

Mr. Clappison: All organisations that wish to receive subsidy from the Housing Corporation to provide social housing will be required to meet the same standards of construction, maintenance, management and services to tenants. The corporation will monitor these organisations to see that these standards are delivered, and will have regulatory powers to take action where standards are not being met.

Mr. Sutcliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the proposals from the National Federation of Housing Associations relating to the proceeds from the sale of the Housing Corporation's loan portfolio; and if he will make a statement. [2786]

Mr. Gummer: The Government will be making a statement on this matter later this afternoon.

Mr. Hargreaves: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to sell to the private sector the Housing Corporation portfolio of earlier loans to housing associations. [3426]

Mr. Curry: Since 1989, housing associations have secured around £5.5 billion of private resources to support housing projects, and a further £3 billion in support of large-scale voluntary transfers of housing from local authorities.

Prior to 1989, housing associations' loan finance was provided by the Housing Corporation with resources borrowed from the national loans fund. There is no reason for public sector bodies to continue to hold these loans, and my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Scotland and for Wales and I have decided in principle that the corporation's portfolio of loans to housing associations in England, and the equivalent lending in Scotland by Scottish Homes and in Wales by Housing for Wales should be sold, subject to detailed investigations of the options for sale and the prospective disposal receipt. We shall shortly be appointing advisers to carry out this investigation.

Sale, if confirmed following investigation, will not affect the financial position of the housing associations concerned, or their tenants, or rents, or the future development programmes of the Housing Corporation, Scottish Homes or Housing for Wales.

Dr. Twinn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on tax relief grant for non-charitable housing associations. [3427]

Mr. Curry: The White Paper "Our Future Homes" set out the Government's proposals to enable profit-making companies and other bodies to compete alongside housing associations for funds to support the provision of social housing in England and Wales.

In this context, it would not make sense for non-charitable housing associations to continue to receive tax relief grant, which currently offsets their liability for income and corporation tax. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales and I have, therefore, decided that tax relief grant should be discontinued with effect from 1 April 1997, subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary legislation.

The tax position of charitable housing associations will remain unchanged.

Stray Dogs

Mr. Tracey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if a local authority must include on its register of stray dogs information derived from *(a)* a tattoo, *(b)* an identification tag or collar and *(c)* a microchip which is carried by a stray dog; and if he will make a statement. [3425]

Mr. Clappison: The Environmental Protection (Stray Dogs) Regulations 1992 (SI 1992 No 288) set out what information a local authority must include in its register of stray dogs. This contains specific mention of information from tattoos, tags and collars, but does not include specific mention of microchips. The local authority must, however, take reasonable steps to include any information which is carried by the dog. The interpretation of these regulations is ultimately a matter for the courts.

DEFENCE

Western European Union

7. **Mrs. Gorman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what aims the Government have for their presidency of the Western European Union. [816]

Mr. Portillo: We intend to concentrate our efforts during the United Kingdom presidency on ensuring that the WEU can fulfil more effectively its operational role as the European pillar of the transatlantic alliance.

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the issues discussed and decisions taken at the recent Western European Union meeting in Madrid; and if he will place in the Library copies of all Western European Union declarations made in 1995. [1575]

Mr. Soames: The WEU Ministerial Council met in Madrid on 14 November. Ministers approved an options paper prepared as the WEU's contribution to the 1996 intergovernmental conference, and publication of a reflection document entitled "European security: a common concept of the 27 WEU countries". Ministers also took decisions on a range of measures to strengthen the WEU's operational capability, and welcomed a statement by the UK on the programme for its presidency commencing on 1 January 1996, which focuses on the WEU's further operational development. Copies of all 1995 WEU declarations not already in the Library of the House will be placed there.

Trident Programme

14. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about the progress of the Trident programme. [824]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The Trident programme continues to make good progress and is on time and within budget. The second Vanguard class submarine, HMS Victorious, is due to enter service around the turn of the year.

Joint Defence Policy (USA)

15. **Dr. Twinn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he last met the US Secretary for Defense to discuss joint defence policy. [825]

Mr. Portillo: I last met the US Defence Secretary at the NATO Ministerial meeting at Williamsburg on 6 October. I shall meet him again later this afternoon.

Mr. David Hart

16. **Mr. Dowd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assurances of confidentiality have been provided by Mr. David Hart regarding information supplied to his Department by the United Kingdom defence industry. [826]

Mr. Portillo: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) on 19 October 1995, *Official Report*, column *361*.

17. **Mr. Purchase:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what access Mr. David Hart has to confidential information provided by the British defence industry. [828]

Mr. Portillo: Mr. Hart has access to the information necessary for him to fulfil his duties as my independent adviser.

RAF High Wycombe

18. **Mr. Lidington:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about the future of RAF High Wycombe. [829]

Mr. Soames: Although some changes are proposed to the internal structure of RAF Strike Command, RAF High Wycombe will continue to play an important role as the home for HQ RAF Strike Command, HQ Allied Forces North West Europe, and the Franco-British Euro Air Group.

Military Helicopters (Exports)

19. **Mr. Mark Robinson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what support his Department provides to assist companies wishing to export military helicopters. [830]

Mr. Arbuthnot: Within the Ministry of Defence, support for defence exports is provided, primarily, by the Defence Export Services Organisation, which exists to help British manufacturers market and sell their products abroad, complementing the wider range of services offered by the Department of Trade and Industry. In

addition to the DESO/DTI support, the Export Credits Guarantee Department makes available its range of export credit facilities to support defence sales.

Eurofighter 2000

20. **Ms Church:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are the consequences for Eurofighter 2000 of the delay in reaching agreement with European allies on workshare. [832]

Mr. Arbuthnot: A number of aspects, including workshare, relating to the planning of the future phases of the Eurofighter 2000 project are being discussed between the partner Governments. It would be premature to speculate now on the consequences of delay in reaching decisions on these aspects.

Trident Programme

21. **Ms Roseanna Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent representations he has received with regard to the Trident programme; and if he will make a statement. [833]

Mr. Arbuthnot: A number of representations have been received regarding the Trident programme.

RAF Pilot Training

22. **Mr. Harvey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about the future of advanced RAF pilot training. [834]

Mr. Soames: Advanced RAF fast-jet pilot training will continue to take place at RAF Valley. Multi-engine pilot training is undertaken at RAF Cranwell, but is currently the subject of a trial to explore the feasibility of conducting this activity in the private sector. Rotary wing training will continue to be undertaken at RAF Shawbury, but from April 1997 will be provided by the new tri-service defence helicopter flying school which is to be based at the station.

French Nuclear Testing

23. **Mr. Donald Anderson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he has had with his French counterpart concerning nuclear testing. [836]

Mr. Arbuthnot: Since their meeting in Paris on 27 September, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and the French Defence Minister have not discussed nuclear testing.

Empty Service Properties

24. **Mr. Jamieson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many empty service properties his Department currently possesses. [837]

Mr. Soames: As at 30 September 1995, my Department owned 13,898 vacant service families quarters. Of these, 3,202 were in the process of being sold while the majority of the remainder were either awaiting major maintenance work, held for unit deployments, already allocated to service families due to move in shortly or formed part of the management margin needed to ensure that accommodation is available to house entitled service personnel.

A continuing programme should ensure significant additional disposals of surplus quarters during the next 12 to 18 months.

British-French Air Defence Co-operation

25. **Mr. Soley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on British-French air defence co-operation. [839]

Mr. Soames: Excellent relations exist between the two air forces. This close co-operation was recently demonstrated by the inauguration of the Franco-British Euro Air Group.

Military Air Crashes

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list all military jet airplane crashes in United Kingdom airspace since 1980 indicating the date and location of each crash or the types of aircraft involved. [2738]

Mr. Soames: The table lists crashes which resulted in category 4 or category 5 damage, or nearest equivalent, to one or both of the military fixed-wing jet aircraft involved:

Date	*Aircraft*	*Location*
1980		
12 February	Hunter FGA9	Isle of Skye
5 March	Phantom FGR2	RAF Coningsby, Lincolnshire
12 March	Harrier GR3	2½ nm SE of Lampeter, Dyfed
17 March	Hunter GA11	English Channel, 10 nm SSW of Start Point
29 April	F-111E	Mappenton, Dorset
8 May	Jet Provost T5A	Near RAF Swinderby, Lincolnshire
17 May	Hawk T1	Brighton sea front, Sussex
28 May	Hunter FGA9	3 nm SE of Dufftown, Morayshire
29 May	Hunter T7	1 nm S of Little Saxham, Suffolk
3 June	Phantom FG1	RAF Alconbury, Cambridgeshire
31 July	Jet Provost T3A	½ nm S of RAF Elvington, North Yorkshire
19 August	Hawk T1	RAF Valley, Anglesey
12 November	Phantom FGR2	North Sea, 50 nm NE of Cromer
17 November	Nimrod MR2	RAF Kinloss, Morayshire
18 November	2 x A-10A	Great Yarmouth, Norfolk
1 December	Sea Harrier FRS1	English Channel, 25 nm S of Land's End
9 December	Phantom FGR2	North Sea, 10 nm NE of Lowestoft
1981		
9 January	A-10A	RAF Donna Nook, Lincolnshire
28 January	Jet Provost T5A	4 nm W of RAF Leuchars, Fife
4 February	A-10A	East Wretham, Suffolk
23 February	Hunter FGA9	Moray Firth, 20 nm N of RAF Lossiemouth
25 March	F-111	RAF Fairford, Gloucester
3 April	Hunter FGA9	RAF Lossiemouth, Morayshire
8 May	A-10A	RAF Wainfleet, Lincolnshire
1 June	Jaguar T2	4 nm NE of Kirriemuir, Tayside
16 June	Jet Provost T5A	RAF Leeming, North Yorkshire

Date	Aircraft	Location
9 July	Phantom FG1	RAF Leuchars, Fife
17 July	Jaguar GR1	1 nm SE of Great Malvern, Hereford and Worcester
23 July	Lightning F6	North Sea, 50 nm NNE of RAF Binbrook
24 July	Jaguar T2	Bristol Channel, 9 nm W of Hartland Point, Devon
30 July	Jet Provost T3A	2 nm N of Snainton, North Yorkshire
6 August	Jaguar GR1	2 nm SW of Barnard Castle, Durham
23 September	Buccaneer S2B	RAF Wattisham, Suffolk
21 October	Hunter T7	St. George's Channel, 35 nm SW of Brawdy
22 October	Jet Provost T3A	Holme-on-Spalding-Moor, Humberside
18 November	Jaguar GR1	14 nm NW of Dingwall, Ross and Cromarty
1 December	Hunter T7	1½ nm N of RAF Brawdy, Dyfed
1982		
7 January	Hawk T1	RAF Bedford, Bedfordshire
12 February	Harrier GR3	8 nm S of Corwen, Clwyd
17 March	Hunter 12	RAF Farnborough, Hampshire
2 April	Jaguar GR1	The Wash, 5 nm SW of Hunstanton
14 April	Phantom FGR2	½ nm SE of Walcot, Lincolnshire
22 April	Jet Provost T4	Nant-y-Moch Reservoir, Dyfed
4 May	F-16	Beccles, Suffolk
12 May	Tornado GR1	RAF Coningsby, Lincolnshire
13 May	Hunter FGA9	15 nm SE of Aberystwyth
17 May	Jet Provost T5A	RAF Linton-on-Ouse, North Yorkshire
17 May	Sea Harrier FRS1	RNAS Yeovilton, Somerset 1½ nm SW of RAF Lossiemouth, Morayshire
17 June	Buccaneer S2B	1½ nm SW of RAF Lossiemouth, Morayshire
23 June	F-111F	Strathconon Forest, Ross and Cromarty
7 July	Phantom FGR2	North Sea, 35 nm N of Cromer
28 July	Hawk T1	RAF Valley, Anglesey
5 August	Hunter T7	4½ nm NW of Carmarthen, Dyfed
13 September	Jaguar GR1	11 nm N of Bonar Bridge, Sutherland
16 September	F-111F	RAF Leuchars, Fife
15 October	Victor K2	RAF Marham, Norfolk
20 October	Hawk T1	RAF Chivenor, Devon
7 December	F-111F	Cullin Hills, Isle of Skye
7 December	F-104G Starfighter	Irish Sea, off Brawdy
9 December	Jet Provost T5A	Lake Thirlmere, Cumbria
16 December	Hunter T8C	The Solent, 3 nm of Nab Tower
1983		
21 January	Sea Harrier FRS1	Cattistock, Dorset
23 February	Harrier GR3 and Harrier T4	3 nm NE of Peterborough, Cambridgeshire
7 March	Jaguar GR1	RAF Tain, Ross and Cromarty
30 March	Jet Provost T3A	RAF Elvington, North Yorkshire
12 April	F-104 Starfighter	Otterburn range
19 April	Jaguar GR1	North Sea, 35 nm NNE of RAF Coltishall
16 May	Hunter GA11	English Channel, 2 nm off Portland Bill
24 June	Hawk T1	Irish Sea, 4 nm SW of the Isle of Man
29 July	2 x Hawk T1	Near Holsworthy, Devon
29 July	Hawk T1	St. George's Channel, 40 nm SW of RAF Brawdy
26 August	Lightning F3	Scarborough, North Yorkshire
19 September	Jaguar GR1	RAF Lossiemouth, Morayshire
27 September	Tornado GR1	Wolferton Marsh, Norfolk
19 October	Canberra B2	North Sea
20 October	Sea Harrier FRS1	2 nm SE of Dorchester, Dorset
28 October	Harrier GR3	RAF Holbeach, Norfolk
28 October	Tornado GR1	North Sea, 10 nm N of Sheringham
14 November	Tornado GR1	RAF Honington, Suffolk
21 November	Jet Provost T3A	2 nm SE of Ribblehead Viaduct, North Yorkshire
12 December	2 x A-10A	North Sea, off Great Yarmouth
21 December	F-111F	North Sea, off Scotland
1984		
17 January	Jaguar T2	¼ mile from A and AEE Boscombe Down
29 February	A-10A	Suffolk
11 May	Jet Provost T3A	RAF Linton on Ouse, North Yorkshire
20 May	Buccaneer S2B	North Sea, 45 nm NE of Fraserburgh
3 June	Nimrod MR2	RAF St. Mawgan, Cornwall
12 July	Tornado GR1 and Jaguar GR1A	1½ nm NW of Sheringham, Norfolk
9 August	F-111E	Loch Eye, Ross and Cromarty
15 August	Jet Provost T3A	RAF Cranwell, Lincolnshire
22 August	Jaguar GR1A	North Sea, 20 nm ENE of Cromer
31 August	Hawk T1	Sidmouth Bay, Devon
9 October	Tornado	RAF Cottesmore, Leicestershire
25 October	Hawk T1	Tremadoc Bay, Gwent
31 October	Hunter T8C	The Solent, 2 nm off Nab Tower
7 November	Hawk T1	Mona Airfield, Anglesey
8 November	Lightning F6	North Sea, 7 nm E of Spurn Head
1 December	Sea Harrier FRS1	6 nm NE of Fort William
1985		
30 January	Hawk T1A	Bristol Channel, off Mumbles Head
7 February	Harrier T4N	3 nm N of RNAS Yeovilton, Somerset
6 March	Lightning F6	North Sea, 20 nm NE of Skegness
10 April	F-111F	RAF Lakenheath, Suffolk
17 April	Hawk T1	1 nm S of RAF Wattisham, Suffolk
30 April	F-5A	RAF Kinloss, Morayshire
14 June	Buccanneer S2B	RAF Lossiemouth, Morayshire
8 August	Canberra B2	RAF Alconbury, Cambridgeshire
19 September	Lightning F6	North Sea, 50 nm E of Flamborough Head
7 October	Jaguar GR1A and Jaguar GR1	4 nm WSW of Alston, Cumbria
24 October	Tornado	Stannersburn, North Yorkshire
19 November	Harrier GR3	RAF Wittering, Cambridgeshire
12 December	Tornado GR1	North Sea, off Flamborough Head
1986		
7 January	Phantom FGR2	5 nm SSE of Aysgarth, North Yorkshire
16 April	Sea Harrier FRS1	North Atlantic Ocean, 120 nm W of Tiree
25 May	Meteor T7 and Vampire T11	RAF Mildenhall, Suffolk

Date	Aircraft	Location
6 June	2 x Jet Provost T5A	2½ nm NNW of Helmsley, North Yorkshire
17 June	Tornado	Near Claerwen Reservoir, Powys
17 June	Harrier GR3	RNAS Yeovilton, Somerset
2 July	Hawk 200	BAe Dunsfold, Surrey
7 July	Hawk T1	RAF Valley, Anglesey
15 July	Lightning F6	North Sea, 7 nm N of Whitby
24 July	F-4 Phantom	St. Bride's Bay, Dyfed
21 October	Tornado	Otterburn range
3 November	Hawk T1A	RAF Scampton, Lincolnshire
27 November	Jaguar GR1A	Eskdalemuir Forest, Borders
2 December	Tornado GR1	Wortham, Suffolk
10 December	2 x Tornado GR1	Near Thorney, Cambridgeshire
1987		
23 February	F-111	Near Newmarket, Suffolk
19 March	Lightning F3	RAF Binbrook, Lincolnshire
22 April	Buccaneer S2B	North Sea, 25 nm E of Wick
3 June	Tornado GR1	Manby Airfield, Lincolnshire
17 June	Jaguar GR1A and Tornado GR1	S of Keswick, Cumbria
24 June	Jaguar GR1A	3 nm SE of Builth Wells, Powys
27 July	Tornado GR1	10 nm NW of Pickering, North Yorkshire
28 July	F-111	Near Lauder, Berwickshire
26 August	F-4J(UK) Phantom	10 nm S of Aberystwyth, Dyfed
7 September	Phantom FG1	North Sea, 50 nm E of RAF Leuchars
15 October	Sea Harrier FRS1	North Atlantic Ocean, 85 nm SW of Tiree
2 November	2 x Harrier GR3	Otterburn range
16 November	2 x Hawk T1	Welton, Lincolnshire
1988		
22 January	Hawk T1A	RAF Scampton, Lincolnshire
11 April	Lightning F6	North Sea, 5 nm off Easington, Humberside
20 April	Phantom FG1	North Sea, 23 nm E of RAF Leuchars
13 May	Hawk T1A	RAF Brawdy, Dyfed
30 May	Meteor T7	3nm NE of Coventry Airport, Warwickshire
14 June	Hunter GA11	2 nm NW of RNAS Yeovilton, Somerset
24 June	Hawk T1A	RAF Scampton, Lincolnshire
9 August	2 x Tornado GR1	Blencarn, Cumbria
23 September	Phantome FGR2	RAF Abingdon, Oxfordshire
22 December	A-10A	RAF Alconbury, Cambs
1989		
9 January	Phantom FGR2	North Sea, 50 nm E of RAF Leuchars
8 March	Jet Provost T3A	Kirby Misperton, North Yorkshire
13 April	Jaguar GR1A	Lumsdaine Beach, Borders
17 April	A-10A	Near RAF Alconbury, Cambridgeshire
24 April	Phantom FGR2	North Sea, 30 nm E of Flamborough Head
14 June	2 x Hawk T1	6 nm NE of Aberystwyth, Dyfed
21 July	Tornado F3	North Sea, 35 nm NE of Newcastle
14 September	Tornado GR1	3 nm of RAF Abingdon, Oxfordshire
20 September	Hawk T1A	RAF Brawdy, Dyfed
4 October	Sea Harrier FRS1	English Channel, 13 nm West of Portland Bill

Date	Aircraft	Location
1990		
9 January	Tornado GR1 & Jaguar GR1A	4nm E of Hexham, Northumberland
5 February	F-111E	RAF Wainfleet, Lincolnshire
6 February	A-10A	Near Hereford
10 April	Hunter T8C	3½ nm N of Dorchester, Dorset
30 April	Phantom FGR2	RAF Valley, Anglesey
2 May	F-111F	Near Sculthorpe, Norfolk
9 May	Hawk T1	1 nm NW of RAF Valley, Anglesey
27 June	Canberra E15	1 nm E of RAF Kinloss, Moray
14 August	2 x Tornado GR1	North Sea, 10 nm NE of Spurn Head
16 August	Tornado GR1	North Sea, 6 nm NE of Spurn Head
12 September	Jaguar GR1A	Solway Firth, 4 nm W of Silloth
1991		
28 February	F-16A	North Sea, 80 nm NE of RAF Coltishall
18 March	Canberra T4	RAF Wyton, Cambridgeshire
10 May	Sea Harrier FRS1	1 nm NE of Parc Seymour, Gwent
29 August	Jaguar T2A	Carno, Powys
12 September	Tornado GR1	Bristol Channel, S of Steep Holm Island
25 September	Harrier T4	3 nm N of Great Driffield, Humberside
1992		
17 February	Hunter T8C	North Atlantic Ocean, 85 nm NW of Cape Wrath
2 April	EF-111A	RAF Upper Heyford, Oxfordshire
14 May	Harrier GR3	RAF Wittering, Cambridgeshire
9 July	Buccaneer S2B	North Sea, 38 nm E of RAF Leuchars
7 August	Harrier GR5	RAF Wittering, Cambridgeshire
17 September	F-111E	RAF Upper Heyford, Oxfordshire
30 September	Hawk T1A	RAF Chivenor, Devon
1993		
28 June	Harrier GR7	5 nm SW of Heckington, Lincolnshire
1 July	Hawk T1	RAF Valley, Anglesey
24 July	2 x MIG-29	RAF Fairford, Gloucestershire
21 October	Tornado F3	Stainmore, Cumbria
1994		
5 Janaury	Sea Harrier FRS2	Bristol Channel, 5 nm SE of Lundy Island
14 January	Harrier GR7	Vale of Evesham, Hereford and Worcester
7 June	Tornado F3	North Sea, 45 nm NE of Scarborough
27 June	Harrier T4N	RNAS Yeovilton, Somerset
19 July	Tornado GR1	Moray Firth, 16 nm N of RAF Lossiemouth
1 September	Tornado GR1A	Glen Ogle, Perthshire
1995		
10 March	Tornado F3	North Sea, 20 nm SE of Spurn Head
16 May	Nimrod R1	Moray Firth, 3½ nm N of RAF Lossiemouth
1 June	Harrier GR7	Solway Firth, 3 nm SE of Burrow Head
26 July	Harrier T10	RAF Wittering,

Date	Aircraft	Location
		Cambridgeshire
10 August	Hawk T1W	Mona Airfield, Anglesey
29 August	U-2R	RAF Fairford, Gloucestershire
20 October	Sea Harrier FA2	RNAS Yeovilton, Somerset
30 October	2 x Tornado F3	North Sea, 50 nm E of RAF Leuchars

Low Flying

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make it his policy to inform hon. Members of proposed low flying exercises. [2230]

Mr. Soames: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Pendle (Mr. Prentice) on 10 February 1995, *Official Report*, column *463*.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make it his policy to review the conduct of low flying; and if he will make a statement. [2434]

Mr. Soames: The regulations governing the use of the United Kingdom low flying system are kept under continuous review.

Shoeburyness Firing Range (Noise)

Sir Roger Moate: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about the number of complaints he has received in the current year from Kent residents about *(a)* noise and *(b)* vibration from the Shoeburyness firing range; how many exceptionally loud detonations have taken place; what procedures are adopted to reduce inconvenience to the minimum possible; and what is the role of the establishment within the defence strategy. [2439]

Mr. Arbuthnot: This is a matter for the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from John Chisholm to Sir Roger Moate, dated 28 November 1995:

Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence about complaints from Kent Residents on the activities at the Shoeburyness range has been passed to me to reply as the Chief Executive of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency (DERA) which includes the Defence Test and Evaluation Organisation (DTEO), of which Shoeburyness is a part, as one of its divisions.

You asked about the role of DTEO Shoeburyness. The site has developed over the last 140 years to provide a large land area and firm tidal sands which are used to test, trial and dispose of weapons and munitions for the Ministry of Defence. In more detail there are four main strands of activity.

a. The Dynamic Trials Section conducts a wide variety of trials and proof testing involving guided weapons, tank ordnance and artillery systems. The use of the tidal sands gives the section the capability to observe end trajectory functioning out to 24km.

b. The Static Trials Section conducts a wide range of trials on all explosive items and targets. The section also tests ballistic body armour and explosive suppression techniques.

c. The Environmental Test Centre (ETC) on Foulness Island is the focus of excellence within DTEO Shoeburyness for all matters relating to safe handling, transportation and storage of military and potentially hazardous stores.

d. Shoeburyness is also a world leader in the development of Conventional Munitions Disposal techniques and has developed a modern integrated range of facilities for the safe, efficient and environmentally benign demilitarisation of ammunition and explosives.

The number of complaints in any year is variable depending on the programme of work we have underway for the MOD. The number of complaints has increased since Shoeburyness undertook large scale demilitarisation at the end of 1993 as a result of the UK signing the 1989 Oslo Convention Agreement which banned deep sea dumping of ammunition. The staff at Shoeburyness have taken a number of steps to minimise the effects of noise on the local population. Before any firings take place an acoustic forecast is undertaken which predicts the likely noise effect over the surrounding area. If conditions are such that disturbance might be caused on any one or more centres of population then firings are postponed, where possible, until conditions are more favourable. The acoustic forecast is backed up by a number of noise monitors, three of which are on the Kent coast, which give an accurate, real time, indication of what noise is actually being propagated. If these results show an unacceptable level of noise, then trials or firings are, if possible, postponed until conditions are more favourable. The management at Shoeburyness has also implemented a policy of encouraging local residents to get in touch with staff at the site if they feel they have a complaint. Details of how to do this have been widely advertised in the local press. We have also tried, by open days at the site, to explain to local people the reason for the noise and the very important role that Shoeburyness fulfils for the Ministry of Defence. We also try to deal sympathetically with claims from members of the public who feel that our activities may have caused damage to their property.

Since January 1995 the complaints regarding noise and vibration from residents in Kent have totalled 290 compared with 336 for the full year in 1994. There have been 26 days so far in 1995 on which one or more of the three Kent monitors have recorded noise above 130 decibels. It should be pointed out, however, that the monitors register all noise, not just that from Shoeburyness. Our statistics do not break down between noise and vibration. The vibrations are, in fact, the result of a low frequency noise side effect.

I hope you find this information helpful.

Territorial Army Volunteer Reserve (Chaplains)

Sir Irvine Patnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many chaplains are currently appointed in the TAVR; to which regiments they are attached; which denominations they represent; and if he will make a statement. [2872]

Mr. Soames: There are at present 103 serving TA chaplains with three more in the process of being recruited.

The 103 serving TA chaplains are deployed as follows:

6 with Royal Armoured Corps Units.

8 with Royal Artillery Units.

6 with Royal Engineers Units.

9 with Royal Signals Units.

26 with Infantry Units.

6 with Royal Logistics Corps Units.

31 with Army Medical Services Units.

There are a further 11 chaplains serving with minor units.

The denominational split of the 103 chaplains currently serving with the TA is as follows:

	Number
Church of England	74
Roman Catholic	9
Methodist	2
Church of Scotland	13
United Board	5

Tornado Air Miss (Alaska)

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will place in the Library a copy of the report on the air miss between two Royal Air Force Tornado GR1s over Alaska in May 1993. [1308]

Mr. Soames: The investigation of air misses and publication of any subsequent reports are matters for the aviation authority in whose airspace the alleged incident occurred. My Department is not aware of an air miss between two Tornados over Alaska in May 1993.

Research and Development

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what were the indicative contributions to the EU budget in respect of research and development for his Department in 1993–94. [1909]

Mr. Arbuthnot: Table 2.1 of the statistical supplement to the forward look of Government-funded science, engineering and technology contains indicative figures for the United Kingdom's contributions to the EC budget in respect of research and development. My Department does not have policy responsibility for Community research and development expenditure.

Airwork Ltd.

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will respond to the report of the Defence Select Committee into the work carried out on Tornado jets based at RAF St. Athans by Airwork Ltd. during 1993. [2399]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The Government intend to respond by the end of the year to the Defence Committee's report on market testing and contracting out of defence support functions.

Military Equipment Sales (Civilian Casualties)

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make it his policy to collate figures on civilian casualties caused by military equipment sold by United Kingdom firms. [2774]

Mr. Arbuthnot: In the case of equipment owned by the Ministry of Defence, accidents at work to MoD civilians are reportable to the Health and Safety Executive under the reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 1985.

Lockerbie

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the role of Ministry of Defence personnel in the examination of timing devices allegedly connected with the destruction of Pan Am 103 over Lockerbie. [1636]

Mr. Soames: Ministry of Defence scientists did assist the Dumfries and Galloway police. I am not prepared to give details that could prejudice criminal proceedings.

Isle of Wight (Visit)

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to visit defence contractors on the Isle of Wight to discuss defence production. [838]

Mr. Arbuthnot: Currently I have no plans to do so.

Ministry of Defence Police

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the current strength, by rank, of the Ministry of Defence police; what he expects it to be, by rank, in each of the next three years; and if he will make a statement. [2875]

Mr. Soames: The strength, by rank, of the Ministry of Defence police, as at 1 October 1995, was: chief constable, one; deputy chief constable, one; assistant chief constable, four; chief superintendent, seven; superintendent, 25; chief inspector, 58; inspector, 149; sergeant, 698; and constable 3,436.

The overall manpower requirements of the Ministry of Defence police are kept under constant review. We will issue consultative documents concerning our proposals for future defence police and guarding requirements shortly.

European Defence Co-operation

Mr. Charles Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will review the prospects for increased European defence co-operation; and if he will make a statement. [815]

Mr. Portillo: The Government are firmly committed to increasing European defence co-operation in a practical way that enhances defence capabilities and complements NATO. We hope our European partners share this objective.

SCOTLAND

Chunghwa Picture Tubes Ltd.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the total amount of state aid *(a)* made available to and *(b)* promised to Chunghwa Picture Tubes Ltd. to locate in Lanarkshire. [338]

Mr. Kynoch: Details of the financial assistance offered to Chunghwa Picture Tubes Ltd. are commercially confidential.

The company is, however, eligible for support on exactly the same basis as any other commercial venture bringing investment and jobs to an assisted area. The greater part of the financial support package offered to the company comprised an offer of grant under the regional selective assistance scheme. In accordance with normal practice, brief details of the RSA offered to the company

will be published in "Labour Market Trends" in the quarter after the first payment of grant is made. No payments have been made to date.

Gaelic Television Service

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received with regard to providing for an enhanced Gaelic television service within any forthcoming legislation for establishing digital terrestrial television services. [163]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My right hon. Friend has noted representations received last week from Comunn na Gaidhlig—the Gaelic development agency—and the Gaelic Television Committee which were both anxious to ensure that the needs and aspirations of the Gaelic-speaking community for enhanced Gaelic television and radio services are taken fully into account in the Government's plans for the introduction of digital terrestrial broadcasting services.

Water Authority Chairmen

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what procedure was used by the Scottish Office in appointing the chairman of Scotland's new water authorities; how many individuals were considered for the posts; what agencies were employed to assist this process; and what was the value of the contracts relating to the process of appointing these individuals. [1181]

Mr. Kynoch: Candidates for appointment were identified from the public appointments lists and other sources. About 100 names were considered. No external agency was involved.

Temazepam

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to restrict further the production of Temazepam; and if he will make a statement. [1580]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: None. Additional controls to prevent diversion from the legitimate trade in Temazepam, including import and export licences, will shortly be introduced.

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what amount of Temazepam per capita is distributed annually in Scotland; and if he will make a statement. [1505]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: In 1993–94, 99 grams of Temazepam were dispensed on prescription per 1,000 population in Scotland. In 1994–95 the figure was 89g.

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what action he is taking to educate young people about the dangerous effects of Temazepam, with particular reference to its mixture with other drugs or injection in jellied form. [1577]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Government encourage schools to tackle drugs education within a comprehensive programme of health and social education and good-quality resources have been made available to schools. The content of the curriculum in Scottish schools is, however, the responsibility of education authorities and teachers.

In addition, the Health Education Board for Scotland runs general drug misuse campaigns aimed at young people and their parents. A current campaign contains information on individual drugs, including Temazepam.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland announced on 17 October a ban on the prescribing of the gel-filled capsule formulation of Temazepam.

Inward Investment

Sir Wyn Roberts: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what has been the value, at current prices, of inward investment to Scotland for the last five years. [1399]

Mr. Kynoch: The inward investment figures published by Locate in Scotland in each of the last five years are as follows:

Year	*Number of projects*	*Planned investment (£ million)*	*Planned jobs (new and safeguarded)*
1990–91	63	394.1	10,244
1991–92	59	380.9	6,002
1992–93	65	352.0	8,059
1993–94	95	587.6	11,072
1994–95	97	1,126.6	12,329
Totals	379	2,841.2	47,706

These figures relate only to projects handled by Locate in Scotland or the Scottish Office Education and Industry Department. The figures for planned investment and planned jobs are those provided by the companies concerned at the time of the investment decision and take no account of subsequent developments.

Energy Efficiency

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what progress has been made towards cutting energy consumption in Government buildings for which he has responsibility in each year since 1990. [1438]

Mr. Kynoch: I refer the hon. Member to the answer that my hon Friend the Minister for Construction Planning, and Energy Efficiency gave to the hon. Member for Surrey, East (Mr Ainsworth) on 17 May 1995, *Official Report*, columns *260–62*.

Drugs (Education Expenditure)

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the expenditure on education on drug abuse per regional council in Scotland in each of the past five years.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information sought is not held centrally by the Scottish Office. In Scottish schools, the life skills approach to drugs, alcohol and smoking will continue to be the core of education programmes rather than the focus on individual substances. It is, therefore, not possible to identify the money that has been spent on education on drug misuse.

NHS Trusts (Termination Payments)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to issue guidance to NHS

trusts on the levels of severance payments to *(a)* NHS managers and *(b)* other NHS employees. [1783]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Guidance is in preparation on the calculation of termination payments to general and senior managers for issue to the NHS in Scotland. The guidance will also be appropriate to calculate termination payments to any other NHS staff on similar contracts to general and senior managers.

NHS Hospital Doctors

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) how many hospital doctors have left the national health service who qualified *(a)* five years previously and *(b)* 10 years previously in each year since 1991; [2279]

(2) if he will list the number of hospital *(a)* consultants and *(b)* doctors who have left the national health service through taking (i) early retirement or (ii) other voluntary reasons in each year since 1991. [2280]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information requested is not available centrally. Evidence of doctors leaving the profession prematurely is available from studies published in 1991 by Professor James Parkhouse. These studies suggested that although 20 per cent. of doctors were not practising in the national health service five years after qualification, the majority of these were not lost permanently to medicine. Many were working in short-term postings overseas, to develop further their skills, while others were working in United Kingdom medical work outside the NHS, or taking short career breaks.

Clinical Waste

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what steps he has taken to ensure that individual general practitioners and other health service providers vet and properly dispose of their clinical waste. [2121]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The NHS management executive wrote to NHS health bodies on 31 August 1994 reminding them of their responsibilities for the management of clinical waste. General managers of health boards were asked to bring the letter to the attention of general practitioners, dentists and hospital/community pharmacists.

Artificial Limb and Appliance Centres

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) how he will distribute the current central funding of artificial limb and appliance centre services to individual health boards as from 1 April 1996; [2134]

(2) if he will list the organisations he consulted about his decision to devolve the provision and funding of artificial limb and appliance centre services from the Common Services Agency to local health boards in Scotland with effect from 1 April 1996. [2131]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: ALAC services are not a designated national service and have been purchased centrally on a temporary basis for only two years. The national services division of the Common Services Agency which is responsible for centrally purchased services set up a working group in early 1995 to look at the future provision of these services. The working group was made up of representatives from trusts, health boards and artificial limb and appliance centres; from training, therapy, supplies and primary care interests; and a consumer sub-group and a consultation network. It concluded that funding for ALAC services should be devolved to health boards, a recommendation that I have approved.

The funding of artificial limb and appliance centres will be returned to boards in 1996–97 through the weighted capitation formula and notification of the notional allocation for each board will be included in the financial allocations for 1996–97.

Council Tax

Sir Hector Monro: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what steps he plans to take to protect Scottish council tax payers. [3236]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: During the past 10 years, current expenditure by Scottish local authorities has increased in real terms by 20 per cent., even after adjusting for additional responsibilities on authorities. In the same period, there has been an increase in Scottish local authority manpower levels. Since 1987, those levels have increased by almost 6 per cent. In the same period, staffing levels have reduced in England by over 6 per cent., despite the fact that English authorities have also had additional responsibilities such as care in the community transferred to them.

Since its introduction in 1993–94, the council tax in Scotland has risen faster than in England. The average band D tax has increased from £559 to £624 in the current year in Scotland and from £569 to £609 in England. In other words, there has been an increase of 11.6 per cent. in Scotland as compared with only 7.0 per cent. in England.

Against this background, I have decided that action must be taken to protect Scottish council tax payers. In addition to the significant increase in Government support for local authority spending next year which I am announcing separately, I plan to take the following two further measures.

The first concerns the use of CFCR by Scottish authorities. In the current year, authorities budgeted to spend a total of £132 million on CFCR, nearly three times the level in 1991–92. As CFCR is funded entirely from the council tax, increase in its use has pushed up tax levels. In the current year it has added £79 to the average band D council tax. Particularly in view of the predictions by some authorities of large tax increases next year, I have concluded that the use of CFCR needs to be curbed. For 1996–97 my intention is to use my powers under section 94 of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 to limit consents for CFCR to a total of £62 million. As compared with the level of budgeted expenditure this year this will reduce the average band D council tax by £41. The detail of this, including how the £62 million will be distributed amongst authorities, will be the subject of discussion with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities.

Despite my general desire to reduce controls on local government, I have concluded, especially against the background of the growth in expenditure, staffing levels and council tax levels in Scotland, that capping must be

retained. I have therefore decided to announce provisional capping principles for the year ahead in order to assist local authorities in their budgeting process.

I have the power to cap a local authority either where I consider that its planned expenditure is excessive or where there is an excessive increase in its planned expenditure as compared with the previous year.
My provisional capping principles for 1996–97 are:

Mainland Councils

Any increase in budget for 1996–97 of more than 0.8 per cent. over the amount specified in relation to that council in a report under section 94A of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 will be an excessive increase if the resulting budget is above the council's grant-aided expenditure for 1996–97—in the case of the Scottish Borders, Dumfries and Galloway, Fife and Highland councils—and the council's GAE for 1996–97 adjusted to take account of the transitional scheme to deal with the mismatch problem announced by the Minister with responsibility for industry and local government, my hon. Friend the Member for Kincardine and Deeside (Mr. Kynoch), on 22 November *Official Report*, column *162*,—in the case of all other mainland councils;

Orkney Islands, Shetland Islands and Western Isles Councils

Any increase in budget between 1995–96 and 1996–97 of more than 0.8 per cent. will be an excessive increase if the resulting budget is above the council's GAE assessment for 1996–97;

Any budget for 1996–97 more than 12.5 per cent. above the council's GAE assessment will be excessive save that if that budget is no greater than the budget set by that council for 1995–96, the council will not be capped.

Local Government Finance

Sir Hector Monro: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will announce details of the 1996–97 Scottish local government finance settlement. [3237]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I have decided to improve on last year's plans and to allocate to Scottish local authorities the full amount of the extra sum added to the Scottish block as a consequence of the English settlement. Scottish local authorities are therefore being treated very favourably, despite the difficult public expenditure round. Next year, the level of local authority spending in Scotland will be 31 per cent. higher per head in Scotland than in England and the level of Government support will be no less than 44 per cent. higher.

Within the settlement, priority is being given to the police and education services and a further transfer of resources is being made to local authorities in respect of their care in the community responsibilities.

On the basis of this settlement, there should be no need for cuts in front-line services or excessive council tax increases, especially if the new councils grasp the opportunity present by reorganisation to streamline their management structures and take a fresh approach to the way services are delivered to ensure that both the national and the local taxpayer receives best value for money.

The details of the settlement are:

Government-supported Expenditure

I propose that government supported expenditure—which is the Government's view of the total amount local authorities need to spend on providing services and meeting debt charges—for 1996–97 should be set at £6,200.7 million. After adjusting for transfers of responsibility to and from local government from 1 April 1996, this is an increase of 2.08 per cent. on the current year's figures.

Grant-aided Expenditure

Local authorities will incur an estimated £777.7 million on loan and leasing charges in 1996–97. This is an increase of £32.3 million over this year's figure—after adjusting for transfers of responsibility. These charges are increasing at an alarming rate and I am announcing separately my plans to bring them under greater control. After deducting this sum from the GSE total, £5,423 million is available for allocation as grant-aided expenditure. This is the amount which we think local authorities need to spend on services. This GAE amount is 1.75 per cent. higher than that for the current year, after adjusting for transfers of responsibility. I shall announce GAE figures for individual local authorities as soon as possible.

Aggregate External Finance

I further propose that Government support for local authority current expenditure—that is, aggregate external finance which consists of revenue support grant, specific grants and non-domestic rate income—for 1996–97 should be set at £5,400.9 million. This is an increase of 2.62 per cent. on the current year's figure, after adjusting for transfers of responsibility. Proposals for the distribution of AEF to individual local authorities are again likely to be issued before Christmas.

Sir Hector Monro: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the level of local authority debt in Scotland and if he will make a statement. [3238]

Mr. Forsyth: At the end of March 1995 local authorities' outstanding debt on general fund services was £5,338 million. This represents an increase of £2,114 million or 65 per cent. since 31 March 1987. The level of loan charges and repayments associated with that debt is an estimated £799 million in the current year, £42 million higher than in 1994–95. At over 13 per cent. of all Government-supported expenditure, these loan charges are pre-empting an increasing proportion of the resources available for local authority services in Scotland. They are also pre-empting resources for other public services since rising loan debt is a factor I have had to take into account in deciding the share of the Scottish block which is allocated to revenue support for local authorities.

Outstanding capital debt on local authorities' housing revenue accounts has also increased since 1987, despite a 25 per cent. fall in the number of council houses over that period. Outstanding debt at 31 March 1995 was £3,938 million and debt per local authority house was £6,166, compared with £3,930 per house eight years earlier, a 57 per cent. increase. As the size of the local authority stock has declined, the burden of loan charges is being shouldered by a decreasing number of tenants.

The high debt levels in Scotland are the product of two factors: the high levels of capital spending by Scottish local authorities, 75 per cent. higher per head than in England; and the absence of a policy which encourages the use of receipts to repay outstanding debt.

Provided they spend them in the same year, local authorities in Scotland are currently allowed to use the full proceeds of asset sales to incur new investment, without having to pay off debt. This contrasts with the position in England and Wales where councils are in general required to use 50 per cent. of general receipts and 75 per cent. of most housing receipts to repay outstanding debt.

I have decided that it is necessary, in the interests of future generations of council tax payers, council tenants and customers for local services, to encourage greater

prudence in the use of capital receipts. From 1 April 1996, therefore, the new Scottish authorities will be obliged to use 25 per cent. of their capital receipts for the repayment of debt. My present intention is that from 1 April 1997, the proportion of receipts to be used to repay debt will be 50 per cent. The details of the new regime, including the question of any exceptions to these general rules and the implications for large-scale disposals of housing stock, will be the subject of detailed consultation with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities in the near future. As announced separately, I have also decided to control the level on capital expenditure financed from general revenues, in order to protect council tax payers.

By allowing councils to spend 75 per cent. of their receipts next year, I am giving them an incentive to dispose of assets quickly after local government reorganisation. If councils take full advantage of this opportunity and make sufficient progress in reducing their outstanding debt, I hope to be able to allow them in future to spend 50 per cent. of both housing and non-housing receipts, a more favourable position than in England. I shall, however, keep the position under review.

Councils' ability to incur capital expenditure at their own hand will obviously be curtailed. There is, however, plenty of opportunity for them to meet the needs of their communities by doing more to involve the private sector in meeting local needs. The outgoing councils have in general been able to pursue the outdated philosophy that where needs exist they must be met by direct public investment. The Government's approach, reflected in the private finance initiative, is that the public sector should increasingly focus on specifying the services its customers need and look to others to incur the necessary investment. By actively promoting the private finance initiative and pursuing joint ventures with the private sector, the new councils should be able to attract private investment on a scale which more than offsets the effect of these changes.

Sir Hector Monro: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will announce the non-domestic rate poundage for 1996–97. [3239]

Mr. Forsyth: Yes. I propose that the Scottish non-domestic rate poundage for 1996–97 should be 44.9p. An order prescribing the poundage will be laid before Parliament in due course. This poundage maintains the link between the Scottish and English poundages and ensures that Scottish business will continue to benefit from the Government's unified business rate policy.

Regional Selective Assistance

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the outturn figures for regional selective assistance *(a)* offers and *(b)* payments made in 1994–95; and if he will indicate how these figures relate to the original budgeted plans. [2109]

Mr. Kynoch *[holding answer 24 November 1995]:* Offers of RSA, worth £116.7 million, were made in 1994–95. As regards payments of regional selective assistance I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 21 November, *Official Report*, column 57.

Health Boards (Expenditure)

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will itemise how much *(a)* NHS trusts, *(b)* general practitioner fundholders, *(c)* regional health authorities and *(d)* district health authorities spent on health care from non-NHS providers in each year since 1991–92 in each region. [2415]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 24 November 1995]:* In Scotland, the purchase of hospital, community and family health care is primarily the responsibility of health boards. The tables are based on health board accounts and show expenditure on purchases of health care from private providers, by health board, and by general practitioner fundholders. Expenditure by NHS trusts on purchases from private providers in Scotland is not held centrally.

Health boards also have contracts with local authorities, hospices and voluntary agencies where these organisations are registered charities undertaking specific contracted activities, but information on these is not collected centrally.

1994–95

£000

Health board	*GP fundholders*	*Health boards*
Argyll and Clyde	9	1,015
Ayr and Arran	21	1,744
Borders	6	1,591
Dumfries and Galloway	0	65
Fife	23	264
Forth Valley	54	657
Grampian	199	468
Greater Glasgow	8	11,089
Highland	3	81
Lanarkshire	2	3,003
Lothian	205	261
Orkney	0	8
Shetland	0	3
Tayside	53	322
Western Isles	0	4
Scotland Total	583	20,575

1993–94

£000

Health board	*GP fundholders*	*Health boards*
Argyll and Clyde	1	1,066
Ayr and Arran	0	1,504
Borders	3	1,355
Dumfries and Galloway	0	50
Fife	0	405
Forth Valley	51	368
Grampian	77	233
Greater Glasgow	6	7,730
Highland	0	142
Lanarkshire	0	2,625
Lothian	73	237
Orkney	0	2
Shetland	0	0
Tayside	21	474
Western Isles	0	0
Scotland Total	232	16,191

1992–93

£000

Health board	*GP fundholders*	*Health boards*
Argyll and Clyde	0	1,742
Ayr and Arran	0	11
Borders	0	463
Dumfries and Galloway	0	29
Fife	0	33

1992–93

£000

Health board	*GP fundholders*	*Health boards*
Forth Valley	0	802
Grampian	54	123
Greater Glasgow	5	7,652
Highland	0	29
Lanarkshire	0	2,492
Lothian	72	7,992
Orkney	0	0
Shetland	0	0
Tayside	0	107
Western Isles	0	0
Scotland Total	131	21,475

1991–92

£000

Health board	*GP fundholders*	*Health boards*
Argyll and Clyde	9	54
Ayr and Arran	0	181
Borders	0	1
Dumfries and Galloway	0	0
Fife	0	33
Forth Valley	0	1
Grampian	0	52
Greater Glasgow	0	1,502
Highland	0	722
Lanarkshire	0	95
Lothian	25	0
Orkney	0	0
Shetland	0	0
Tayside	0	1
Western Isles	0	0
Scotland Total	34	2,642

Legislative Repeals

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what legislation from his Department passed in the last five years contains provision for statutory repeal or review. [2038]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 27 November 1995]:* The Department regularly reviews and, where appropriate, amends or consolidates relevant legislation. For example, in the 1994–95 parliamentary session there was a major consolidation of criminal justice legislation.

In addition, the Scottish Law Commission, together with the Law Commission for England and Wales, has responsibility for statute law revision. The Law Commissions prepare programmes of statute law revision with a view to recommending in reports presented to Parliament the repeal of enactments identified as being no longer of practical utility, usually because they are spent, obsolete or unnecessary.

In the last five years the Law Commissions have submitted two statute law revision reports. The 14th report on statute law revision was published on 22 April 1993 and was implemented by the Statute Law (Repeals) Act 1993, c. 50. The 15th report was published on 22 March 1995 and was implemented by the Statute Law (Repeals) Act 1995, c. 44.

Small and Medium Enterprises

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what percentage of his Department's expenditure in 1994–95 was spent on procuring goods or services from small and medium enterprises. [1954]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 27 November 1995]:* The Scottish Office's current financial and procurement systems have no facility for categorising suppliers according to the size of their businesses. It is therefore not possible to make any estimate for 1994–95 of the proportion of expenditure with suppliers which could be considered to be small or medium enterprises.

Forestry

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what work the Forestry Commission has undertaken to classify its woodland according to level of recreational use; if he will publish the results of such work; if he will detail how recreational use has been assessed; if he will describe the purpose of the exercise; and if he will make a statement. [2424]

Mr. Kynoch *[holding answer 27 November 1995]:* Following the forestry review, we asked the forestry Commission to strengthen the arrangements for protecting public access to woodlands which it sold. This included classifying the woodlands according to the level of existing public access. The new arrangements will be set out in revised access guidelines which will be published soon.

Campsie View Flats, Cumbernauld

Mr. Norman Hogg: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what advice he has given Cumbernauld development corporation concerning Campsie View flats in Cumbernauld; and if he will make a statement. [2540]

Mr. Kynoch *[holding answer 27 November 1995]:* My right hon. Friend has approved the recommendation from Cumbernauld development corporation that, when compared to the costs of the refurbishment necessary to bring the homes up to standard, demolition of the three blocks of flats at Campsie View represents better value for money. Over the next few months, tenants will be rehoused and the corporation will repurchase the owner-occupied properties in the blocks.

Roads Programme

Mr. Norman Hogg: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make an announcement on the roads programme for 1996. [2544]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 27 November 1995]:* My right hon. Friend will make an announcement on the roads programme for the next three years after he has set out his new expenditure plans for the Scottish Office.

Lanarkshire Development Agency

Mr. Norman Hogg: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what advice he has given to the Lanarkshire development agency on the membership of its board

following local government reorganisation; and if he will make a statement. [2541]

Mr. Kynoch *[holding answer 27 November 1995]:* None. The membership of the board of a local enterprise company is a matter for that board subject to the requirements in its articles of association. In particular, these require two thirds of the members to be drawn from senior businessmen or businesswomen from the local area. It is an operational matter for Scottish Enterprise to ensure that Lanarkshire development agency complies with those requirements.

Councillor's Earnings

Mr. Norman Hogg: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what arrangements he makes for councillors to disclose earnings wholly or partly derived from their elected membership of a local authority; and if he will make a statement. [2543]

Mr. Kynoch *[holding answer 27 November 1995]:* Regulation 28 of the Local Authorities etc. (Allowances) (Scotland) Regulations 1995 requires councils to publish annually details of payments—basic allowances, attendance allowances and special responsibility allowances—made to individual councillors.

Convention of Scottish Local Authorities

Mr. Norman Hogg: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he last met councillor Rosemary McVenna CBE JP, president of the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities; and what subjects were discussed. [2545]

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 27 November 1995]:* I last met Councillor Rosemary McKenna and other representatives of the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities on 10 November as part of the normal consultation on local government finance matters. During this meeting, a number of matters affecting local government in Scotland were discussed including the 1996–97 local government finance settlement and reorganisation finance issues.

WALES

Breast Cancer

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what action he is taking to initiate further research into the incidence of breast cancer in Wales; [1147]

(2) what action he is taking to ensure that all patients with breast cancer have equal access to high quality care. [1148]

Mr. Richards: In April, my right hon. Friend announced plans for improving cancer care services in Wales based on the report of the chief medical officers of England and Wales—"A Policy Framework for Commissioning Cancer Services".

The report recognised that it is essential for all patients with cancer, including those with breast cancer, to have access to high quality, safe and effective care.

An expert group on cancer services, chaired by Professor Ian Cameron, provost of the university of Wales college of medicine, was established earlier this year to assist health authorities in Wales to implement the recommendations of the chief medical officers' report. It has already started work on identifying how effective services for all cancer patients should be provided and will report in 1996.

International comparisons suggest that differences in the rates observed between countries and regions are due to a mixture of social, environmental and genetic factors. For this reason, the Department considers that basic research into how and why breast cancer develops is more likely to be of benefit in terms of treatment and prevention than an attempt to establish why exactly breast cancer rates vary from region to region.

Mrs. Clywd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish comparative statistics for Wales, England, Scotland and Northern Ireland on the incidence and mortality rates from breast cancer. [1144]

Mr. Richards: Information on deaths from cancer is published separately in the annual reports by the registrars general for Scotland and Northern Ireland, and by the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys for England and Wales.

Information on cancer registrations for Scotland is given in "Cancer Registrations: Scotland", published by the Scottish Common Health Service Authority; for Northern Ireland in "Cancer Registration", published by the Department of Health and Social Security; in "Cancer Registrations: Wales", published by the Wales cancer registry; and in the series "Cancer Statistics: Registrations" by the OPCS.

Copies of these publications are available in the Library of the House.

Temazepam

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many deaths in each of the past five years are attributable to the abuse of Temazepam in each district health authority in Wales. [1508]

Mr. Richards: The table shows the number of deaths recorded in "The Office of Population Censuses and Surveys" due to temazepam abuse, alone or with other drugs—ICDs[1] 304.1, 304.7, 304.8, 305.4, 305.9—by year of occurrence and district health authority for the latest five year period available.

Residents of:	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*
Clwyd	0	0	0	0	0
East Dyfed	0	0	0	0	1
Pembrokeshire	0	0	0	0	0
Gwent	0	0	0	0	0
Gwynedd	0	0	0	0	0
Mid Glamorgan	0	1	1	0	0
Powys	0	0	0	0	0
South Glamorgan	0	0	0	0	1
West Glamorgan	0	0	0	0	1
Total for Wales	0	1	1	0	3

[1] International Classification of Diseases, Injuries and Causes of Death (9th revision).

Cancer Research

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what financial contribution the Government are making directly to cancer research; and how much is contributed by charities in respect of Wales. [1146]

Mr. Richards: The Government are committed to encouraging research into the causes, prevention, early detection and treatment of all cancers.

The main agency through which the Government support biomedical and clinical research is the Medical Research Council, which received Government funding from the office of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster. The council spent £13.5 million directly on research into cancer in 1992–93. This figure would rise considerably if a proportion of the council's spend on basic medical research that could yield results relevant to cancer were included.

Charities, including the Imperial Cancer Research Fund and the Cancer Research Campaign, play a major role in cancer research. In 1992–93 they spent £114.8 million. Information is not held centrally on the contributions made by charities in respect of Wales.

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what were the indicative contributions to the EU budget in respect of research and development for his Department in 1993–94. [1918]

Mr. Hague: Table 2.1 of the "Statistical Supplement to the Forward Look of Government-funded Science, Engineering and Technology" contains indicative figures for the United Kingdom's contributions to the EC budget in respect of research and development. My Department does not have any policy responsibilities for Community research and development expenditure.

RECHAR II

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the membership of the technical group advising him on the distribution of RECHAR II money in south Wales. [2116]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Welsh Office officials are currently consulting the industrial south Wales monitoring committee on the membership of the RECHAR II technical group.

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the amount available to south Wales under the RECHAR II programme; and what consultations he has held on the distribution of these funds. [2115]

Mr. Jones: Some 20.21 mecu—£16.8 million at current exchange rates—will be available to the mining communities of south wales under the RECHAR II programme over the period 1994–97. Welsh Office officials are currently consulting the industrial south wales monitoring committee on how these moneys are to be administered.

General Practitioners (Out-of-hours Systems)

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish for each family health service authority and for Wales as a whole *(a)* the number of general practitioner practices and *(b)* the number of practices known to operate an out-of-hours system similar to that operated by the association of Gwent doctors on call. [2314]

Mr. Richards: The number of general practitioner partnerships and single-handed practitioners for each family health services authority in Wales as at 1 April 1995 was as follows:

	Number
Clwyd	73
Dyfed	65
Gwent	91
Gwynedd	52
Mid Glamorgan	104
Powys	18
South Glamorgan	72
West Glamorgan	63
Wales	538

The organisation of out-of-hours services is a matter for individual FHSAs, and information is not held centrally.

Executive Agencies (Travel)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list for each of his executive agencies for the last financial year in respect of overseas travel by staff of the agency *(a)* the cost, *(b)* the countries visited and *(c)* the posts held by the staff involved. [2362]

Mr. Hague: For Cadw, the Welsh Historic Monuments executive agency, responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the chief executive, Mr. T. J. Cassidy. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

I also have shared responsibility for the Planning Inspectorate and the Agricultural Development Advisory Service agencies. My right hon. Friends the Secretary of State for the Environment and the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food are arranging for replies to be given separately for these agencies.

Letter from T. J. Cassidy to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 28 November 1995:

As Cadw is an Executive Agency the Secretary of State for Wales has asked me to write to you direct in respect of Cadw, in response to your recent Parliamentary Question about overseas travel by Cadw staff.

Three overseas visits were made by staff in the last financial year and the information that you have requested is as follows:

Cost	*Country visited*	*Post held*
1,249	USA	Head of Presentation
1,139	Spain	Chief Executive
148	Eire	Head of Presentation

Staff Transfer (Unitary Authorities)

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales which Welsh county and district councils have submitted detailed plans for transfer of staff to unitary authorities; and if he will make a statement. [2477]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: All county and district councils whose areas are split by reorganisation have submitted details of staff to be transferred to the new authorities, although there are gaps in some cases because of decisions which have yet to be taken by those authorities. The old councils concerned have been asked to supply the further information as quickly as possible.

Playing Fields

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) how many playing fields are currently under threat of development; [2587]

(2) what area of playing fields have been sold off since 1981; [2585]

(3) what is the value of playing fields sold off since 1981; [2588]

(4) how many playing fields have been sold off since 1981. [2584]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: This information is not held centrally.

Research

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much he spends annually on research in Wales, indicating the amounts spent under each heading; and if he will make a statement. [2660]

Mr. Hague: Estimated expenditure by the Welsh office on research in 1994–95 is as follows:

Subject area	*Estimated outturn £ million*
Health	1.9
Housing	0.1
Environmental protection	0.6
Transport and Highways	0.1
Public services	0.1
Total expenditure	2.7

The Welsh Office also supports, through the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales, basic and strategic research in universities and colleges.

Further information is contained in "Forward Look of Government Funded Science Engineering and Technology 1995", a copy of which is in the Library of the House.

Sheep Annual Premium

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when the sheep annual premium was paid to farmers in Wales in each year since 1990. [2807]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Payments began in the following months:

Scheme	*First advance payment*	*Second advance payment*	*Final payment*
1990	September 1990	December 1990	May 1991
1991	September 1991	November 1991	April 1992
1992	September 1992	November 1992	April 1993
1993	October 1993	October 1993	May 1994
1994	September 1994	September 1994	June 1995
1995	July 1995	July 1995	Not yet determined

Hill Livestock Compensatory Allowance

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when the hill livestock compensatory allowance was paid to farmers in Wales in *(a)* 1992, *(b)* 1993, *(c)* 1994 and *(d)* 1995. [2806]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Payments began in February in each case.

Professors

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many *(a)* female and *(b)* male professors there are in Wales, and if he will make a statement. [2661]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: This information is not held centrally.

Out-of-town Supermarkets

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many out-of-town supermarkets have been opened in the last three years. [2657]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: This information is not collected centrally.

Roads Expenditure

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the planned expenditure for roads in Wales in the year 1996–97; and if he will make a statement. [2923]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: My right hon. Friend is to announce his roads and transport expenditure plans for 1996–97 shortly.

Listed Building Surveys

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will discuss with Cadw what measures are required to encourage tendering by Welsh-based consultants for the surveying of historic properties; and if he will make a statement. [1087]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The Department, of which Cadw forms a part, follows procurement procedures which promote open competition between suppliers to offer value for taxpayers' money and comply with European public procurement regulations. The procurement procedures cannot be used to discriminate in favour of Welsh companies. Of the six companies currently working on contract to Cadw, three are based in Wales. Expressions of interest were invited through the United Kingdom and Welsh press bilingually, and through the *Architects' Journal*. Cadw would welcome any further expressions of interest from suitably qualified Welsh-based organisations to undertake this work.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish in respect of *(a)* each district council area in Wales and *(b)* for Wales as a whole the number of historic buildings surveyed by Cadw for each of the last available three years, together with his estimate of the number of properties which remain to be surveyed. [1088]

Mr. Jones: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to Cadw, Welsh Historic Monuments. I have asked its chief executive, Mr. T. J. Cassidy, to reply to the hon. Member.

Letter from T. J. Cassidy to Mr. Elfyn Llwyd, dated 28 November 1995:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question in which you asked for information about the number of historic buildings surveyed by Cadw in the last 3 years and the work that remains to be done.

The Government gave a commitment to accelerate the Welsh listed building resurvey programme in response to the recommendation made by the Welsh Affairs Committee which reported on the preservation of historic buildings and ancient monuments some three years ago. Since that time substantial progress has been made—the Agency has resurveyed some 78 Community Council areas. This has seen the number of listed buildings in Wales increase from 14,778 in 1992 to some 17,671 today. The completion of the resurvey by 2005 should, we estimate, see the number of listed buildings increase to roughly double today's total. We have assumed that the volume of structures to be surveyed is between 2 and 3 million, and to judge by experience in England and Scotland, would expect to list about 1½%.

In undertaking a community resurvey all buildings within each community are surveyed and those which are judged to be of special architectural or historic interest are listed. The Agency does not keep statistics of the numbers of buildings assessed in each community but I hope that the number of listed buildings will give you some indication of progress to date. To complete the resurvey within the next 10 years will require the Agency to resurvey over 700 further communities—and to do so remains a priority for the Agency.

I hope this is helpful.

Statutory Instruments

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many statutory instruments his Department sponsored in the last Session of Parliament; and how many of these *(a)* constituted a new rule or regulation, *(b)* were introduced to implement European Community directives and *(c)* amplify the minimum standards set out in an original European Community directive. [2461]

Mr. Hague: The Secretary of State for Wales makes many statutory instruments with English Ministers and the Secretary of State for Scotland. Other Departments will include such statutory instruments in their lists. In the 1994–95 Session of Parliament, 101 local statutory instruments were made solely by the Secretary of State for Wales. These relate to the control of traffic either temporarily or permanently on various lengths of trunk roads and motorways in Wales; 111 general SIs were made by the Secretary of State alone. Six of these constituted new rules or regulations prohibiting or restricting activities.Five general statutory instruments were made to implement European Community directives. None amplified the minimum standards set out in an original European Community directive.

A449

Mr. Roy Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when the access road to the A449 from Raglan to Newport will be reopened. [2547]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The southbound slip road at the Raglan interchange will be opened by the end of the year.

Mr. Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the cost to date of the reconstruction of the A449 trunk road; what is the estimated total cost; and on what date the road will become fully operational. [2546]

Mr. Jones: The cost to date of the renewal of the A449 trunk road is £8.6 million. The estimated total cost is expected to be £21.4 million. The future programme has yet to be determined.

Tir Cymen and Environmentally Sensitive Area Schemes

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what assessment he has made of the success of the current prescriptions of the Tir Cymen and ESA schemes; [2937]

(2) if he will make it his policy to modify the prescriptions of Tir Cymen/ESAs to enhance the development of farmland bird communities; [2936]

(3) what forecasts he has made about the impact of the Tir Cymen and ESA schemes on farmland bird communities in Wales. [2938]

Mr. Hague: Tir Cymen and ESA prescriptions are subject to a five-year evaluation monitoring exercise and five year policy review respectively. Some modifications and enhancements have been, and will continue to be made, during Tir Cymen's experimental period; and modifications of ESA prescriptions will be considered in the light of the policy review. Although neither scheme is specifically targeted at enhancing the population of farmland birds, the nature of both will help to ensure a positive impact on their populations in Wales.

RSPB "Silent Fields" Report

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds report "Silent Fields"; and what proposals he will initiate in response to this report. [2939]

Mr. Hague: I launched the report in Wales at the royal Welsh show in July. I also discussed it with the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds when I met it on 24 October. I will take the report into account in developing environmental and agricultural policies.

Overgrazing

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received on overgrazing; if he will place a copy of all representations in the Library; and what is his assessment of the impact of overgrazing on Wales' wildlife. [2931]

Mr. Hague: I have received a number of complaints about specific instances of overgrazing, which we are investigating, as well as representations about the issue generally. I will place copies of the general

representations in the Library, subject to the permission of the organisations concerned. Overgrazing can have a damaging effect on habitat, which we are anxious to arrest.

Mr. Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the number of reports of overgrazing that have been investigated by the Welsh Office agriculture department in relation to the hill livestock compensatory allowance over the past five years; and how many of these investigations have resulted in hill livestock compensatory allowance payments being refused. [2933]

Mr. Hague: We have investigated nine cases in the period, all of which have been drawn to our attention during the past 18 months. The investigations are still in progress because of the need to study the vegetation during all seasons of the year. Where overgrazing is proven, our aim is to encourage farmers to change management practices voluntarily or reduce stocking levels to prevent further damage. There have been no cases where HLCA's have been reduced, but WOAD retains the right to do so in any cases where changes in farming practices are shown to be necessary and cannot be achieved voluntarily.

Moorland Scheme

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has for increasing the financial incentives of the moorland scheme. [2932]

Mr. Hague: The moorland scheme payment rates are currently under review. No decisions have yet been taken.

Mr. Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many applications have been made for entry into the moorland scheme in Wales; and if he will make a statement. [2935]

Mr. Hague: Five applications have been approved in respect of the moorland scheme in Wales. In addition, 28 farmers have expressed an interest in joining the scheme, which suggests the potential for further take-up in future years.

Environmentally Sensitive Areas

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what monitoring of birds is taking place or is planned in environmentally sensitive areas in Wales; what methodologies are being used; which organisations have been consulted about monitoring; and if he will place copies of all consultation documents in the Library. [2934]

Mr. Hague: Winter wading bird populations are being monitored in the Lleyn peninsula and Ynys Mon ESAs using the wetland bird survey and national wildfowl counts, which have been developed by the British Trust for Ornithology and the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust respectively and are contained in the ADAS national strategy for ESA monitoring. A survey of breeding waders in these ESAs is also planned. The Countryside Council for Wales, as my statutory conservation advisers, has been consulted. No consultation documents are available to be placed in the Library of the House.

Non-Domestic Rating

Mr. Sweeney: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what his proposals are for the Welsh non-domestic rate poundage for the next financial year. [3326]

Mr. Hague: I propose that the national non-domestic rate poundage for Wales should rise to 40.5p to reflect the annual increase in the retail prices index to September 1995.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Sweeney: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what his proposals are for local government revenue spending in 1996–97. [3327]

Mr. Hague: I propose to set total standard spending in Wales for 1996–97 at £2,867.3 million. This figure includes £149.6 million for care in the community. It represents an increase of £85.2 million, 3.1 per cent. on the comparable level of funding for 1995–96.

I propose to set central government support for total standard spending at £2,517.4 million.

I shall announce provisional standard spending assessments and provisional capping principles for Welsh police authorities later this week. At the same time, I shall announce my proposals for aggregate external finance and for damping increases in council tax arising from the reorganisation of local government from 1 April 1996. My Department will shortly write to the Welsh local authority associations to consult them on my proposals for revenue support grant in 1996–97.

I shall announce provisional standard spending assessments and provisional capping principles for unitary authorities in mid-December and my final decisions early in the new year.

Housing Revenue Account Subsidy

Mr. Sweeney: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he proposes to consult on his housing revenue account subsidy proposals for 1996–97 and what proposals he will be making. [3328]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The Welsh Office is issuing proposals for consultation today. Local authorities and other consultees have been invited to let us have their views by 22 December 1995. I am arranging for copies of the proposals to be placed in the Library of the House.

We are proposing to keep guideline rents for 1996–97 at the same level in real terms as for 1995–96. This means an increase of £48 per dwelling per year, 92p per week for each authority. The flat rate increase is a transitional measure for the first year of the unitary authorities. We shall consult next year on the distribution of guideline rent increases between authorities in future years.

To encourage efficiency, we are also proposing a change in the subsidy rules which will limit rent rebate subsidy to the guideline rent increase. Authorities with rent below the guideline will be unaffected. The proposal does not affect tenants' entitlement to rent rebate.

For Wales total management and maintenance allowances will be around £175 million. This will allow broadly the same cash value of allowances per dwelling

as in 1995–96. However, there will be increases for authorities furthest below the target level under a formula which takes account of relative stock condition. No authority will receive less than the equivalent of their 1995–96 allowance per dwelling and all authorities will achieve at least 97 per cent. of their targeted level in 1996–97.

Together, these proposals strike a reasonable balance between the need to constrain public expenditure and the need to ensure that housing is provided for tenants at reasonable cost.

Housing Associations (Tax Relief Grant)

Mr. Sweeney: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on tax relief grant for non-charitable housing associations. [3329]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given today to my hon. Friend the Member for Edmonton (Dr. Twinn) by the Minister for Local Government, Housing and Urban Regeneration.

HEALTH

Research and Development

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what were indicative contributions to the EU budget in respect of research and development for his Department in 1993–94. [1911]

Mr. Malone: Table 2.1 of the statistical supplement to the "Forward Look of Government funded Science, Engineering and Technology", copies of which are available in the Library, contains indicative figures for the United Kingdom's contributions to the European Community budget in respect of research and development. Departments' policy responsibilities are subject to change and can vary from year to year. The Department of Health currently has responsibility for 2.67 per cent. of the United Kingdom's share of the Community R and D budget.

Carbon Monoxide Poisoning

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health who will be responsible for alerting doctors and the medical services to test for carbon monoxide poisoning, after the introduction of competition in the domestic gas supply market. [2005]

Mr. Sackville: The chief medical officer will shortly be issuing a reminder that general practitioners should consider the possibility of carbon monoxide poisoning when patients complain of certain symptoms. The medical profession will continue to be responsible for considering all possibilities when diagnosing illness in their patients.

Accident and Emergency League Tables

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish in the next edition of the accident and emergency league tables the number of patients left on trolleys for more than two hours in each NHS trust. [1798]

Mr. Malone: The current patients charter standard is that patients admitted to hospital through accident and emergency departments should be given a bed as soon as possible and certainly within three to four hours. This standard will be tightened to two hours from 1 April 1996.

The next set of NHS performance tables will cover NHS performance to 31 March 1996.

"Employer's Guide to Stress"

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the cost of the document commissioned by his Department entitled "Employers' Guide to Stress"; how many copies were printed; and what has happened to them. [2078]

Mr. Bowis: The Department commissioned a document for internal use. The cost to the Department of this was £1,500. Subsequently, the Department has agreed that a priced version of this may be published independently of the Department by HMSO. It will be published in due course.

Asthma

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the number of preventable deaths from asthma. [2227]

Mr. Sackville: We do not have the information centrally on which to base such an assessment. It is important that people with asthma should discuss with their general practitioner or an asthma nurse what their individual trigger factors are and how to avoid them, and what practical steps and medicines they may take to control their symptoms.

NHS Hospital Doctors

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the number of hospital *(a)* consultants and *(b)* doctors who have left the national health service (i) through taking early retirement or (ii) for other voluntary reasons in each year since 1991. [2281]

Mr. Malone: This information is not available centrally.

GP Fundholding

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to require general practitioner fundholders to inform their patients of the hospital with whom they have contracted for in-patient services. [2238]

Mr. Malone: General practitioner fundholders are already expected to make available to patients at the practice, key information which relates to the management of their fund, including major shifts in purchasing intentions and annual practice plans. The requirement is set out in the "Accountability Framework

for GP Fundholding", published in April 1995, copies of which are available in the Library.

Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people have been diagnosed as suffering from Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease in the last 24 months; how many people so diagnosed had previously received growth hormone treatment; and if he will make a statement. [2312]

Mr. Sackville: Between 24 November 1993 and 24 November 1995, there have been 89 definite and probable cases of Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease. Of these, six had previously received growth hormone treatment.

Executive Agencies (Travel)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list for each of his executive agencies for the last financial year in respect of overseas travel by staff of the agency *(a)* the cost, *(b)* the countries visited and *(c)* the posts held by the staff involved. [2364]

Mr. Sackville: This information could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Lowestoft Hospital

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will make a statement regarding Suffolk health authority's proposal to close 30 continuing care beds at Lowestoft hospital; [2094]

(2) what representations he has received from *(a)* members of the local community and *(b)* medical professionals regarding Suffolk health authority's proposal to close 30 continuing care beds at Lowestoft hospital; [2095]

(3) what assessment he has made of the impact of Suffolk health authority's proposal to close 30 continuing care beds at Lowestoft hospital on local continuing care facilities; what alternative provision for continuing care in the area has been proposed; and if he can make a statement. [2096]

Mr. Bowis: This is a matter for Suffolk health authority, which is currently conducting public consultations on the proposal.

Men's Health

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what new steps he is taking to improve standards of health among men. [2129]

Mr. Sackville: Departmental activity to improve men's health continues through the strategy of "The Health of the Nation", which places an important focus on men's health in emphasising the reduction of avoidable illness and premature death.

Men's health was discussed in the report of the sub-group of the chief medical officer's health of the nation working group—"Variations in Health: What Can the Department of Health and the NHS Do?"

The Department is also contributing to raising awareness of testicular cancer and carrying out research into prostate cancer.

Queens Medical Centre, Nottingham

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion administration costs form in the overall budget of the QMC, Nottingham; and what is the equivalent figure for other hospitals in the United Kingdom. [2106]

Mr. Sackville: This information is not centrally available.

Manchester Family Health Services Authority

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Sectretary of State for Health what reason the chief executive of Manchester FHSA gave for resigning from it; and what was his age at the time of his resignation. [2236]

Mr. Malone: This is a matter for Manchester family health services authority.

NHS Trusts

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many NHS trust executive directors received annual salaries of more than *(a)* £90,000 and *(b)* 100,000 in each financial year since 1992–93; [3117]

(2) how many NHS trust executive directors received annual salaries of more than £100,000 in the years 1992–93 to 1994–95. [3105]

Mr. Malone: This information is not available centrally.

Audit Commission Powers

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what powers the Audit Commission has to carry out investigations into the reasons for and costs of the early retirements of chief executives at NHS authorities and trusts. [3115]

Mr. Sackville: The Audit Commission and its appointed auditors have powers to examine all areas of expenditure incurred by health authorities and trusts.

Hospital Beds

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will list the number of hospital beds in each year since 1988–89; [3118]

(2) what was the number of total available NHS acute hopsital beds in each year between 1988–89 and 1994–95. [3104]

Mr. Sackville: The information requested is published annually in "Bed availability for England", copies of which are available in the Library.

Medical Examinations

Mrs. Maddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will estimate the annual number of unconsenting medical examinations on female patients; and if he will make a statement. [450]

Mr. Sackville: All patients with the capacity to do so have a common law right to consent or otherwise before undergoing a medical examination or treatment. Exceptions are where examination or treatment is required for a life-saving procedure and the patient is unable to indicate her wishes; where there are statutory powers requiring examination of a patient; or where the patient is detained under the Mental Health Act 1983 and treatment is for mental disorder. If an adult does not have the capacity to consent, medical examination and treatment can still be given if they are in her best interests but must be confined to what is necessary to preserve life, health or well-being. A court can also make orders in respect of the treatment of adults incapable of consenting.

Information about medical examinations falling into these categories is not available.

Statutory Instruments

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many statutory instruments his Department sponsored in the last Session of Parliament; and how many of these *(a)* constituted a new rule or regulation, *(b)* were introduced to implement European Community directives and *(c)* amplifies the minimum standards set out in an original European Community directive. [2427]

Mr. Sackville: The Department of Health sponsored 222 statutory instruments in the last Session of Parliament. Of this total, 62 constitute a new rule or regulation and six were introduced to implement European Community directives. None amplifies the minimum standards set out in any of the original European Community directives.

Migration Statistics

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what are the net migration figures for each of the last 10 years for which they are available; and if he will make a statement. [2337]

Mr. Sackville: The information is shown in the table.

Estimated net inward migration to the United Kingdom

Year	*Thousands of migrants*
1984	58.3
1985	80.2
1986	58.8
1987	30.6
1988	18.3
1989	91.2
1990	88.8
1991	73.9
1992	35.5
1993	35.2

Work Experience

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance has been issued to hospitals about school pupils undertaking work experience in hospitals; and if he will make a statement. [2762]

Mr. Malone: None. This is a matter for local national health service employers.

Hip Replacement Operations

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many hip replacement operations have been carried out in the national health service on individuals over the age of 80 years during the past 12 months. [2698]

Mr. Sackville: In 1993–94, the latest year for which figures are available, 18,487 patients over the age of 80 years had hip replacement or other arthroplasty of the hip operations.

Public Bodies (Income and Staff)

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the annual income from *(a)* fees, *(b)* charges and *(c)* fines; what was the total number of staff employed (i) part time and (ii) full time; and what contribution his Department has made towards the annual running costs in each of the past three years in respect of (1) the Medicines Control Agency, (2) the Good Laboratory Practice Monitoring Authority, (3) the Medical Devices Agency and (4) the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority. [2749]

Mr. Sackville: The information is shown in the table.

	Annual income			*Total number of staff employed*		*Department's contribution to annual running costs*
	Fees £ million	*Charges*	*Fines*	*Part-time*	*Full-time*	*£ million*
1992–93						
Medicines Control Agency	0.021	nil	nil	[1]349	—	nil
Good Laboratory Practice Monitoring Authority	0.140	nil	nil	4	4	[2]—
Medical Devices Agency	[3]0.402	nil	nil	n/a	n/a	4.851
Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority	0.647	nil	nil	1	15	[4]0.922
1993–94						
Medicines Control Agency	0.024	nil	nil	[1]374	—	nil
Good Laboratory Practice Monitoring Authority	0.147	nil	nil	4	4	[2]—

	Annual income			Total number of staff employed		Department's contribution to annual running costs
	Fees £ million	Charges	Fines	Part-time	Full-time	£ million
Medical Devices Agency	[3]0.483	nil	nil	[3]6	[3]162	5.714
Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority	0.907	nil	nil	1	18	[4]1.173
1994–95						
Medicines Control Agency	0.025	nil	nil	—	[1]399	nil
Good Laboratory Practice Monitoring Authority	0.159	nil	nil	3	4	[2]—
Medical Devices Agency	1.229	nil	nil	[5]7	[5]165	11.392
Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority	0.794	nil	nil	1	23	[4]1.353

[1] Full-time and part-time counted as whole-time equivalent. Breakdown not readily available.
[2] Authority is staffed by DH officials and full annual running costs are met from the DH Vote.
[3] Figures are fees/receipts.
[4] Figures include contributions from other Territorial Departments.
[5] Figures at 1st April 1993.
[6] Figures at 1 April 1994.

Social Workers

Ms Coffey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many social workers there were per *(a)* 10,000 residents and *(b)* 10,000 residents over 65 years of age in each year since 1988 in each metropolitan district, London borough and shire county. [2790]

Mr. Bowis: It would depend on the definition of "social workers"—that is, by qualifications or by job and whether one were looking at all of such categories working in all sectors.

The Department has published a wide range of statistical information on local authority staff which is available in the Library.

Ms Coffey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many social workers qualified in mental health in each year since 1988 in each metropolitan district, London borough and shire county. [2789]

Mr. Bowis: This information is not available centrally.

Unregistrable Children's Homes

Ms Coffey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what are the numbers of *(a)* unregistrable children's homes visited by the social services inspectorate, *(b)* proprietors interviewed, *(c)* agencies sent a questionnaire and *(d)* questionnaires completed, in their recent study of unregistrable children's homes. [2791]

Mr. Bowis: Five, six, 41 and 15 respectively.

Ms Coffey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make publicly available a copy of the questionnaire sent to agencies and proprietors managing small unregistrable children's homes as part of the study by the social services inspectorate published in August. [2792]

Mr. Bowis: Copies of the questionnaire have been placed in the Library.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much private capital has been invested in each NHS region and in how many projects in each year since the private finance initiative was launched, listing each of the projects and their value. [3088]

Mr. Sackville: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile) on 6 November, *Official Report*, columns *622–23*.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, for the purposes of the private finance initiative in the NHS, if he will specify which clinical services are to be excluded from PFI-NHS contracts. [3103]

Mr. Sackville: The private finance initiative in the national health service is concerned with the provision of modern and efficient facilities for the delivery of NHS health care. It does not seek to extend private sector responsibility into the clinical area. No clinical or clinical support service will be provided by PFI partners without the support of local clinicians.

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many schemes, and to what value, are currently being considered for private finance initiative in each region. [3091]

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will specify the PFI contracts in the NHS *(a)* under way, *(b)* signed and *(c)* under discussion. [3102]

Mr. Sackville: To ensure that national health service capital projects meet NHS needs as cost effectively as possible, the option of using private finance, under this Government's private finance initiative, must be considered for every potential capital project. Formulation of plans for projects to meet local needs is the responsibility of NHS trusts and health authorities. I refer the hon. Members to the reply I gave the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile) on 6 November, *Official Report*, columns *622–23*, for the available information on PFI projects that have been given approval by the NHS executive.

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many officials are responsible within *(a)* his Department and *(b)* the NHS executive for the private finance initiative. [3092]

Mr. Sackville: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the right hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) on 2 May 1995, *Official Report*, columns *175–76*.

Psychiatry (Consultants)

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* acute adult psychiatric, *(b)* adult rehabilitation and continuing care, *(c)* child and adolescent psychiatric, *(d)* learning disabilities, *(e)* old age psychiatric and *(f)* psychotherapy consultant posts have been vacant in each of the last five years in each region. [2943]

Mr. Bowis: This information is not available centrally.

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* acute adult psychiatric, *(b)* adult rehabilitation and continuing care, *(c)* child and adolescent psychiatric, *(d)* learning disabilities, *(e)* old age psychiatric and *(f)* psychotherapy consultants there are in each region and per 100,000 head of population. [2945]

Mr. Bowis: The available information is shown in the tables.

Wte of Consultants by each speciality in the Psychiatry Group by Region per 100,000 head of population as at 30 September 1994

	Child and adolescent psychiatry	*Forensic psychiatry*	*Mental handicap*	*Mental illness*	*Old age psychiatry*	*Psychotherapy*
England	0.6	0.2	0.3	2.3	0.3	0.1
Northern	0.5	0.1	0.3	2.3	0.3	0.1
Yorkshire	0.5	0.1	0.2	2.3	0.3	0.1
Trent	0.6	0.1	0.2	2.3	0.3	0.2
East Anglia	0.7	0.1	0.3	1.7	0.4	0.0
North West Thames	0.9	0.2	0.4	2.4	0.2	0.3
North East Thames	0.8	0.1	0.3	2.3	0.3	0.3
South East Thames	0.7	0.2	0.3	3.0	0.5	0.1
South West Thames	0.5	0.1	0.4	3.0	0.2	0.1
Wessex	0.8	0.1	0.2	2.1	0.3	0.1
Oxford	0.9	'—	0.3	2.3	0.4	0.3
South Western	0.5	0.1	0.4	2.4	0.1	0.0
West Midlands	0.5	0.1	0.4	1.8	0.4	0.1
Mersey	0.6	0.1	0.3	2.5	0.3	0.1
North Western	0.5	0.1	0.2	2.2	0.2	0.1
Special health authorities (inc Special Hospitals)	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

' "Zero value".
n/a = "not available".

Wte of Consultants by each speciality in the Psychiatry Group by Region as at 30 September 1994

	Child and adolescent psychiatry	*Forensic psychiatry*	*Mental handicap*	*Mental illness*	*Old age psychiatry*	*Psychotherapy*
England	310	70	150	1,130	150	70
Northern	20	0	10	70	10	0
Yorkshire	20	0	10	90	10	0
Trent	30	10	10	110	10	10
East Anglia	20	0	10	50	10	0
North West Thames	30	10	10	70	10	10
North East Thames	30	0	10	90	10	10
South East Thames	30	10	10	110	20	10
South West Thames	10	0	10	90	10	0
Wessex	20	0	10	70	10	0
Oxford	20	'—	10	60	10	10
South Western	20	0	10	80	10	0
West Midlands	30	10	20	100	20	10
Mersey	10	0	10	60	10	0
North Western	20	0	10	90	10	0
Special health authorities (inc Special Hospitals)	'—	20	'—	0	'—	0

Figures are rounded to the nearest 10' Denotes "zero value".

0 Denotes figure is greater than 0 but less than 5.

England total does not equal the sum of the regions due to rounding.

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many *(a)* acute adult psychiatric, *(b)* adult rehabilitation and continuing care, *(c)* child and adolescent psychiatric, *(d)* learning disabilities, *(e)* old age psychiatric and *(f)* psychotherapy consultants there have been per 100,000 head of population in each of the last five years; [2947]

(2) how many *(a)* acute adult psychiatric, *(b)* adult rehabilitation and continuing care, *(c)* child and adolescent psychiatric, *(d)* learning disabilities, *(e)* old age psychiatric and *(f)* psychotherapy consultants there have been in each of the last five years; and how many there are now. [2949]

Mr. Bowis: The available information is shown in the table.

Consultants in the Psychiatry Group per 100,000 population

England—as at 30 September each year *Whole-time equivalents (WTE)*

	1990		1991		1992		1993		1994	
	Wte	*Per 100,000 population*	*Wte*	*Per 100,000 population*	*Wte*	*Per 100,000 population*	*Wte*	*Per 100,000 population*	*Wte*	*Per 100,000 population*
England total	1,840	3.8	1,830	3.8	1,840	3.8	1,880	3.9	1,880	3.9
Mental illness	1,120	2.3	1,110	2.3	1,130	2.3	1,120	2.3	1,130	2.3
Child and Adolescent psychiatry	330	0.7	330	0.7	300	0.6	320	0.7	310	0.6
Forensic psychiatry	70	0.1	70	0.1	80	0.2	80	0.2	70	0.2
Mental handicap	160	0.3	160	0.3	160	0.3	160	0.3	150	0.3
Old age psychiatry	80	0.2	100	0.2	110	0.2	130	0.3	150	0.3
Psychotherapy	70	0.1	70	0.2	70	0.1	70	0.1	70	0.1

Consultants data rounded to the nearest 10.

Psychiatric Beds

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many *(a)* acute adult psychiatric, *(b)* adult rehabilitation and continuing care, *(c)* child and adolescent psychiatric, *(d)* learning disabilities, *(e)* old age psychiatric and *(f)* psychotherapy beds there are in each region and per 100,000 head of population; [2944]

(2) how many *(a)* acute adult psychiatric, *(b)* adult rehabilitation and continuing care, *(c)* child and adolescent psychiatric, *(d)* learning disabilities, *(e)* old age psychiatric and *(f)* psychotherapy beds there have been per 100,000 head of population in each of the last five years; [2946]

(3) how many *(a)* acute adult psychiatric, *(b)* adult rehabilitation and continuing care, *(c)* child and adolescent psychiatric, *(d)* learning disabilities, *(e)* old age psychiatric and *(f)* psychotherapy beds there have been in each of the last five years; and how many there are currently. [2948]

Mr. Bowis: Information is not available in the form requested.

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many medium secure psychiatric beds have been available in each region in each of the last three years per 100,000 population. [2930]

Mr. Bowis: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East (Mr. Brown) on 9 June, *Official Report*, columns *333–34*.

Private Patient Income

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the total income received from private patients by *(a)* region and *(b)* each trust in each region in 1994–95. [2952]

Mr. Sackville: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 24 November, *Official Report*, column *337*.

Prescriptions

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to increase the speed which pharmacists are paid in full for prescriptions dispensed; and if he will make a statement. [3018]

Mr. Malone: None. Pharmacists are currently paid on time, to a timetable originally agreed with the Pharmaceutical Services Negotiating Committee.

Services and Treatment (Non-NHS Purchases)

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information his Department maintain on the services and treatments purchased by *(a)* NHS trusts, *(b)* health authorities or *(c)* general practitioner fundholders from outside the NHS. [3090]

Mr. Sackville: Information on services and treatments purchased outside the national health service is included in the information requirements set out in the health authorities manual of accounts on form HFR25, family health services authorities manual of accounts on form FAA23 and in NHS trusts manual of accounts on form TFR3. Copies of these manuals will be placed in the Library.

NHS Policy Board

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the members of the NHS policy board and explain their remit. [3094]

Mr. Malone: The national health service policy board provides a forum in which Ministers and senior managers meet regional chairmen to consider current NHS management issues. The board is non-statutory and is advisory to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health. The members of the policy board are:

The right hon. Stephen Dorrell, Secretary of State for Health; Gerald Malone, Minister of State for Health; the hon. Tom Sackville, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State; John Bowis OBE, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State; Baroness Cumberlege CBE, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Graham Hart, Permanent Secretary Department of Health; Alan Langlands, NHS Chief Executive; Dr. Kenneth Calman, Chief Medical Officer; Yvonne Moores, Chief Nursing Officer; Keith Ackroyd, Regional Chairman Trent; Bryan Baker, Regional Chairman West Midlands; Sir Stuart Burgess, Regional Chairman Anglia and Oxford; Rennie Fritchie, Regional Chairman South and West; John Greetham, Regional Chairman Northern and Yorkshire; Sir William Staveley, Regional Chairman North Thames; William Wells, Regional Chairman South Thames; Sir Donald Wilson, Regional Chairman North West.

External Consultants

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much has been spent on all external consultants, with special reference to management consultants in each year since 1990–91, for his Department, the national health service executive and other agencies. [2950]

Mr. Sackville: The Department of Health and its agencies have spent the following amount on all external consultancy.

1990–91: £18,398,000

1991–92: £24,258,000

1992–93: £18,399,000

1993–94: £15,933,037

1994–95: £18,479,405.

Information about expenditure on management consultancy specifically is not available centrally.

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what are the quantified annual cost savings made as a consequence of spending on external consultants by his Department, the national health service executive and other agencies in each year since 1990–91. [2960]

Mr. Sackville: External consultants are used to assist in improving efficiency and effectiveness in the Department, but it is not possible to assess the savings which are a direct consequence of their activity.

NHS Services

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the *(a)* clinical services and *(b)* non-clinical services provided by the NHS. [3101]

Mr. Sackville: The national health service provides a comprehensive range of clinical and non-clinical services for the investigation, diagnosis, treatment and care of people both inside and outside hospital.

Medicines

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what methods alternative to the resale price maintenance scheme for medicines he has considered for ensuring the continued effectiveness of a nationwide pharmacy service. [3016]

Mr. Malone: None. The Office of Fair Trading is conducting a review of the resale price maintenance arrangement for medicines.

NHS Staff

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* medical locums and *(b)* agency nursing staff were employed in the NHS (i) as a total and (ii) as a proportion of permanent medical and nursing staff in each year since 1990 (1) nationally and (2) regionally. [2421]

Mr. Malone *[holding answer 24 November 1995]:* This information will be placed in the Library.

SOCIAL SECURITY

War Widows Pension

Mr. Simon Hughes: to ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people have claimed war widows and war disablement pension in each year since 1980. [1659]

Mr. Heald: The information is in the tables:

Claims for war widow's pension

Year	Number
1980	3,400
1981	2,100
1982	3,350
1983	3,100
1984	2,850
1985	2,700
1986	2,800
1987	3,000
1988	3,100
1989	3,009
1990	4,027
1991	3,578
1992	3,548
1993	3,570
1994	4,283
1995	[1]13,476

[1] January to October.

The 1995 figure includes 9,878 claims for restoration of the war widow's pension made as a result of the change introduced in the Pensions Act 1995. The war widow's pension is withdrawn on re-marriage; the Act provided that it may be reclaimed, for instance, on subsequent widowhood or divorce.

War disablement pension: First Claims

Year	Number
1980	5,896
1981	4,909
1982	5,532
1983	5,782
1984	4,468
1985	6,760
1986	7,225
1987	9,345

War disablement pension: First Claims

Year	Number
1988	13,173
1989	17,167
1990	20,214
1991	36,527
1992	116,605
1993	139,757
1994	51,947
1995	[1]30,560

[1]January to October.

War disablement pension: claims for further conditions (additional disablement)

Year	Number
1989	3,321
1990	4,874
1991	6,354
1992	12,654
1993	18,089
1994	13,598
1995	[1]10,138

[1]January to October.

This information is available only from 1989.

Child Support Agency

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security in how many cases a separated husband and wife have both sold their homes following a maintenance award made by the Child Support Agency. [2221]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: The information requested is not available. The maintenance assessment formula ensures that parents with care and the vast majority of absent parents have their housing costs taken fully into account.

Mr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what precautions the Child Support Agency takes to ensure that no child is rendered homeless as a result of its assessments. [2385]

Mr. Mitchell: Absent parents who have children living with them have their housing costs taken fully into account when their maintenance payments are assessed.

Where the agency needs to consider enforcement action, it is required by law to have regard to the welfare of any child likely to be affected by its decision.

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many type D interim assessments have been issued by the Child Support Agency. [2014]

Mr. Mitchell: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the chief executive, Miss Ann Chant. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Miss Ann Chant to Ms Liz Lynne, dated 27 November 1995:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about Child Support Agency Type 'D' interim assessments.

The type 'D' interim assessment was introduced in April 1995 to make interim assessments on cases where the absent parent has exceptionally high earnings. At 30 September 1995 this measure had been used in eight cases.

I hope this is helpful.

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the weekly maintenance due via the Child Support Agency's collection service in *(a)* cases which are fully paid and *(b)* cases which are partially paid. [2020]

Mr. Mitchell: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the chief executive, Miss Ann Chant. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Miss Ann Chant to Ms Liz Lynne, dated 27 November 1995:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about cases using the Child Support Agency collection service.

Information on these cases is not available in the form you have requested. However, the average amount of maintenance assessment in cases with an interim assessment is £95. In cases with a full maintenance assessment, when the absent parent has earned income, the average amount is £39.69.

I hope this is helpful.

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security in how many cases a Child Support Agency assessment is limited by *(a)* the protected income formula and *(b)* the 30 per cent. rule; and what are the amounts of weekly maintenance due in these cases. [2012]

Mr. Mitchell: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the chief executive, Miss Ann Chant. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Miss Ann Chant to Ms Liz Lynne, dated 27 November 1995:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about Child Support Agency assessments.

The increase of protected income to 70% of net income was one of a number of policy changes introduced in April 1995. It was introduced to ensure that after a maintenance assessment, an absent parent retained a minimum guaranteed income, and at the time 18,752 cases benefitted.

Specific information is not available on the impact of this policy change on the amount of child maintenance payable in each individual case. However, I can tell you that as a result of all the changes in April where liability decreased, the average maintenance assessment reduced from £60.64 to £52.31.

I am afraid I cannot establish what subject you are asking for information in relation to the "20 per cent" rule. The April policy changes did not include any such measure. If you write to me explaining what you are interested in, I will do my best to help.

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what agencies, Government Departments or other sources the Child Support Agency has received from, or supplied to, information related to clients. [2015]

Mr. Mitchell: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the chief executive, Miss Ann Chant. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Miss Ann Chant to Ms Liz Lynne, dated 27 November 1995:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about information related to clients.

The Child Support Agency is registered with the Data Protection Registrar's Office in accordance with the provisions of the Data Protection Act.

This registration includes details of the possible sources, from which we may require information and to whom such information may be disclosed. The information is shown on the attached table.

DATA HELD BY THE CHILD SUPPORT AGENCY

Sources of Data

Family, relatives, guardians, trustees

Financial representatives,

Landlords.

Inland Revenue,

Customs and Excise,

DVLC,

Local authority housing department,

Prison Service,

Public utilities,

Banks,

Northern Ireland housing executive,

Building societies.

Recipients of Data

Home Office,

Local authority social services,

Police forces,

The Post Office,

Other Government Departments,

Treasury Solicitors.

Sources and Recipients of Data

The data subject themselves,

Employers past, current, prospective,

Legal representatives,

Nominated Representatives of Customers,

Persons working within DSS to gain Work Experience,

Recipients, customers, clients for goods or services,

Department of Employment,

Departments of Health and Social Security,

MoD (Including Armed Forces),

The Courts,

Judges magistrates,

Central Government. Departments in Northern Ireland,

Registered medical practitioners.

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security in how many cases *(a)* which are fully paid and *(b)* which are partially paid, absent parents are paying child support maintenance by way of a deduction of earnings order. [2019]

Mr. Mitchell: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the chief executive, Miss Ann Chant. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Miss Ann Chant to Ms Liz Lynne, dated 27 November 1995:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about deduction of earnings orders.

The number of absent parents who were paying their child maintenance by way of a deduction of earnings order since April 1995 is 28,302. It is not possible to break this figure down into full or partial payments.

I hope this is helpful.

Housing Benefit

Mr. John Townend: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what were the total amounts paid to recipients of housing benefit in *(a)* Humberside, *(b)* Hull, *(c)* North Yorkshire, *(d)* Leeds, *(e)* Bradford and *(f)* Sheffield in (i) 1991–92 and (ii) 1993–94; and if he will estimate the amounts likely to be paid out in the current year; [2146]

(2) what were the total amounts paid to recipients of housing benefit in Bridlington in *(a)* 1991–92 and *(b)* 1993–94; and if he will estimate the amounts likely to be paid out in the current year. [2147]

Mr. Roger Evans: Information is not available in the format requested. Expenditure figures for Bridlington are included in those given for East Yorkshire district council which administers housing benefit in the Bridlington area.

Housing benefit expenditure

£ million

Counties	*1991–92*	*1993–94*
Humberside	85.9	116.1
North Yorkshire	44.4	66.3

Districts	*1991–92*	*1993–1994*
Bradford	51.1	68.9
East Yorkshire	7.3	10.8
Kingston upon Hull	42.8	55.3
Leeds	83.7	109.8
Sheffield	63.7	84.6

Expenditure shown for Humberside includes the amounts shown for East Yorkshire and Kingston upon Hull.

Estimates for expenditure during 1995–1996 are not available.

Incapacity Benefit

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what percentage of those claimants appealing against the results of the all-work test for incapacity benefit have had their appeals upheld. [2085]

Mr. Burt: As at 31 October 1995, 354 appeals against decisions on incapacity benefit entitlement following application of the all-work test had been heard. In 146 cases—41 per cent.—the appeal tribunal found in the appellant's favour.

Benefit Uprating

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on the new rates of benefit proposed from April 1996. [3231]

Mr. Lilley: As usual, the annual uprating of social security benefits will take place in the first full week of the tax year. In 1996, this will be the week beginning on 8 April.

Expenditure on social security will be £90 billion in 1996–97, £93 billion in 1997–98 and £96 billion in 1998–99.

I have reviewed social security benefits in accordance with section 150 of the Social Security Administration Act 1992. My proposals, which are set out in the schedule,

will increase most of the major benefits in line with inflation. The statutory instruments to implement them will be laid before both Houses for debate. My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland proposes to introduce similar changes for Northern Ireland.

All national insurance benefits will be uprated in line with the annual increase in the retail prices index up to September, which this year is 3.9 per cent.

Income-related benefits will generally rise by 3 per cent., in line with the Rossi index—RPI less certain housing costs.

As a first step in restructuring benefits for lone parents, one parent benefit and the income-related benefit lone parent premiums will not be increased in 1996.

Some key points of the 1996 increases are:

Retirement pension

The standard rate of retirement pension will be increased by £2.30 per week for a single person to £61.15 and by £3.65 per week for couples to £97.75.

Incapacity benefit

The basic rate of long term incapacity benefit will rise to £61.15 per week from £58.85, an increase of £2.30 per week.

Unemployment benefit

Unemployment benefit for a single person under pension age will rise from £46.45 to £48.25 per week.

Child benefit

Child benefit will again be raised in line with prices. For the first or eldest eligible child the weekly rate will increase from £10.40 to £10.80 and for each subsequent child the rate will rise from £8.45 to £8.80.

War pensions

War pensions will again be uprated fully in line with prices.

Non-dependant deductions

Increases will be made to deductions from housing benefit, income support and council tax benefit in respect of non-dependant adults living in the claimant's home. The income thresholds will also be increased so that non-dependants can earn more before a higher deduction band takes effect.

Schedule of main proposed Social Security benefits—April 1996

£ per week unless otherwise stated

	Old Rates 1995	*New Rates 1996*
Attendance Allowance		
higher rate	46.70	48.50
lower rate	31.20	32.40
Child Benefit		
—only, elder or eldest for whom child benefit is payable	10.40	10.80
—each subsequent child	8.45	8.80
Child's Special Allowance		
see note on child dependency increase	11.05	11.15
Council Tax Benefit		
Personal allowances		
single		
18 to 24	36.80	37.90
25 or over	46.50	47.90
lone parent —18 or over	46.50	47.90
couple —one or both over 18	73.00	75.20
dependent children		
under 11	15.95	16.45
11 to 15	23.40	24.10
16 to 17	28.00	28.85
18	36.80	37.90
Premiums		
family	10.25	10.55
lone parent	11.50	11.50
pensioner		
single	18.60	19.15
couple	28.05	28.90
pensioner (enhanced)		
single	20.70	21.30
couple	30.95	31.90

Schedule of main proposed Social Security benefits—April 1996

£ per week unless otherwise stated

	Old Rates 1995	*New Rates 1996*
pensioner (higher)		
single	25.15	25.90
couple	35.95	37.05
disability		
single	19.80	20.40
couple	28.30	29.15
severe disability		
single	35.05	36.40
couple (one qualifies)	35.05	36.40
couple (both qualify)	70.10	72.80
disabled child	19.80	20.40
carer	12.60	13.00
Allowance for personal expenses for claimants in hospital		
higher rate	14.70	15.30
lower rate	11.75	12.25
Non-dependant deductions		
aged 18 or over and in remunerative work		
—gross income: £114 or more	2.30	2.60
—gross income: under £114	1.15	1.30
others,aged 18 or over	1.15	1.30
Alternative maximum council tax benefit		
second adult on Income Support	25 per cent. of CT	
second adult's gross income:		
—under £114	15 per cent. of CT	
—£114 to £149.99	7.5 per cent. of CT	
Capital		
upper limit	16,000.00	16,000.00
amount disregarded	3,000.00	3,000.00
child's limit	3,000.00	3,000.00
Tariff income		
£1 for every complete £250 or part thereof between amount of capital disregarded and capital upper limit.		
Earnings disregards:		
where disability premium awarded	15.00	15.00
various specified employments	15.00	15.00
lone parent	25.00	25.00
where the claimant has a partner	10.00	10.00
single claimant	5.00	5.00
where carer premium awarded	15.00	15.00
childcare charges	40.00	60.00
Other income disregards:		
maintenance disregard	15.00	15.00
war disablement pension and war widow's pension	10.00	10.00
certain voluntary and charitable payments	10.00	20.00
student loan	10.00	10.00
student's covenanted income	5.00	5.00
income from boarders :		
disregard the fixed amount (£20) plus 50% of the balance of the charge	20.00	20.00
30 Hr Adult Allowance in DWA	10.00	10.30
30 Hr Adult Credit in FC	10.00	10.30
Expenses for subtenants		
furnished or unfurnished	4.00	4.00
where heating is included, additional	9.20	9.25
Dependency Increases		
Adult dependency increases		
For spouse or person looking after children, with;		
retirement pension on own insurance, long term incap. benefit, unemployability supplement and, if beneficiary over pension age, unemployment benefit	35.25	36.60

Schedule of main proposed Social Security benefits—April 1996

£ per week unless otherwise stated

	Old Rates 1995	*New Rates 1996*
severe disablement allowance	21.15	21.95
invalid care allowance	21.10	21.90
short-term incap. benefit if beneficiary over pension age	33.85	35.15
unemployment benefit	28.65	29.75
maternity allowance / short-term incap. ben.	27.50	28.55
child dependency increases, with; retirement pension, widows benefit, short term incap ben. at the higher rate and long term incap. ben. invalid care allowance severe disab. allowce, higher rate industrial death benefit, unemployability supplement and short-term incap.ben./unemployment benefit if beneficiary over pension age	11.05	11.15

NB —The Overlapping Benefits Regulations provide for the rate of child dependency increases, guardian's allowance and child special allowance to be adjusted where the increase or allowance is payable for the eldest eligible child for whom Chb is also payable. The weekly rate of the increase or allowance is reduced by the differential (less the 75p derived from the Oct 1991 increase in Chb) between the rate of Chb payable for the oldest eligible child and that payable for a subsequent child. This gives a rate of £9.85 (1995) and £9.90 (1996).

Disability Living Allowance		
Care component		
Highest	46.70	48.50
Middle	31.20	32.40
Lowest	12.40	12.90
Mobility component		
Higher	32.65	33.90
Lower	12.40	12.90
Disability Working Allowance		
Adult allowance		
Single people	46.85	48.25
Couples/lone parents	73.40	75.60
30 hours allowance.	10.00	10.30
Child allowance		
under 11	11.40	11.75
11 to 15	18.90	19.45
16 to 17	23.45	24.15
18	32.80	33.80
Applicable amount (ie taper threshold)		
Single people	54.75	56.40
Couples/lone parents	73.00	75.20
Disabled child's allowance	19.80	20.40
Capital		
upper limit	16,000.00	16,000.00
amount disregarded	3,000.00	3,000.00
child's limit	3,000.00	3,000.00
Tariff income		
£1 for every complete £250 or part thereof between amount of capital disregarded and capital upper limit		
Disregards:		
maintenance disregard	15.00	15.00
war disablement pension and war widow's pension	10.00	10.00
certain voluntary and charitable payments	10.00	20.00
student loan	10.00	10.00
student's covenanted income	5.00	5.00
Income from boarders:		
disregard the fixed amount (£20) plus 50 per cent. of the balance of the charge	20.00	20.00
child care charges	40.00	60.00
Expenses for subtenants		
furnished or unfurnished	4.00	4.00
where heating is included, additional	9.20	9.25

Schedule of main proposed Social Security benefits—April 1996

	£ per week unless otherwise stated	
	Old Rates 1995	*New Rates 1996*
Earnings Rules		
Invalid care allowance	50.00	50.00
Unemployment benefit (daily rate)	2.00	2.00
Unemployment benefit (maximum weekly amount)	58.00	61.00
Therapeutic earnings limit	44.00	45.50
Industrial injuries unemployability supplement permitted earnings level (annual amount)	2,288.00	2,366.00
War pensioners' unemployability supplement permitted earnings level (annual amount)	2,288.00	2,366.00
Adult dependency increases with short-term incap.benefit		
where claimant is		
(a) under pension age	27.50	28.55
(b) over pension age	33.85	35.15
maternity allowance	27.50	28.55
unemployment benefit where claimant is		
(a) under pension age	28.65	29.75
(b) over pension age	35.25	36.60
retirement pension, long-term incap. ben., severe disablement allowance, unemployability supplement where dependent:		
(a) is living with claimant	46.45	48.25
(b) still qualifies for the tapered earnings rule	45.09	45.09
retirement pension, long-term incap benefit and unemployability supplement where dependant not living with claimant	35.25	36.60
severe disablement allowance where dependant not living with claimant	21.15	21.95
invalid care allowance	21.10	21.90
Child dependency increases level at which IDIs are affected by earnings of claimant's spouse or partner:		
for first child	125.00	130.00
for each subsequent child	16.00	17.00
Family Credit		
Adult credit	45.10	46.45
Adult credit for working 30 hrs+ pw.	10.00	10.30
Child credit		
under 11	11.40	11.75
11 to 15	18.90	19.45
16 to 17	23.45	24.15
18	32.80	33.80
Applicable amount (ie taper threshold)	73.00	75.20
Capital		
upper limit	8,000.00	8,000.00
amount disregarded	3,000.00	3,000.00
child's limit	3,000.00	3,000.00
Tariff income £1 for every complete £250 or part thereof between amount of capital disregarded and capital upper limit		
Disregards		
maintenance disregard	15.00	15.00
war disablement pension and war widow's pension	10.00	10.00
certain voluntary and charitable payments	10.00	20.00
student loan	10.00	10.00
student's covenanted income	5.00	5.00

Schedule of main proposed Social Security benefits—April 1996

£ per week unless otherwise stated

	Old Rates 1995	*New Rates 1996*
income from boarders:		
disregard the fixed amount (£20) plus 50% of the balance of the charge	20.00	20.00
childcare charges	40.00	60.00
Expenses for subtenants		
furnished or unfurnished	4.00	4.00
where heating is included, additional	9.20	9.25
Guardian's Allowance	11.05	11.15
see note on child dependency increase		
Hospital Downrating		
20 per cent. rate	11.75	12.25
40 per cent. rate	23.50	24.50
Housing Benefit		
Personal allowances		
single		
16 to 24	36.80	37.90
25 or over	46.50	47.90
lone parent		
under 18	36.80	37.90
18 or over	46.50	47.90
couple		
both under 18	55.55	57.20
one or both over 18	73.00	75.20
dependent children		
under 11	15.95	16.45
11 to 15	23.40	24.10
16 to 17	28.00	28.85
18	36.80	37.90
Premiums		
family	10.25	10.55
lone parent	11.50	11.50
pensioner		
single	18.60	19.15
couple	28.05	28.90
pensioner (enhanced)		
single	20.70	21.30
couple	30.95	31.90
pensioner (higher)		
single	25.15	25.90
couple	35.95	37.05
disability		
single	19.80	20.40
couple	28.30	29.15
severe disability		
single	35.05	36.40
couple (one qualifies)	35.05	36.40
couple (both qualify)	70.10	72.80
disabled child	19.80	20.40
carer	12.60	13.00
Allowance for personal expenses for claimants in hospital		
higher rate	14.70	15.30

Schedule of main proposed Social Security benefits—April 1996

£ per week unless otherwise stated

	Old Rates 1995	*New Rates 1996*
lower rate	11.75	12.25
Non-dependant deductions		
rent rebates and allowances		
aged 25 and over, in receipt of income support aged 18 or over, not in remunerative work or —gross income under £76	5.00	6.00
aged 18 or over and in remunerative work:		
—gross income: £76 to £113.99	10.00	12.00
—gross income: £114 to £149.99	14.00	16.00
—gross income: £150 or more	30.00	32.00
Service charges for fuel		
heating	9.20	9.25
hot water	1.10	1.15
lighting	0.75	0.80
cooking	1.10	1.15
Amount ineligible for meals		
—three or more meals a day		
single claimant	16.60	17.10
each person in family aged 16 or over	16.60	17.10
each child under 16	8.40	8.65
—less than three meals a day		
single claimant	11.00	11.35
each person in family aged 16 or over	11.00	11.35
each child under 16	5.55	5.70
—breakfast only—claimant and each member of family	2.00	2.05
Capital		
upper limit	16,000.00	16,000.00
amount disregarded	3,000.00	3,000.00
child's limit	3,000.00	3,000.00
Tariff income		
£1 for every complete £250 or part thereof between amount of capital disregarded and capital upper limit		
Earnings disregards		
where disability premium awarded	15.00	15.00
various specified employments	15.00	15.00
lone parent	25.00	25.00
where the claimant has a partner	10.00	10.00
single claimant	5.00	5.00
where carer premium awarded	15.00	15.00
childcare charges	40.00	60.00
Other income disregards		
maintenance disregard	15.00	15.00
war disablement pension and war widow's pension	10.00	10.00
certain voluntary and charitable payments	10.00	20.00
student loan	10.00	10.00
student's covenanted income	5.00	5.00
income from boarders:		
disregard the fixed amount (£20) plus 50 per cent. of the balance of the charge	20.00	20.00
30 Hr Adult Allowance in DWA	10.00	10.30
30 Hr Adult Credit in FC	10.00	10.30
Expenses for subtenants		
furnished or unfurnished	4.00	4.00
where heating is included, additional	9.20	9.25
Incapacity Benefit		
Long-term incapacity benefit	58.85	61.15

Schedule of main proposed Social Security benefits—April 1996

£ per week unless otherwise stated

	Old Rates 1995	*New Rates 1996*
Short-term incapacity benefit (under pension age)		
lower rate	44.40	46.15
higher rate	52.50	54.55
Short-term incapacity benefit (over pension age)		
lower and higher rate	56.45	58.65
Increase of long-term incap. ben for age		
higher rate	12.40	12.90
lower rate	6.20	6.45
Invalidity allowance (transitional)		
higher rate	12.40	12.90
middle rate	7.80	8.10
lower rate	3.90	4.05
Income support		
Personal allowances		
single		
under 18 —usual rate	28.00	28.85
under 18 —higher rate payable in specific circumstances	36.80	37.90
18 to 24	36.80	37.90
25 or over	46.50	47.90
lone parent		
under 18 —usual rate	28.00	28.85
under 18 —higher rate payable in specific circumstances	36.80	37.90
18 or over	46.50	47.90
couple		
both under 18	55.55	57.20
one or both 18 or over	73.00	75.20
dependent children		
under 11	15.95	16.45
11 to 15	23.40	24.10
16 to 17	28.00	28.85
18	36.80	37.90
Residential allowance		
except Greater London	51.00	54.00
Greater London	57.00	60.00
Premiums		
family	10.25	10.55
lone parent	5.20	5.20
pensioner		
single	18.60	19.15
couple	28.05	28.90
pensioner (enhanced)		
single	20.70	21.30
couple	30.95	31.90
pensioner (higher)		
single	25.15	25.90
couple	35.95	37.05
disability		
single	19.80	20.40
couple	28.30	29.15
severe disability		
single	35.05	36.40

Schedule of main proposed Social Security benefits—April 1996

£ per week unless otherwise stated

	Old Rates 1995	*New Rates 1996*
couple (one qualifies)	35.05	36.40
couple (both qualify)	70.10	72.80
disabled child	19.80	20.40
carer	12.60	13.00
Maximum amounts for accommodation and meals in		
residential care homes		
old age	197.00	203.00
very dependent elderly	227.00	234.00
mental disorder (not handicap)	207.00	214.00
drug / alchohol dependence	207.00	214.00
mental handicap	237.00	244.00
physical disablement		
(a) (under pension age)	267.00	276.00
(b) (over pension age)	197.00	203.00
others	197.00	203.00
maximum Greater London increase	34.00	38.00
nursing homes		
mental disorder (not handicap)	296.00	304.00
drug / alchohol dependence	296.00	304.00
mental handicap	301.00	310.00
terminal illness	295.00	303.00
physical disablement		
(a) (under pension age)	331.00	341.00
(b) (over pension age)	295.00	303.00
others (including elderly)	295.00	303.00
maximum Greater London increase	39.00	43.00
Amounts for meals where these cannot be purchased within the accommodation		
(Daily rate)		
breakfast	1.10	1.10
midday meal	1.55	1.55
evening meal	1.55	1.55
Allowances for personal expenses for claimants in:		
private and voluntary residential care and nursing homes		
personal expenses	13.35	13.75
dependent children		
(a) under 11	5.50	5.65
(b) 11 to 15	8.00	8.25
(c) 16 to 17	9.25	9.55
(d) age 18	13.35	13.75
Allowances for personal expenses for claimants in:		
hospital		
higher rate	14.70	15.30
lower rate	11.75	12.25
local authority (part III) accommodation	13.35	13.75
the Polish home Ilford Park		
maximum amount for accommodation and meals	331.00	341.00
personal expenses for claimant	17.35	17.35
personal expenses for partner	17.35	17.35
personal expenses for dep children		
(a) under 11	5.50	5.65
(b) 11 to 15	8.00	8.25
(c) 16 to 17	9.25	9.55
(d) 18	15.55	15.55

Schedule of main proposed Social Security benefits—April 1996

£ per week unless otherwise stated

	Old Rates 1995	*New Rates 1996*
Housing costs		
deduction for non-dependants		
aged 25 and over, in receipt of Income Support aged 18 or over, not in work or —gross income under £76	5.00	6.00
aged 18 or over and in remunerative work:		
—gross income: £76 to £113.99	10.00	12.00
—gross income: £114 to £149.99	14.00	16.00
—gross income: £150 or more	30.00	32.00
Deduction for direct payments		
arrears of housing, fuel and water costs council tax and fines default, and deductions for child maintenance	2.35	2.40
Arrears of community charge		
court order against claimant	2.35	2.40
court order against couple	3.70	3.80
Maximium rates for recovery of overpayments		
ordinary overpayments	7.05	7.20
where claimant convicted of fraud	9.20	9.60
Reduction in benefit for strikers	25.00	26.00
Capital		
upper limit	8,000.00	8,000.00
amount disregarded	3,000.00	3,000.00
child's limit	3,000.00	3,000.00
Tariff income		
£1 for every complete £250 or part thereof between amount of capital disregarded and capital upper limit		
Disregards		
standard earnings	5.00	5.00
higher earnings	15.00	15.00
war disablement pension and war widow's pension	10.00	10.00
voluntary and charitable payments	10.00	20.00
student loan	10.00	10.00
student's covenanted income	5.00	5.00
income from boarders:		
disregard the fixed amount (£20) plus 50 per cent. of the balance of the charge	20.00	20.00
Expenses for subtenants		
furnished or unfurnished	4.00	4.00
where heating is included, additional	9.20	9.25
Industrial Death Benefit		
Widow's pension		
higher rate	58.85	61.15
lower rate	17.66	18.35
Industrial Disablement Pension		
18 and over, or under 18 with dependants		
100 per cent.	95.30	99.00
90 per cent.	85.77	89.10
80 per cent.	76.24	79.20
70 per cent.	66.71	69.30
60 per cent.	57.18	59.40
50 per cent.	47.65	49.50
40 per cent.	38.12	39.60
30 per cent.	28.59	29.70
20 per cent.	19.06	19.80
Under 18		
100 per cent.	58.35	60.65
90 per cent.	52.52	54.59
80 per cent.	46.68	48.52
70 per cent.	40.85	42.46

Schedule of main proposed Social Security benefits—April 1996

	£ per week unless otherwise stated	
	Old Rates 1995	*New Rates 1996*
60 per cent.	35.01	36.39
50 per cent.	29.18	30.33
40 per cent.	23.34	24.26
30 per cent.	17.51	18.20
20 per cent.	11.67	12.13
Maximum life gratuity (lump sum)	6,330.00	6,580.00
Unemployability Supplement	58.85	61.15
plus where appropriate an increase for early incapacity		
higher rate	12.40	12.90
middle rate	7.80	8.10
lower rate	3.90	4.05
Maximum reduced earnings allowance	38.12	39.60
Maximum retirement allowance	9.53	9.90
Constant attendance allowance		
exceptional rate	76.40	79.40
intermediate rate	57.30	59.55
normal maximum rate	38.20	39.70
part-time rate	19.10	19.85
Exceptionally severe disablement allowance	38.20	39.70
Invalid Care Allowance	35.25	36.60
Maternity Allowance		
Lower rate	45.55	47.35
Higher rate	52.50	54.55
One Parent Benefit	6.30	6.30
Pneumoconiosis, Byssinosis, Workmen's Compensation (Supplementation) and other Schemes		
Total disablement allowance and major incapacity allowance (maximum)	95.30	99.00
Partial disablement allowance	35.25	36.60
Unemployability supplement	58.85	61.15
plus where appropriate increases for early incapacity		
higher rate	12.40	12.90
middle rate	7.80	8.10
lower rate	3.90	4.05
Constant attendance allowance		
exceptional rate	76.40	79.40
intermediate rate	57.30	59.55
normal maximum rate	38.20	39.70
part-time rate	19.10	19.85
Exceptionally severe disablement allowance	38.20	39.70
Lesser incapacity allowance		
maximum rate of allowance	35.25	36.60
based on loss of earnings over	46.70	48.50
Retirement Pension		
Category A or B	58.85	61.15
Category B (lower) —husband's insurance	35.25	36.60
Category C or D —non-contributory	35.25	36.60
Category C(lower) —non-contributory	21.10	21.90

Schedule of main proposed Social Security benefits—April 1996

£ per week unless otherwise stated

	Old Rates 1995	*New Rates 1996*
Additional pension		Increase by 3.90 per cent.
Increments to:—		
Basic and additional pensions		Increase by 3.90 per cent.
Contracted out deductions (CODs):		
(Pre April 1988 earnings)		Increase by 3.90 per cent.
(Post April 1988 earnings)		Increase by *0.90 per cent.
Graduated Retirement Benefit (GRB)		Increase by 3.90 per cent.
* 3 per cent. paid by scheme		
Graduated retirement benefit (unit)(pence)	7.64	7.94
Graduated retirement benefit (Inherited)		Increase by 3.90 per cent.
Addition at age 80	0.25	0.25
Severe Disablement Allowance		
Basic rate	35.55	36.95
Age-related addition (from Dec 90)		
Higher rate	12.40	12.90
Middle rate	7.80	8.10
Lower rate	3.90	4.05
Social Fund		
Maternity payment	100.00	100.00
Cold weather payments	8.50	8.50
Capital limit		
aged under 60	500.00	500.00
aged 60 and over	1,000.00	1,000.00
Statutory Maternity Pay		
Earnings threshold	58.00	61.00
Lower rate	52.50	54.55
Statutory Sick Pay		
Earnings threshold	58.00	61.00
Standard rate	52.50	54.55
Unemployment Benefit		
Over pension age	58.85	61.15
Under pension age	46.45	48.25
Occupational pension abatement	35.00	35.00
War Pensions		
Disablement pension		
(100 per cent. rates)		
private	101.10	105.00
officer (£ per annum)	5,275.00	5,479.00
Age allowances		
40 per cent.–50 per cent.	6.75	7.00
over 50 per cent. but not over 70 per cent.	10.40	10.80
over 70 per cent. but not over 90 per cent.	14.85	15.45
over 90 per cent.	20.80	21.60
Disablement gratuity		
(base figures for calculation purposes only)		
specified minor injury	6,330.00	6,580.00
unspecified minor injury	3,481.50	3,619.00
Unemployability allowance		
personal	62.45	64.90
adult dependency increase	35.25	36.60
a. increase for first child	9.85	9.90
b. increase for subsequent children	11.05	11.15

Schedule of main proposed Social Security benefits—April 1996

£ per week unless otherwise stated

	Old Rates 1995	*New Rates 1996*
Invalidity allowance		
higher rate	12.40	12.90
middle rate	7.80	8.10
lower rate	3.90	4.05
Constant attendance allowance		
exceptional rate	76.40	79.40
intermediate rate	57.30	59.55
normal maximum rate	38.20	39.70
part-time rate	19.10	19.85
Comforts allowance		
higher rate	16.40	17.00
lower rate	8.20	8.50
Mobility supplement	36.35	37.75
Allowance for lowered standard of occupation (maximum)	38.12	39.60
Exceptionally severe disablement allowance	38.20	39.70
Severe disablement occupational allowance	19.10	19.85
Clothing allowance (£ per annum)		
higher rate	129.00	134.00
lower rate	82.00	85.00
Education allowance (£ per annum) (maximum)	120.00	120.00
War widow's pension		
Widow (private)	76.35	79.35
Widow (NCO)	76.60	79.60
Widow—Officer (£ p.a. maximum)	4,723.00	4,907.00
Childless widow under 40 (private)	17.66	18.35
Childless widow (NCO)	17.93	18.63
Childless widow (Officer maximum £s p.a.)	4,723.00	4,907.00
Supplementary Pension age allowance	49.77	51.71
(a) age 65–69	8.70	9.05
(b) age 70–79	16.75	17.40
(c) age 80 and over	24.95	25.90
children's allowance		
a. increase for first child (adjusted for ChB increase)	14.00	14.10
b. increase for subsequent children	15.20	15.35
Orphan's pension		
a. increase for first child (adjusted for ChB increase)	15.65	15.85
b. increase for subsequent children	16.85	17.10
Unmarried dependant living as spouse (maximum)	74.30	77.30
Rent allowance (maximum)	28.85	30.00
Adult orphan's pension (maximum)	58.85	61.15
Widower's pension		
(i) Private (maximum)	76.35	79.35
(ii) officer (£ per annum) maximum	4,723.00	4,907.00
Widow's Benefit		
Widow's payment (lump sum)	1,000.00	1,000.00
Widowed mother's allowance	58.85	61.15
Widow's pension		
standard rate	58.85	61.15
age-related		
age 54 (49)	54.73	56.87
age 53 (48)	50.61	52.59

Schedule of main proposed Social Security benefits—April 1996

£ per week unless otherwise stated

	Old Rates 1995	*New Rates 1996*
age 52 (47)	46.49	48.31
age 51 (46)	42.37	44.03
age 50 (45)	38.25	39.75
age 49 (44)	34.13	35.47
age 48 (43)	30.01	31.19
age 47 (42)	25.89	26.91
age 46 (41)	21.77	22.63
age 45 (40)	17.66	18.35

Note:
For deaths occurring before 11 April 1988 refer to age points shown in brackets.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make it his policy when details of the April 1996 benefit uprating are released to list *(a)* for each benefit and each capital or income limit which is not to be increased in April 1996, the reasons for not doing so and *(b)* the current value of each such benefit or limit and the value which would have resulted from increasing it in line with prices and average earnings since it was last increased or since it was introduced. [1089]

Mr. Burt: No. The announcement of benefit rates from April 1996 is in a similar format to previous years.

National Insurance Contributions Review

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he has yet completed his review of national insurance contributions for 1996–97. [3232]

Mr. Lilley: I have completed the annual review under section 141 of the Social Security Administration Act 1992. My proposals will take effect from 6 April 1996. There will be no change to the standard rates of contributions for either employees or employers. The rates will remain at 10 per cent. and 10.2 per cent. respectively, but from April 1997, I intend to reduce the main rate of contributions for employers by 0.2 per cent. The savings to employers from this measure will be equivalent to the money raised from the landfill tax. The national insurance contribution holiday for employers, also announced in last year's Budget, will take effect from 6 April 1996. This will effectively remove the national insurance costs for employers for up to a year when they take on someone who has been out of work for at least two years. I am reducing the rate of class 4 contributions paid by self-employed earners by 1.3 per cent. to 6 per cent. This will more than offset the effect of the abolition of the tax relief for class 4 contributions announced by my right hon. and learned Friend.

Employers and employees

In line with the Social Security Contributions and Benefits Act 1992, the lower earnings limit for class 1 contributions is to be raised to £61 a week. It is set at the level of the basic retirement pension rate for single person from April 1996, rounded down to the nearest pound.

The upper earnings limit is to be raised to £455 a week which is slightly less than seven and a half times the new basic pension rate as provided by the Social Security Contributions and Benefits Act 1992. These new earnings limits will replace the current ones of £58 and £440 respectively.

Employees whose earnings reach the lower earnings limit will continue to pay an initial contribution of 2 per cent. of that limit and standard rate contributions of 10 per cent. on that portion of their earnings which exceeds the lower but not the upper earnings limit.

For employers, the three lower contribution rates remain unchanged at 3 per cent., 5 per cent. and 7 per cent. respectively. The thresholds for these rates will be raised so that from April 1996 they apply to weekly earnings which fall below £110, £155 and £210 respectively, compared with £105, £150 and £205 at present.

Not contracted out employees and their employers

Neither employees nor employers will have to pay any contributions if earnings are less than £61 a week. Employees whose earnings do not exceed £440, the former upper earnings limit, will pay 24p a week less in contributions than at present. This is because a further £3 of their weekly earnings will be subject to the 2 per cent. rate rather than 10 per cent. For employees with earnings above £440, the maximum possible increase will be £1.26 per week.

There will be no change for most employers, but some employers will pay less as a result of the increase in the earnings thresholds. For example, where earnings fall between £205 and £209.99, employers will pay between £6.56 and £6.72 a week less.

Contracted out employees and their employers

Employees with earnings between £61 and £440, the former upper earnings limit, will usually pay 18p a week less. For those who earn more than £440, the maximum possible increase will be £1.05 per week.

Where earnings are less than £440, most employers will pay 9p a week extra. This is due to the increase in the lower earnings limit which means that a further £3 of earnings is not subject to the contracted-out rebate. Some employers will pay less as a result of the increase in the earnings thresholds. For example, where earnings fall between £205 and £209.99, employers will pay between £6.47 and £6.63 a week less. Where earnings reach or exceed £455, employers will pay 36p a week less.

Self-employed people

The flat rate class 2 contribution will be raised by 30p to £6.05 a week.

The rate of class 4 contributions will be reduced by 1.3 per cent. to 6 per cent. The annual limits of profits between which class 4 contributions are paid will be raised to £6,860 and £23,660 from £6,640 and £22,880 respectively.

Self-employed people who pay only class 2 contributions will pay an extra £15.60 a year in 1996–97.

All self-employed people who pay class 2 and class 4 contributions will pay less, ranging from a few pence a year less for those with profits of £6,860, the new lower profits limit to £208.72 a year less for those with profits of £22,880, the former upper profits limit.

Class 3 (voluntary) contributions

The rate of class 3 contributions will be raised by 30p to £5.95 a week.

National health service allocation

The allocation to the national health service is unchanged at 1.05 per cent. from employees and 0.9 per cent. from employers.

Treasury grant

The general increase in contributory benefit expenditure, which I am maintaining, means that the outgoings of the national insurance fund will continue to exceed income. In accordance with section 2(2) of the Social Security Act 1993, I propose to maintain the level of the fund in 1996–97 by means of a grant from the Treasury. I estimate that the grant required will be approximately £2.2 billion.

As usual, I shall lay a draft order before Parliament, with a report by the Government Actuary describing the effects of my proposals.

Mortgage Protection Insurance

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will place in the Library a summary of the information he has obtained about the quality, availability and cost of mortgage protection insurance. [897]

Mr. Roger Evans: A summary of the information requested has been placed in the Library.

Housing Costs (Domestic Violence)

Ms Coffey: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) if the easement which enables women who have been deserted by their partners and who make an application for income support after 1 October to have their housing costs treated as existing housing costs, will include women who have been subjected to domestic violence and have taken legal action to exclude their partner from the house; [2787]

(2) how he will establish that adjudication officers in judging that a woman who had been the victim of domestic violence and had taken legal action to exclude her partner from the house, had been abandoned, had interpreted statute law correctly. [2788]

Mr. Roger Evans: Our intention is that this easement should apply to any lone parent who claims income support as a result of being deserted by his or her partner. This should not preclude a claimant in the circumstances outlined in the question from benefiting from it. However, decisions on the application of the income support regulations to individual claims are taken by the independent adjudicating authorities after applying the regulations to the circumstances of the individual case. The operation of all aspects of the new rules on income support help with mortgage interest payments, including this easement, will be kept under review.

Statutory Instruments

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many statutory instruments his Department sponsored in the last Session of Parliament; and how many of these *(a)* constituted a new rule or regulation, *(b)* were introduced to implement European Community directives and *(c)* amplify the minimum standards set out in an original European Community directive. [2458]

Mr. Heald: The number of statutory instruments sponsored by the Department of Social Security in the last Session of Parliament was 71. Of these, one consolidated existing legislation: the remainder therefore constituted new legislation. None were introduced to implement European Community directives and none amplified the minimum standards set out in a European Community directive.

National Insurance Numbers

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what are the current weekly and monthly earnings limits which do not require a person to make national insurance contributions or to be allocated a national insurance number; and what is the current estimate of the numbers of people to whom these exemptions apply. [2548]

Mr. Heald: The current weekly and monthly earnings limits below which an employee is not required to pay contributions are £58 and £252 respectively. In any week, some 3 million people are estimated to have earnings below £58. Any individual who enters employment and does not already have a national insurance number is required to apply for one to the Secretary of State, irrespective of the level of earnings.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many spare national insurance numbers exist at the present time.

Mr. Heald: There is technically no such thing as a "spare" national insurance number, or NINO. NINOs are unique reference numbers allocated to individuals. These NINOs are kept by the individual throughout their lifetime.

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security under what circumstances an employer is not required to ask a new employee for his or her national insurance number. [2721]

Mr. Heald: The administration of the national insurance scheme is a matter for Mrs. Faith Boardman, the chief executive of the Contributions Agency. She will write to the right hon. Member.

Letter from Mrs. Faith Boardman to Mr. Gerald Kaufman, dated 28 November 1995:

As Chief Executive of the Contributions Agency, I have responsibility for answering questions about operational matters relating to the Agency. I have been asked to reply to your question about the circumstances in which an employer is not required to ask a new employee for his or her National Insurance (NI) number.

An employer is required by law to ask all new employees for their NI Number where their earnings reach or exceed the prescribed level at which National Insurance contributions (NICs) become payable.

The NI Number is a unique reference number which is used by the Department of Social Security to identify a customer's NI record. Its use ensures that NICs paid or credited are put on the right record so that contributors will receive the correct rate of benefit when they make a claim. The NI Number is also used by Inland Revenue as reference for Pay As you Earn (PAYE) purposes. The Contributions Agency issues guidance to employers which stresses the importance of asking all new employees for their NI Number as soon as possible after they start work.

It is in employees' own interests to give their NI Number to their employer. If, however, an employee does not know his or her NI Number, the Contributions Agency provides clear guidance to employers on what to do to get that number.

I hope that my reply proves helpful. Please let me know if I can be of any further assistance.

Income Support

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the maximum financial benefit available to claimants or families in receipt of income support in *(a)* 1979, *(b)* 1985 and *(c)* 1990; and when it was last uprated. [3096]

Mr. Roger Evans: It is not possible to give figures in answer as income support, and supplementary benefit before it, is made up of different elements paid to people according to their circumstances. There is no single maximum amount available to claimants.

The amount of supplementary benefit and income support available has always varied according to the age and the size of the claimant's family as well as any other commitments such as a rent or mortgage liability. In addition, supplementary benefit included exceptional circumstances additions, further reflecting individual household variations. Income support was last uprated in April 1995.

Statutory Fees

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the annual income from *(a)* fees, *(b)* charges and *(c)* fines; what was the total number of staff employed (i) part time and (ii) full time; and what was the contribution his Department has made in the last three years in respect of (1) the Contributions Agency and (2) the Occupational Pensions Board. [2745]

Mr. Heald: The information is not available in the format requested. Figures are not available for fines due to the following reasons:

Contributions Agency

Any fines for non-compliance with national insurance regulations are imposed by the courts and no income is received by the agency or Department.

Occupational Pensions Board

Any fines would be imposed by the courts but no court action has been taken by the OPB in the period concerned.

The available information is set out in the tables:

Annual income from fees and charges

£

	1992–93	*1993–94*	*1994–95*
Contributions agency (CA)	346,202	575,024	693,146
Occupational pensions board[1, 2] (OPB)	2,746,131	1,393,487	1,608,639

[1] The current Pensions Levy on Occupational and Personal Pension Schemes was introduced with effect from January 1991 to meet some of the costs arising from three separate bodies, the Pensions Ombudsman, the Pensions Registry and the Occupational Pensions Advisory Service which is funded through a grant made by OPB. Only the last two of these form part of the running costs of the OPB. The total sum raised cannot be disaggregated to provide only the part used to fund the OPB.

[2] Amounts of Pensions Levy collected is normally paid according to a three-yearly cycle under which only a third of scheme pay in any one year. Special introductory arrangements covering the payments due between 1 January 1991 and 31 March 1995 required all schemes to pay the levy in 1992–93 and resulted in higher than usual revenue for that year.

Staff employed

	1992–93	*1993–94*	*1994–95*
CA			
Full time	7,668	8,566	9,077
Part time[1]	1,277	1,608	1,487
OPB			
Full time	121	121	135
Part time	9	11	13

[1] Part time is in actual staff numbers rather than full time staff equivalent. Please note that staff figures are taken as at 1 April for each financial year.

Contribution towards annual running costs[1]

£ million

	1992–93	*1993–94*	*1994–95*
CA	149.258	205.325	254.340
OPB	2.373	2.625	3.061

[1] The figures represent expenditure outturn.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Prisoner Statistics

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish the ethnic breakdown of all prisoners in England and Wales at the last available date. [1531]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. A. J. Beith, dated 28 November 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question asking for the ethnic breakdown of the current prison population.

The information is shown in the attached table.

Prison population on 31 October 1995[1] by ethnic origin and sex, England and Wales

Ethnic origin	*Total*	*Males*	*Females*
White	42,565	41,056	1,509
Black	6,323	5,917	406
South Asian	1,645	1,620	25
Chinese and other Asian	617	602	15
Unrecorded	878	815	63
Total	52,027	50,009	2,018

[1] Provisional figures.

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the ethnic breakdown of all prisoners received into prisons in England and Wales in each of the last 10 years; and if he will make a statement. [1532]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr A.J. Beith, dated 28 November 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question asking for the ethnic breakdown for all prisoners received into prison in England and Wales in each of the last 10 years.

Information is only available for the last 5 years and is shown in the attached table.

Prison receptions[1] by ethnic origin[2], England and Wales 1990 and 1991

Year	*Total*	*White*	*West Indian, Guyanese, African*	*Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi*	*Chinese, Arab, mixed origin*	*Unrecorded*
1990						
Remand	60,174	50,471	6,171	1,354	1,331	847
Sentenced[3]	67,510	59,903	4,748	1,214	1,048	597
1991						
Remand	62,604	52,796	6,328	1,476	1,551	453
Sentenced[3]	72,313	68,873	4,549	1,354	1,158	379

[1] Total receptions cannot be calculated by adding together remand and sentenced receptions because there is double-counting.
[2] A new classification for ethnic origin was introduced in 1992. It is congruent with that used for the Census Population. Data for 1990 and 1991 is shown separately as the classification prior to 1992 is not directly comparable with that in later years.
[3] Including fine defaulters.

Prison receptions by ethnic origin[1], England and Wales 1992–1994[2]

Year	*Total*	*White*	*Black*	*South Asian*	*Chinese and other Asian*	*Unrecorded*
1992						
Remand	57,551	48,285	6,156	1,402	192	1,516
Sentenced[3]	69,832	61,978	4,672	1,478	143	1,561
1993						
Remand	63,236	53,442	7,072	1,477	403	842
Sentenced[3]	72,966	65,086	5,279	1,384	401	816
1994[2]						
Remand	68,414	57,420	7,937	1,512	553	992
Sentenced[3]	89,288	77,813	7,408	2,173	691	1,203

[1] A new classification for ethnic origin was introduced in 1992. It is congruent with that used for the Census of Population. Data for 1990 and 1991 is shown separately as the classification prior to 1992 is not directly comparable with that in later years.
[2] Provisional figures.
[3] Including fine defaulters.

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish a breakdown of the number of people in prison at the most recent count by *(a)* sex, *(b)* age group and *(c)* ethnic group; if he will publish the same figures for 3 May 1979; and if he will make a statement. [1533]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. A. J. Beith, dated 28 November 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question asking for a breakdown of the current prison population by sex, age group and ethnic origin and for the same breakdown on 3 May 1979.

Table one gives the age, sex and ethnic origin breakdown of the population for latest available date, 31 October 1995. Information on the ethnic breakdown of the prison population for 1979 is not available. An age and sex breakdown is available for June 1979 and is given in table two.

Justice Council

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the outcome of the Justice Council held on 23 to 24 November, giving details of all votes and all decisions which were determined by unanimity or without dissension. [1600]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 27 November 1995]:* My right hon. and learned Friend represented the United Kingdom at the Council which was held in Brussels on 23 November.

The Council agreed as A points, among other things, a draft resolution on the protection of witnesses, a draft decision on monitoring the implementation of texts adopted regarding admission of third country nationals, reports on the activities of the Europol drugs unit during the first half of 1995 and its programme of activities for the first half of 1996, the rules of procedure of the Europol management board, a draft report on simplified extradition procedure and a draft resolution on the status of third country nationals residing legally in the territory of member states of the European Union.

Following discussion, the Council agreed to a joint position on the definition of refugee status, a joint action on airport transit visas, a report on organised crime in 1994, and standard re-admission clauses for mixed agreements with third countries. The Council discussed the question of European Court of Justice jurisdiction in the Dublin convention which deals with the determination of the state responsible for examining applications for asylum lodged in one of the EU member states. The Council noted the current situation with regard to the draft external frontiers convention and discussed the challenge represented by drug trafficking. The insolvency convention was opened for signature and signed by 12 member states.

The Council had a full discussion on the issue of European Court of Justice jurisdiction in the Europol convention and on the difficulties for the United Kingdom presented by the draft joint action on racism and xenophobia. The Council also examined the draft protocol to the convention on fraud against the revenues of the European Community and the draft convention dealing with matrimonial matters. A number of issues relating to extradition were considered, and the Council discussed proposals my right hon. and learned Friend put forward to enhance co-operation in the fight against terrorism.

The Council received information from the presidency relating to EU relations with third countries and with the European Parliament in the fields covered by title VI of the treaty of European Union. It also examined certain procedural questions regarding working methods, decision-taking and finance.

Together with his colleagues, my right hon. and learned Friend signed a memorandum of understanding on the legal interception of telecommunications.

Child Murder (Joint Enterprises)

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement about joint enterprise cases in which a child loses its life. [2308]

Mr. Maclean: We have examined the relevant legal provisions to see whether there is any scope for changes to make it easier to secure convictions in joint enterprise cases in which a child dies. We have, however, been unable to identify any option for reform which would not itself create further injustice. The priority must be to obtain sufficient evidence in each case pointing to the guilt of one or both parties. The provisions of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 will make it more difficult for those who are guilty of such appalling crimes to hide behind their silence in police interviews and at trial. We will keep the law under review and consider any practical proposals for reform.

Murder Victims (Family Compensation)

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if he will make it his policy to allow the families of *(a)* all murder victims, *(b)* parents of adult victims, *(c)* the adult children of murder victims, *(d)* the unmarried partners of murder victims and *(e)* the fathers of illegitimate murder victims who applied for compensation under the tariff-based scheme of criminal injury compensation which was announced in April 1994 and subsequently withdrawn to make a new application under the terms of the new scheme he proposes to implement from April 1996 under the terms of the Criminal Injuries Compensation Act 1995. [2309]

Mr. Maclean: All applications received under the former tariff scheme fall to be considered or reconsidered under the terms of the 1990 scheme as the only scheme lawfully in force. To allow applicants in any particular category to withdraw a claim lodged between 1 April 1994 and 5 April 1995 and then reapply under the proposed new scheme would be wrong in principle and anomalous in practice.

Not all applicants in the categories mentioned who were eligible under the former tariff scheme are ineligible under the 1990 scheme. For example, parents of adult victims may have been dependent on their children and thus qualify for an award in respect of that dependency; so too might a common law spouse dependent on the deceased partner. There may be cases where such a claim either fails, or is treated less generously under the 1990 scheme criteria than might be the case under the proposed new tariff scheme. But we cannot reasonably adopt an arrangement whereby applicants since 1 April 1994 can select which scheme they wish to be bound by according to the perceived advantages and disadvantages.

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many applications were received from the families of murder victims in general and specifically from *(a)* parents of adult victims, *(b)* the adult children of murder victims, *(c)* the married partners of murder victims and *(d)* the fathers of illegitimate murder victims, under the tariff-based scheme of criminal injury compensation which was announced in April 1994 and subsequently withdrawn. [2293]

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 24 November 1995]:* A total of 1,246 applications in respect of fatal cases were received under the former tariff scheme. All applications received under that scheme are subject to consideration or reconsideration under the 1990 scheme. That has meant

making changes to the data held and dispersing the case papers to board members and staff for assessment. A precise analysis of the relationship between the applicant and the victim, and the other data requested, are not therefore readily available and could not be provided without disproportionate effort. The board has, however, provided the following summary of the position.

A total of 1,192 fatal applications were outstanding when the tariff scheme was withdrawn. About a third were from a parent or parents, some 30 per cent. were in respect of children under 18 years of age, about 20 per cent. were from children aged 18 or over, and some 15 per cent. were from spouses, whether formally married or regarded as a spouse in common law.

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much money was paid out to the families or murder victims in total and specifically to *(a)* parents of adult victims, *(b)* the adult children of murder victims and *(c)* the unmarried partners or murder victims and *(d)* the fathers of illegitimate murder victims under the tariff-based scheme of criminal injury compensation which was announced in April 1994 and subsequently withdrawn. [2295]

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 24 November 1995]:* The board advises that precise figures are not readily available.

Its estimate is that 40 applications resulted in provisional payment of awards, including funeral expenses, totalling some £200,000.

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate he has made of the total cost involved if all applications received from the families of murder victims and specifically from *(a)* parents of adult victims, *(b)* the adult children of murder victims, *(c)* the unmarried partners of murder victims and *(d)* the fathers of illegitimate murder victims were to be paid under the terms set out in the tariff-based scheme of criminal injury compensation which was announced in April 1994 and subsequently withdrawn. [2294]

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 24 November 1995]:* Taking account of the proportion of cases which might have failed the eligibility criteria—perhaps 20 per cent.—the total cost might have been of the order of £5 million. Assuming that 250 eligible applicants were from the specific categories mentioned, the estimate for these is in the range £1.25–£2.5 million.

Deregulation

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate he has made of the annual saving to business which will accrue from *(a)* the Deregulation (Greyhound Racing) Order 1995 and *(b)* the Deregulation (Sunday Dancing) Order 1995. [2024]

Mr. Kirkhope *[holding answer 27 November 1995]:* It is estimated that the proposal in the Deregulation (Greyhound Racing) Order to remove the requirement for an accountant to be present when the Tote is operated will result in cost savings of £260,000 a year. In addition the industry estimates that inter-track betting will increase turnover by 10 to 15 per cent. in its first year of operation. Details of compliance costs are given in the explanatory memorandum.

No direct cost savings were anticipated as a consequence of the Deregulation (Sunday Dancing) Order. The industry expected that the order would create new market opportunities and resultant financial benefits although these could not be quantified.

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what were the costs to public funds involved in preparing the cost-benefit assessment contained in the explanatory memorandum for *(a)* the Deregulation (Greyhound Racing) Order 1995 and *(b)* the Deregulation (Sunday Dancing) Order 1995. [2023]

Mr. Kirkhope *[holding answer 27 November 1995]:* Details of costs and benefits were sought as part of the public consultation exercise on the proposed Deregulation (Greyhound Racing) Order 1995 and the Deregulation (Sunday Dancing) Order.

Statutory Instruments

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many statutory instruments his Department sponsored in the last Session of Parliament; and how many of these *(a)* constituted a new rule or regulation, *(b)* were introduced to implement European Community directives and *(c)* amplify the minimum standards set out in an original European Community directive. [2456]

Mr. Howard: In the Session November 1994 to October 1995, 64 statutory instruments—excluding commencement orders—were made. Of these five related to changes in fee levels affecting business; nine either removed burdens on business or provided more favourable regimes; two, relating to video recordings, tightened the law. The remainder had no significant impact on business.

Only one of the statutory instruments implemented a European Community directive, and none amplified standards set out in an original European Community directive.

Departmental Drugs Branch

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list annual income from *(a)* fees, *(b)* charges and *(c)* fines what was the total number of staff employed (i) part time and (ii) full time; and what contribution his Department has made towards the annual running costs in each of the past three years in respect of the drugs branch of his Department. [2750]

Mr. Maclean: Drugs branch is a centrally funded part of the Home Office drugs division. It has four part-time and 28 full-time staff. Annual income from fees—there are no charges or fines—and running costs for each of the past three year were as follows:

	Fees (£)	*Fees (£)*
1992–93	318,693	895,614
1993–94	358,991	882,418
1994–95	409,200	875,666

Immigration (DNA)

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many dependants aged over 21 years have been allowed to enter the United Kingdom since the Government accepted DNA evidence as conclusive evidence of a relationship; and how many such dependants were allowed to enter the United Kingdom following decisions by Ministers to exercise their discretion exceptionally outside the immigration rules. [2549]

Mr Kirkhope: The information requested is not available. No separate statistics are maintained of dependants over the age of 21 admitted as a result of conclusive DNA evidence.

Witnesses (Media Payments)

Mr. Robathan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proposals he has regarding changes in the law relating to newspapers offering money to a witness in a criminal trial before that witness has given evidence in court. [511]

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 20 November 1995]:* The Government are concerned about the potential impact of payments to witnesses in criminal proceedings. We have sought reports from prosecuting counsel and others on the effect of such payments in the Rosemary West trial and will consider urgently, in the light of those reports, what further action is needed.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many cases in which people whose applications for political asylum were under consideration were not determined at the closest date to 31 December 1994 for which figures are available. [3143]

Mr. Kirkhope: As at 31 December 1994, there were 55,225 applications for asylum awaiting initial decisions. The number of people who had claimed asylum and were being detained on this date is not known. As at 18 November 1994, 654 persons, who at some stage had sought asylum including those awaiting removal following refusal of their applications as well as those whose applications were under consideration or subject to appeal, were being held in detention.

Ms Janet Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many applications for asylum have been rejected on safe third country grounds to date. [1671]

Mr. Kirkhope: A total of 865 asylum applications were refused on safe third country grounds in 1994 and 1,205 in the first nine months of 1995. A nationality split is available in table 4.3 of the Home Office statistical bulletin, "Asylum Statistics United Kingdom 1994", issue 15/95. A copy of this publication is available in the Library.

Ms Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement about the short procedure pilot scheme introduced in May 1995 for processing asylum claims. [1689]

Mr. Kirkhope: I refer the hon. Member to the statement made to the House by my right hon. and learned Friend on Monday 20 November, at column 335-38.

Ms Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many asylum applications are currently waiting to be heard. [1686]

Mr. Kirkhope: A total of 66,665 asylum applications were awaiting an initial decision as at 31 October 1995.

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many asylum seekers whose cases *(a)* have yet to be determined and *(b)* have been determined are (i) currently detained and (ii) currently detained in prisons; and what is the average period of their detention. [986]

Mr. Kirkhope: As at 21 November 1995, a total of 776 persons who had at some stage sought asylum were detained. This figure includes people awaiting removal following refusal of their applications as well as those whose applications were under consideration or subject to appeal. Of this figure, 267 had been in detention less than one month, 99 between one and two months, 304 between two and six months, 89 between six and 12 months, and 17 had been detained for longer than 12 months.

Information on the stage of application and place of detention of people who have sought asylum is given in the table.

Number of people detained on 21 November 1995 who have sought asylum, by place of detention and stage of application

	Awaiting initial decision on application	*Awaiting result of appeal*	*Awaiting removal after application refused*	*Other*	*Total*
Detained in prison service establishments	63	207	94	14	378
Detained in other places of detention	89	188	57	64	398
Total detained	152	395	151	78	776

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will provide a breakdown of the number of asylum seekers currently detained under Immigration Act powers by *(a)* nationality, *(b)* gender, *(c)* length of detention, *(d)* place of detention and *(e)* immigration status at the time of application. [549]

Mr. Kirkhope: As at 21 November 1995, a total of 776 persons who had at some stage sought asylum were detained. This figure includes people awaiting removal following refusal of their applications as well as those whose applications were under consideration or subject to appeal. Of this figure, 267 had been in detention less than

one month, 99 between one and two months, 304 between two and six months, 89 between six and 12 months, and 17 had been detained for longer than 12 months.

Information on the gender, immigration status, nationality and location of those detained, as at 21 November 1995, is provided in tables 1 to 3.

Table 1: Number of people detained on 21 November 1995 who had sought asylum by immigration status and gender

Immigration status	*Male*	*Female*	*Total*
Port case	363	34	397
Illegal entrant case	320	8	328
Deportation case	49	2	51
Total	732	44	776

Table 2: Number of people detained on 21 November 1995 who had sought asylum, by nationality

	Number
Afghanistan	6
Albania	4
Algeria	78
Angola	9
Bangladesh	15
China	48
Colombia	5
Cote D'Ivoire	3
Cuba	3
Cyprus	5
Ecuador	3
Ethiopia	3
Gambia	52
Ghana	34
India	106
Iran	9
Iraq	2
Jamaica	7
Kenya	24
Lebanon	4
Liberia	13
Morocco	8
Niger	2
Nigeria	107
Pakistan	31
Peru	3
Poland	8
Romania	35
Sierra Leone	8
Somalia	9
Sri Lanka	19
Sudan	3
Tanzania	5
Togo	2
Tunisia	3
Turkey	24
Uganda	8
Former USSR	15
Former Yugoslavia	9
Zaire	17
Other nationalities	17
Nationality not known	10
Total	776

Table 3: Number of persons detained who have claimed asylum as at 21 November 1995, by place of detention

Place of detention	*Number detained*
Prisons/YOIs	
HMP Rochester	160
HMP Haslar	93
HMP Winson Green	43
HMP Greenock	11
HMP Wormwood Scrubs	11
HMP Crumlin Road Belfast	9
HMP Armley Leeds	7
HMP Liverpool	5
HMP Brixton	4
HMP Wolds	4
HMP Belmarsh	4
HMP Craiginchess Aberdeen	3
HMP Edinburgh Saughton	3
HMP Doncaster	2
HMP Hindley	2
HMP Chelmsford	2
HMP The Mount	2
HMP Exeter	2
Other HM Prisons	9
Total	378
Other places of detention	
Campsfield House	164
Harmondsworth	99
Gatwick Detention Centre	44
Dover Habour Board	31
Stansted	14
Queens Building	13
Newhaven	9
Manchester Airport Detention Suite	5
Dover West	3
Other Detention Centres	2
Police cells	14
Total	398
Grand total	776

External Frontiers Convention

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proposals have emerged from within *(a)* the Council of Ministers and *(b)* the Justice and Home Affairs Council to resolve disputes between member states with regard to the draft convention on external borders. [2827]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 27 November 1995]:* At its meeting on 23 November the Justice and Home Affairs Council received a progress report on the state of discussions on the draft external frontiers convention. The report recorded the presidency's hope that outstanding issues could be resolved as soon as possible. A copy of the progress report is being placed in the Library.

Nigerian Criminals

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans the national criminal intelligence service has to conduct an inquiry into the flow of currency between Nigeria and Britain. [2810]

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer on 27 November 1995]:* None. The national criminal intelligence service is already aware of the threat to the United Kingdom posed by some Nigerian criminals and monitors the situation on a regular basis.

Asylum and Immigration

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what consultations he held, and from which bodies he sought information, opinions and advice about asylum and immigration problems. [2538]

Mr. Kirkhope *[holding answer 27 November 1995]:* We discuss these matters regularly with a wide range of organisations.

Ethnic Minority Business Group

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how often the ethnic minority business advisory group meets; when it last met; who are its members; and what issues it is currently pursuing. [1936]

Mr. Kirkhope *[holding answer 27 November 1995]:* The ethnic minority business advisory group last met on 20 September 1994. It was formally disbanded in September 1995. Its membership consisted of ethnic minority business agencies, representatives of mainstream businesses and organisations, and Government Departments.

Oleoresin Capsicum

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if the police or Prison Service are considering oleoresin capsicum as a possible chemical incapacitant for use in their operations; [2369]

(2) what *(a)* biomedical and *(b)* other technical testing of the chemical agent oleoresin capsicum have recently been carried out by the police scientific development branch, with particular reference to the effects of the agents when dispersed as an aerosol spray; with what results; and what further testing or trials of OC currently are taking place or planned; [2368]

(3) what recent *(a)* biomedical or *(b)* other technical testing of the chemical agent oleoresin capsicum has recently been carried out by his Department; and with what results. [2317]

Mr. Maclean: The Home Office police scientific development branch has reviewed all the available information about the effects of incapacitant products containing oleoresin capsicum. In addition, research commissioned by my right hon. and learned Friend has been undertaken into the possible carcinogenic effects of oleoresin capsicum's main incapacitating ingredient, capsaicin. That research indicates that capsaicin is not a genotoxic carcinogen.

My right hon. and learned Friend has, however, concluded, in consultation with the Association of Chief Police Officers, that currently too little is known about oleoresin capsicum's effects on health for it to be considered for use by the police in this country.

Further work has been undertaken to determine methods of analysing oleoresin capsicum products. The Home Office police scientific development branch will continue to review any relevant research undertaken elsewhere.

The Prison Service has no proposals to use products containing oleoresin capsicum at this time.

Police Gallantry Awards

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will set out the rules governing the recommendations for gallantry awards to police officers, with particular reference to the circumstances in which a lesser award may be made than the one for which a recommendation has been made. [2237]

Mr. Maclean: There are four categories of civilian gallantry award which may be made to police officers:

(i) of the highest order (George cross)

(ii) of an extremely high order (George medal)

(iii) of a high order (Queen's gallantry medal)

(iv) not up to the foregoing standards, but entailing risk to life and meriting recognition (Queen's commendation for bravery or the Queen's commendation for bravery in the air)

The category for which a case may be considered depends on the circumstances of the case and partly upon the risk of death to the person being nominated.

There are three main factors which must be evident in the actions taken. Firstly, the act of bravery must be carried out in the knowledge of the risk. Secondly the act must show persistence in the face of danger and, thirdly, there must have been a degree of choice in taking positive action. A lesser award will be made than the one recommended if the circumstances of the case do not merit a higher award.

Princess of Wales

Mr. Hain: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis is taking to investigate allegations by the Princess of Wales that her telephone calls were illegally intercepted. [2366]

Mr. Maclean: I understand from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis that no such formal complaint has been received.

Illegal Drugs

Mr. Chris Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list by substance the total volume of illegal drugs seized by law enforcement agencies in Britain annually since 1984. [2124]

Mr. Maclean: The information requested is contained in tables 2.4 and 2.5 of the Home Office Statistical Bulletin, "Statistics of drug seizures and offenders dealt with, United Kingdom, 1993", a copy of which is in the Library.

Mr. Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the total sums spent by law enforcement agencies in Britain in detecting and seizing illegal drugs annually since 1984 in constant prices. [2122]

Mr. Maclean: This information is not available. The sums spent on tackling drug trafficking cannot be separated from expenditure on other aspects of law enforcement.

Mr. Chris Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will estimate and list by substance the total volume of illegal drugs available for sale in Britain annually since 1984. [2123]

Mr. Maclean: Since drug misuse is a clandestine activity, it is impossible to estimate the volume of controlled drugs which is circulating illegally.

Police Support Functions

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what guidelines he has issued to chief constables in England and Wales regarding the outsourcing and privatisation of police support functions. [2128]

Mr. Maclean: It is the Government's policy to introduce the benefits of the market place to police support functions by extending compulsory competitive tendering to these areas. In support of this policy, the Home Office issued guidance earlier this year on the cleaning of police buildings, 19 April, on police legal services—2 March on police construction-related and property services—2 March, and on police personnel service—9 November.

Summer Time

Mr. Michael Spicer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will reconsider the current policy of putting back the clocks by one hour at the end of the summer. [2130]

Mr. Kirkhope: This system of operating without summer time and keeping the clocks on Greenwich mean time plus one hour throughout the year was tried between 1968 and 1971. We have no plans to revert to it.

Prison Ombudsman

Mr Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on how many cases from Doncaster prison the prisons ombudsman has reported: and if he will make a statement. [2274]

Miss Widdecombe: Since the prisons ombudsman began to take complaints from prisoners on 24 October 1994 he has received 26 complaints from Doncaster. Twenty of these were ineligible—19 because the prison has not exhausted the internal request complaint system and one because it came from a third party. The eligibility of two cases is currently being considered. Investigations have taken place into the remaining three complaints and in one of these cases the complaint was upheld. This case involved property stolen from a prisoner's cell, apparently as a result of a design fault in the cell windows at Doncaster. The prison ombudsman recommended that the prisoner involved should receive compensation for the loss and the Prison Service accepted this recommendation.

Prison Suicides

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many attempted suicides and suicides have occurred in each prison for each year since 1992. [2139]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter had been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Neil Gerrard, dated 28 November 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about suicides in Prison Service Establishments since 1992.

The attached table gives the number of reported incidents of attempted suicide and the number of self inflicted deaths at each establishment for the years 1992, 1993, 1994 and 1995 (to 21 November).

Establishment	*Attempted suicides*				*Self inflicted deaths*			
	1992	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*
Acklington	4	3	4	1	0	0	0	1
Albany	3	4	3	6	0	0	1	0
Aldington	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Ashwell	2	1	2	3	2	0	0	0
Askham Grange	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Aylesbury	8	5	4	4	0	0	0	1
Bedford	0	2	4	0	0	0	1	2
Belmarsh	14	21	24	22	0	1	0	2
Birmingham	9	5	4	0	1	0	1	2
Blakenhurst	not open	4	35	26	not open	0	0	1
Blantyre House	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Blundeston	2	2	0	2	0	0	0	2
Brinsford	10	10	6	22	1	0	1	0
Bristol	4	7	6	11	1	2	0	0
Brixton	24	26	23	6	1	1	3	0
Brockhill	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Buckley Hall	not open	not open	0	1	not open	not open	0	0
Bullingdon	3	5	8	6	1	0	0	1
Bullwood Hall	7	7	5	5	0	0	0	0
Camp Hill	5	3	8	9	0	0	0	0
Canterbury	9	11	4	0	0	1	0	0
Cardiff	6	2	1	6	0	0	2	0
Castington	2	4	1	5	0	0	0	0

Establishment	Attempted suicides				Self inflicted deaths			
	1992	1993	1994	1995	1992	1993	1994	1995
Channingswood	0	0	3	2	0	0	0	0
Chelmsford	20	7	8	3	0	0	0	1
Coldingley	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
Cookham Wood	2	0	0	2	0	0	0	0
Dartmoor	2	16	10	18	0	1	1	0
Deerbolt	2	5	9	15	1	0	0	0
Doncaster	not open	not open	59	37	not open	not open	2	1
Dorchester	6	2	3	1	1	0	0	0
Dover	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Downview	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
Drake Hall	3	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
Durham	11	12	21	13	2	1	0	0
East Sutton Park	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
East Wood Park	0	closed	closed	closed	0	closed	closed	closed
Elmley	18	9	23	8	1	0	1	0
Erlestoke	2	4	1	2	0	0	0	2
Everthorpe	4	4	1	3	0	0	0	0
Exeter	30	23	21	9	0	4	1	2
Featherstone	0	3	5	7	0	0	0	1
Feltham	16	5	21	1	2	0	0	0
Ford	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Frankland	8	7	13	6	0	0	0	1
Full Sutton	3	7	12	27	0	1	0	1
Garth	1	6	2	8	0	0	1	1
Gartree	1	2	7	3	1	0	1	0
Glen Parva	9	5	4	4	1	0	0	0
Gloucester	6	11	11	0	0	0	0	0
Grendon	4	1	0	0	0	0	2	1
Guys Marshi	1	4	4	0	0	0	0	0
Haslar	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0
Hatfield	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0
Haverigg	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	1
Hewell Grange	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0
Highdown	1	14	20	9	0	1	1	4
Highpoint	3	4	2	6	0	0	0	0
Hindley	24	19	13	3	1	1	0	0
Hollesley Bay	2	3	0	2	0	0	0	0
Holloway	18	4	7	4	1	1	0	1
Holme House	9	30	7	6	0	2	0	0
Hull	7	12	20	22	2	1	2	1
Huntercombe	16	5	2	0	0	0	0	0
Kingston	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0
Kirkham	2	0	1	1	0	0	0	0
Kirklevington	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Lancaster	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0
Lancaster Farms	0	13	1	3	0	0	0	0
Latchmere House	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Leeds	2	1	0	8	2	2	1	1
Leicester	0	5	14	19	1	3	3	1
Lewes	5	3	7	1	1	1	0	1
Leyhill	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Lincoln	3	6	9	8	0	3	1	1
Lindholme	15	10	2	2	0	1	0	0
Littlehey	14	8	4	11	1	0	0	0
Liverpool	19	54	33	6	1	2	5	1
Long Lartin	5	7	6	6	1	1	1	1
Low Newton	9	16	4	8	0	0	2	2
Maidstone	9	4	1	0	1	0	0	0
Manchester	1	6	7	22	0	2	2	0
Moorland	52	58	51	2	0	0	3	0
Morton Hall	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
The Mount	2	3	4	3	0	0	0	1
New Hall	2	2	1	0	0	0	1	0
Northallerton	2	2	9	5	0	0	1	0
North Eye	0	closed	closed	closed	0	closed	closed	closed
North Sea Camp	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Norwich	18	25	3	10	2	2	0	4
Nottingham	1	3	5	1	0	1	0	1
Onley	14	15	6	1	0	0	0	0
Oxford	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Parkhurst	1	1	6	12	1	1	2	0
Pentonville	18	54	25	14	4	0	0	2
Portland	18	4	6	1	0	0	1	0

Establishment	Attempted suicides				Self inflicted deaths			
	1992	1993	1994	1995	1992	1993	1994	1995
Preston	10	14	9	10	0	0	1	1
Pucklechurch	4	3	1	2	0	0	0	0
Ranby	4	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Reading	4	3	1	2	0	0	0	0
Risley	46	19	10	20	0	0	1	0
Rochester	12	2	12	5	0	0	0	0
Rudgate	0	0	0	—	0	0	0	—
Send	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Shepton Mallet	1	0	4	0	0	1	0	0
Shrewsbury	7	4	3	0	0	0	1	0
Spring Hill	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Stafford	8	6	2	3	1	0	0	0
Standford Hill	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Stocken	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Stoke Heath	2	3	7	5	0	0	0	1
Styal	1	4	3	3	1	0	0	0
Sudbury	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Swaleside	8	5	8	3	1	0	1	0
Swansea	10	3	4	4	0	0	1	1
Swinfen Hall	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	0
Thorn Cross	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Thorpe Arch	1	0	0	—	0	0	0	—
Usk	0	1	3	1	0	0	1	0
The Verne	5	0	4	2	0	0	1	0
Wakefield	2	2	6	3	1	3	1	1
Wandsworth	5	19	31	19	0	2	4	0
Wayland	5	7	1	5	0	0	0	0
Wealstun	—	—	—	0	—	—	—	0
Wellingborough	0	1	0	2	1	0	0	0
Werrington	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0
Wetherby	2	2	1	2	1	0	0	0
Whatton	0	0	4	3	0	0	0	1
Whitemoor	3	11	9	5	0	0	0	1
Winchester	4	9	2	4	0	1	1	0
Wolds	0	7	17	35	0	1	0	1
Woodhill	2	8	12	0	0	1	1	0
Wormwood Scrubs	19	21	16	38	1	0	3	0
Wymott	1	3	3	1	0	0	0	0
Total	728	814	841	683	42	47	61	55

South Africa (Oil Embargo)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prosecutions were successfully brought against individuals and organisations who breached the oil embargo against South Africa. [2243]

Mr. Maclean: Court proceedings data held centrally by my Department do not identify this type of offence.

Children's Certificates

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to introduce a standardised system for the issue of children's certificate liquor licences. [2126]

Mr. Kirkhope: Among the questions we are considering in our review of the operation of the system of children's certificates is whether there is a need for greater uniformity in the terms on which they are granted.

National Lottery

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what plans he has to ensure that applications from animal welfare charities for lottery funding are considered; [2318]

(2) what representations he has received from animal welfare charities on the allocation of funds arising from the national lottery. [2319]

Mr. Kirkhope: We have received a number of such representations. The national lottery charities board is responsible for distributing part of national lottery proceeds allocated for charitable expenditure. My right hon. and learned Friend has issued directions to the board. These require it to take into account the need to ensure over time the distribution of money to a reasonably wide spread and range of recipients, including small organisations and those operating purely at a local level. The board—after consultation with the sector, including animal welfare charities—has announced themes for

future grant rounds which reflect this direction. Animal welfare charities are welcome to apply for grants, and in doing so will no doubt take account of the programme announced by the board.

Invoices

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many orders and firms are represented by the 8 per cent. of invoices not paid by his Department within 30 days or in accordance with contractual agreements in 1994–95; and how many of these are related to firms with fewer than 500 employees. [939]

Mr. Howard *[holding answer 22 November 1995]:* The number of invoices not paid by my Department within 30 days or in accordance with contractual agreements in 1994–95 was approximately 46,400 out of a total of 580,000 valid invoices. Information on the number of individual purchase orders and firms to which these invoices related is not available except at disproportionate cost.

Illegal Immigration

Ms Janet Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions he has had with the employers' organisations about taking action against employers for employing illegal immigrants. [1670]

Mr. Kirkhope: Ministers have met representatives of a number of employers' organisations to discuss this matter.

Visitors

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what would be the cost to public funds of recording the dates on which visitors to the United Kingdom leave the country. [1990]

Mr. Kirkhope: We estimate the costs of establishing and running an information technology system capable of providing such data would be £66 million over 10 years. There would also be considerable additional Immigration Service staffing and other costs.

Mr. Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimates he has made of the number of people who entered the United Kingdom on a visitor's visa since 1990 and have overstayed. [1991]

Mr. Kirkhope: As the hon. Member was informed in the replies given to his questions on 29 March 1994 at column *612* and 15 April 1994 at column *312*, comprehensive information on which an estimate could be based of the number of visitors who remain in the United Kingdom after the expiry of their leave is not available.

Prison Population

Ms Janet Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the number of prisoners currently being held in *(a)* Prison Service prisons and *(b)* privately run prisons. [1687]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Ms Janet Anderson, dated 28 November 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the number of prisoners currently being held in Prison Service prisons and privately run prisons.

On 23 November 1995, 52,411 prisoners were being held in Prison Service prisons. Of these, 2,103 prisoners were being held in contractually managed establishments.

Prison Places

Ms Janet Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many additional prison places he expects will be available for use by the end of 1995–96. [1693]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Ms Janet Anderson, dated 28 November 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the number of additional prison places expected to be available by the end of 1995–96.

The Certified Normal Accommodation available for uses in prisons in England and Wales on 23 November 1995 was 51,328. Some 1,600 additional places are currently expected to be available by the end of March 1996.

Drug Trafficking

Ms Janet Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the average sentence handed down for trafficking in class B drugs to *(a)* men and *(b)* women. [1690]

Mr. Maclean: The information is given in the table.

Average sentence length given for persons sentence to immediate custody for offences of trafficking in class B drugs by sex, type of court and type of offence, 1994

England and Wales

Type of offence	*Sex*	*Average sentence lengths (months)* *Magistrates' courts*	*Crown court*
Production or being concerned in the production of a controlled class B drug[1]	M	—	57.0
	F	—	—
Supplying or offering to supply a controlled class B drug	M	3.6	16.1
	F	3.0	11.9
Having possession of a controlled class B drug with intent to supply	M	3.5	14.7
	F	1.5	10.3

Average sentence length given for persons sentence to immediate custody for offences of trafficking in class B drugs by sex, type of court and type of offence, 1994

England and Wales

Type of offence	Sex	Average sentence lengths (months) Magistrates' courts	Crown court
Offences in relation to the unlawful *importation* of a drug controlled under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971[1]	M	3.1	51.2
	F	—	55.8
Offences in relation to the unlawful *exportation* of a drug controlled under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971[2]	M	—	49.2
	F	—	26.4

[1] Excludes production of cannabis (growth of plant).
[2] Class of drug not separately specified.

Ministerial Proposals

Ms Janet Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what sectors of his Department have been involved in the drawing up and implementation of his proposals published on 12 October. [1902]

Mr. Howard: I draw as necessary on all the relevant parts of my Department.

Fines

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the court procedures used in *(a)* Scotland and *(b)* England for the recovery of fines as a civil debt. [1978]

Mr. Maclean: A fine imposed by a court is not a civil debt. In England and Wales, magistrates' courts have a wide range of powers to enforce payment of fines and other financial penalties. The Lord Chancellor has established a working group to identify ways of improving the effectiveness of these powers. Court procedures relating to fine enforcement in Scotland are the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland.

Television Licence Fines

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the total annual cost in England and Wales of imprisoning *(a)* men, *(b)* women and *(c)* men and women for the non-payment of a television licence fine. [1925]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary director general of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Ms Liz Lynne, dated 28 November 1995.

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about what is the total annual cost in England and Wales of imprisoning *(a)* men, *(b)* women, and *(c)* men and women for non-payment of a television licence fine.

Information on the cost of prisoners according to their type of offence is not collected centrally. On the basis of the number normally in custody—under 10—we estimate the costs of imprisoning these defaulters to be up to £200,000 a year, approximately 67% for men and 33% for women.

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the discrepancies of imprisonment rates for television licence fine defaulters in *(a)* England and Wales and *(b)* Scotland. [1979]

Mr. Maclean: Imprisonment cannot be imposed for television licence evasion. It may be imposed by the courts only where an offender has failed to pay a fine imposed upon conviction for failing to have a television licence. A total of 763 people in England and Wales were imprisoned in 1994 for non payment of a fine imposed for television licence evasion. Information is not held centrally on the proportionate use of imprisonment for fine defaulters, where the fine was imposed for television licence evasion, as between England and Wales. Court procedures relating to fine enforcement in Scotland are the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland.

Energy Efficiency

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what progress has been made towards cutting energy consumption in Government buildings for which he has responsibility in each year since 1990. [1445]

Mr. Howard: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my hon. Friend the Minister for Construction, Planning and Energy Efficiency to my hon. Friend the Member for Surrey, East (Mr. Ainsworth) on 17 May 1995, *Official Report*, columns *260–62*.

Final figures for 1994–95 are not yet available, but are likely to be broadly in line with those for 1992–93 and 1993–94.

Public Interest Immunity Certificates

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list all those in his Department who have authority to issue public interest immunity certificates; how many such certificates have been issued in each of the last five years; and what were the main reasons for them. [1430]

Mr. Howard: A claim for public interest immunity is normally made by the appropriate Minister. Within the Home Office central records of public interest immunity certificates used in legal proceedings have only been kept since 1992. The available figures are:

Year	Number of PII certificates
1992	4
1993	5
1994	7
1995	12

The certificates have been issued to protect information relating to the Security Service and information relating to the security and operation of prisons.

Prisoners, Leeds

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what percentage of inmates at Leeds gaol were *(a)* unemployed and *(b)* homeless before entering prison for each year since 1990. [1464]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. John Battle, dated 28 November 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the percentage of inmates at Leeds jail who were *(a)* unemployed and *(b)* homeless before entering prison for each year since 1990.

This information is not available as Leeds prison does not keep records of its previous prisoners. However, research findings from the National Prison Survey 1991 (from a random sample of the prison population) indicated that approximately 13% of the prison population had no permanent home just before imprisonment and 33% were unemployed.

Immigration

Sir Ivan Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* admissions and *(b)* refusals for immigration and settlement in the United Kingdom have been made in each of the last 10 years. [1551]

Mr. Kirkhope: The information requested is given in the table.

Number of persons granted and refused settlement 1985–June 1995

	Persons accepted for settlement[1]	*Persons overseas initially refused*[2] *an entry clearance for settlement*[3]	*Persons in the UK initially refused*[4] *settlement*
1985	55,360	n/a	260
1986	47,820	n/a	510
1987	45,980	n/a	540
1988	49,280	n/a	490
1989	49,650	7,290	800
1990	53,200	8,240	1,060
1991	53,900	6,780	1,750
1992	52,570	7,300	2,360
1993	55,640	8,690	3,220
1994	55,110	9,690	3,020
1995[5]	27,890	n/a	1,730

n/a not available.

[1] Including persons admitted to the United Kingdom on a temporary basis and subsequently granted settlement following a change of immigration status, as well as persons granted settlement on arrival or admitted in a category leading to settlement and subsequently granted settlement.

[2] Some were subsequently granted an entry clearance for settlement following an appeal.

[3] Includes applications for a certificate of entitlement to the right of abode.

[4]

[5] January to June, Provisional figures.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Student Costs

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the total cost and what is the cost of *(a)* fees, *(b)* student maintenance, *(c)* student loans and *(d)* other to the Northern Ireland office of supporting students from Northern Ireland in places of higher education elsewhere in the United Kingdom. [1768]

Mr. Ancram *[holding answer 27 November 1995]:* In the 1994–95 academic year, the total cost for Northern Ireland domiciled students on first degree, or equivalent courses at institutions of higher education elsewhere in the United Kingdom was £30.8 million. Expenditure on tuition fees was £15.4 million as was that on maintenance grant, including allowances and supplementary maintenance.

The information on loans is not readily available from the Student Loans Company and could be obtained only from the company at disproportionate cost.

Information about access funds which are administered by the higher education institutions is not available.

Student Statistics

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement about the ratio of provision of higher education places and qualified students in Northern Ireland, England, Wales and Scotland. [1769]

Mr. Ancram *[holding reply 27 November 1995]:* Available information relates to students studying in each of the four territories, and the number of students domiciled in each territory. The 1993–94 figures in respect of full-time undergraduates are as follows:

	(a) Full-time undergraduate students studying in territory	*(b) Full-time undergraduate students domiciled in territory*	*(c) Ratio of places : students (a) : (b)*
Northern Ireland	23,000	30,200	0.8 : 1
England	755,200	704,100	1.1 : 1
Wales	52,600	43,800	1.2 : 1
Scotland	117,400	92,100	1.3 : 1

Legislative Repeals and Reviews

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what legislation from his Department passed in the last five years contains provision for statutory repeal or review. [2037]

Mr. Ancram *[holding answer 27 November 1995]:* In Northern Ireland the Emergency Provisions Act 1991 is required to be renewed annually in order to keep the statutes in force.

As part of the Government's deregulation initiative Northern Ireland Departments have been reviewing, on a regular basis, legislation which affects business.

Dry Stone Walls

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what *(a)* grants and *(b)* other support will be available from his Department for the conservation and protection of dry stone walls from April 1996. [2329]

Mr. Ancram *[holding answer 27 November 1995]:* The only scheme with this provision in Northern Ireland will be the sub-programme for agriculture and rural development. It was suspended temporarily from 24 March 1995 to allow an assessment to be made of the financial commitments to cover the applications already received. No decision has been made yet when it can be reopened.

This scheme offered 50 per cent. grant rate on a maximum expenditure of £25,000 on a variety of items including the provision, replacement and improvement of dry stone walls.

Electricity

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what proposals or plans have been notified to his Department to deal with increased demand for electricity in *(a)* Newry *(b)* Armagh and *(c)* South Armagh. [1239]

Mr. Ancram: My Department has been informed by Northern Ireland Electricity that the maximum demand in the Newry and South Armagh area is increasing by 2.7 per cent per annum and in Armagh by 2.5 per cent. per annum.

NIE plc have further advised that development plans covering these areas are currently being implemented. These include the provision of new substations, providing new 33kv and 11kv circuits, replacing obsolete equipment and carrying out extensive network refurbishment.

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans there are to resolve outstanding problems of low voltage supply in *(a)* Newry and *(b)* South Armagh. [1240]

Mr. Ancram: This is primarily a matter for Northern Ireland Electricity plc. NIE has informed my Department that it is implementing an extensive programme of works in these areas.

Camlough Lake

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what progress has been made in determining the future ownership and usage of Camlough lake, South Armagh. [1241]

Mr. Moss: The Department of the Environment's Water Executive inherited water abstraction rights at Camlough lake at local government reorganisation in 1973. In August 1994 it published notice of its intention to vest the bed and soil of the lake. This is necessary to ensure the sufficiency of water obtained from this source for the pubic supply and to facilitate effective protection of the quality of water supplies.

A number of representations about the vesting proposals have been received. Discussions are currently underway with objectors, including those with parallel use proposals for the lake such as recreational development and hydro-electric power generation. The Water Executive's position in such discussions is that any supplementary development must be compatible with the continuing use of the lake as a water supply source for the Newry area, especially in regard to the safeguarding of water quality. If agreement is not forthcoming in these discussions the Department will convene a local inquiry at which the outstanding issues can be presented and progress made to determining the lake's future ownership and use.

It is my understanding, as conveyed in a recent letter from my noble Friend, Baroness Denton, to the chief executive of Newry and Mourne district council, that the Director-General of Electricity Supply is still considering the complex issues involved in proposals for pumped storage electricity generation at Camlough.

Incapacity Benefit

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) what proportion of decisions to refuse incapacity benefit have been *(a)* overturned on appeal and *(b)* are pending a decision since the benefit was introduced in April; [1242]

(2) what is the total number of applications received for incapacity benefit since April; [1243]

(3) what is the average length of time taken to process an incapacity benefit appeal; [1244]

(4) how many decisions to award incapacity benefit have been issued since April; [1245]

(5) how many decisions to refuse incapacity benefit applications have been issued since April; [1246]

(6) what is the average cost of each incapacity benefit appeal. [1247]

Mr. Moss: Responsibility for the subject in question has been delegated to the Social Security Agency under its chief executive, Mr. Alec Wylie. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Alec Wylie to Mr. Seamus Mallon, dated 28 November 1995:

I have been asked to reply to your recent parliamentary questions in which you asked for some statistical information on Incapacity Benefit.

Some 30,000 claims to Incapacity Benefit were received from 13 April 1995 to 31 October 1995. Unfortunately, records are not maintained on the actual number of claims which were either allowed or refused but I can tell you that 2474 claims were disallowed during this period solely on incapacity grounds. Not included in this figure are claims disallowed for other reasons such as insufficient contributions, last claims and dependents claims.

As we do not maintain statistics on the number of claims refused, I'm afraid I cannot provide you with the number of appeals received as a proportion of the overall number of refusals. However, a total of 358 appeals has been received by the Agency since April 1995, 50 appeals have been heard, 19 of which were allowed by the Appeal Tribunal. Of the remaining 308 appeals outstanding, 81 are awaiting hearing by an Appeal Tribunal and the remainder, the majority of which have been received within the last couple of months, are still in the process of being prepared.

Finally, the average length of time taken to process an incapacity appeal from the date of receipt in the Agency until the appeal papers are despatched to the Independent Tribunal Service for hearing is 36 working days. However, no information is available on the average cost of each incapacity appeal.

I hope you find this information helpful but if you require any further clarification please let me know.

Statutory Instruments

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many statutory instruments his Department sponsored in the last Session of Parliament and how many of these *(a)* constituted a new rule or regulation, *(b)* were introduced to implement European Community directives and *(c)* amplify the minimum standards set out in an original European Community directive. [2463]

Sir John Wheeler: Three statutory instruments were sponsored directly by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. None of these constituted a new rule or regulation. None of them were introduced to implement European Community directives.

In addition 16 Orders in Council were made in the last session of Parliament, under schedule 1 paragraph of the Northern Ireland Act 1974.

Eight of the Orders in Council constituted a new rule, that is their main purpose was not to amend, supersede or replace earlier rules or regulations.

None of the Orders in Council were introduced to implement European Community directives.

In addition, 35 statutory instruments were sponsored by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland acting with Great Britain Departments. Four of these were introduced to implement European Community directives.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Local Government

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list the Acts of Parliament including consolidation Acts that affect local government that have been introduced by her Department since January 1994. [29]

Mr. Paice: There are none.

Training and Enterprise Council, Barnsley and Doncaster

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment when she expects the Barnsley and Doncaster TEC's report and accounts for 1994–95 to be published; and if she will make a statement. [2275]

Mr. Paice: The Barnsley and Doncaster training and enterprise council's annual report for 1994–95 was published in August 1995. A copy has been placed in the Library. Further copies can be obtained by contacting the TEC.

A copy of the TEC's annual accounts for 1994–95 were lodged with Companies House in November 1995 and have been placed in the Library.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how much money has been allocated to the Barnsley and Doncaster TEC for training from *(a)* the single regeneration budget and *(b)* the single regeneration budget challenge fund. [2239]

Mr. Paice: The money for successful bids to the single regeneration budget challenge fund round 1 was allocated to the partnerships who submitted the bid, not to individual members of the partnership. I understand that successful bids for challenge fund round 2 are expected to be announced in December.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what assessment she has made of the level of administrative costs of the Barnsley and Doncaster TEC; and if she will make a statement. [2276]

Mr. Paice: This is an operational matter for Barnsley and Doncaster training and enterprise council.

Executive Agencies (Travel)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list for each of the executive agencies for the last financial year in respect of overseas travel by agency staff *(a)* the costs of the travel, *(b)* the countries visited and *(c)* the posts held by the staff concerned. [2289]

Mr. Robin Squire: Two executive agencies report to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State: the Teachers' Pensions Agency and the Employment Service.

In the last financial year there was no overseas travel by staff of the Teachers' Pension Agency.

Details of overseas travel by staff of the Employment Service are not separately recorded and could not be provided without disproportionate cost. The number of Employment Service staff who travel overseas is however small. Visits are predominantly to European Union and former eastern block countries in connection with employment and training developments. The cost of some Employment Service visit is met from the know-how fund, the United Kingdom's programme of bilateral assistance to the countries of Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. Employment services are among the priorities in these countries.

Pupil Registration Regulations

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans she has further to update the Pupils Registration Regulations 1956.

Mr. Robin Squire: Revised and updated pupil registration regulations came into effect on 1 September 1995 and copies were sent to all schools and local education authorities in England. We will consider whether any additional guidance is necessary in the light of the West case.

Playing Fields

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what estimate she has made of the area of playing fields in England that has been sold off since 1981. [2672]

Mrs. Gillan: The information requested is not held centrally.

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many school playing fields have been sold in England since the introduction of regulation DES 909 in 1981. [2589]

Mrs. Gillan: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) on 19 October, *Official Report*, column *376*.

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is the value of playing fields in England that have been sold off since 1981. [2586]

Mrs. Gillan: The information requested is not held centrally.

Education (School Premises) Regulations

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what research her Department has commissioned into the impact on children's *(a)* learning, *(b)* health, *(c)* safety and *(d)* discipline, arising from the proposed changes to the Education (School Premises) Regulations 1981. [2715]

Mrs. Gillan: The Education (School Premises) Regulations 1981 were reviewed by officials and professional advisers in the Department and the Welsh Office. The views of LEAs, school governors, teachers' association and voluntary bodies were sought.

The changes to the regulations we are considering will safeguard the health and safety of pupils. We do not believe that the changes will have any effect on learning and discipline in schools.

Nursery Vouchers

Mr. Mills: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) what steps she is taking to ensure that *(a)* the number of three-and-a-half, four and five-year-olds and *(b)* the quality of education of this group in nursery education in Solihull will be maintained following the implementation of her nursery voucher proposals; and if she will make a statement; [2650]

(2) if she will estimate the number of local education authorities where the quality of nursery education for three-and-a-half, four and five-year-olds will *(a)* improve and *(b)* deteriorate as a result of her nursery voucher proposals; and if she will make a statement. [2675]

Mr. Robin Squire: The introduction of nursery education vouchers will be accompanied by measures to assure the quality of what is provided, which will be of benefit to parents in all areas. The funding mechanism is designed to ensure that if maintained schools continue to recruit pupils as they do now, there is no financial disadvantage. However, the number of four-year-olds in state provision will depend on parental choice, and on the response of providers to the voucher scheme.

Provision for other age groups should not be affected by the scheme.

Teachers Pensions Agency

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what was the cost of the failure to implement the Hoskyns computer system at the Teachers Pensions Agency. [2714]

Mr. Robin Squire: The cost of the failure to implement the pensions administration system forms a significant component of a claim which the Department is pursuing against Hoskyns, through litigation. Since the litigation is as yet unresolved, it would be inappropriate to provide details at this stage.

Managers (Training)

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what steps she is taking to expand the provision of postgraduate courses for the training of managers for the manufacturing sector. [2571]

Mr. Forth: Responsibility for providing postgraduate courses for managers within the manufacturing sector rests with higher education institutions, who take demand from manufacturing industry into account in arranging their provision.

Furthermore, the Government are keen supporters of the use by organisations in all sectors of the national occupational standards for managers. These were developed in consultation with industry to articulate best practice by managers at all levels. They also form the basis for national vocational qualifications.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what steps she is taking to ensure the expansion of postgraduate education successfully produces high quality industrial managers. [2679]

Mr. Forth: The Government have introduced comprehensive quality assurance arrangements within higher education which apply to all subjects, including management. The Higher Education Funding Council for England has a statutory responsibility to undertake quality assessment in specific subjects; and the Higher Education Quality Council undertakes quality audits of institutions' internal quality control systems.

In addition, the Department is taking forward its Competitiveness White Paper commitment to

"look to Business Schools and others to contribute to improving the skills base by continuing improvement in the relevance and quality of courses".

This has resulted in contracts being agreed with a number of business schools to develop postgraduate level courses which are competence based and which draw where appropriate on the national management standards.

Remploy

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many people are currently engaged in work with Remploy; and if she will indicate the locations of the work force in each case. [2662]

Mr. Forth: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service Agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from M. E. G. Fogden to Mr. Barry Jones, dated 28 November 1995.

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question about how many people are currently engaged in work with Remploy and the locations of the workforce in each case.

A total of 10,929 people, of whom 9,357 were disabled workers, were engaged in work in Remploy at the end of October 1995. 8,682 (7,110 disabled workers) were working in 102 locations and these are listed in the attached table (Annex 1). The remaining 2,247 are Interworkers who are supported by Remploy in placements with host firms but not working on Remploy premises.

I hope this is helpful.

ANNEX 1

Aberdare
Aberdeen
Abertillery
Acton
Aintree
Ashington
Aycliffe
Banbury
Barking
Barnsley
Barrow
Bath
Belfast
Birkenhead
Birmingham
Blackburn
Blackwood
Bolton
Bradford
Bridgend
Bridgewater
Bristol
Brynamman
Brixton
Bromborough
Burnley
Chatham
Chesterfield
Cleator Moor
Clydebank
Coventry
Cowdenbeath
Croespenmaen
Derby
Dudley
Dundee
Edinburgh
Gateshead
Halifax
Hartlepool
Hereford
Hillington
Holloway
Huddersfield
Hull
Jarrow
Leatherhead
Leeds
Leicester
Leven
London
Lydney
Manchester
Mansfield
Medway
Merthyr Tydfil
Milton Keynes
Motherwell
Neath
Newcastle under Lyne
Newcastle upon Tyne
Norwich
Oldham
Oxford
Oxfordshire
Penzance
Pinxton
Plymouth
Pontefract
Poole
Porth
Portsmouth
Preston
Radcliffe
Redruth
Rotherham
St. Helens
Salford
Sheffield
Southampton
Southend
Spennymoor
Springburn
Starman
Stirling
Stockport
Stockton
Stoke
Sunderland
Swansea
Tixall
Treforest
Trentham
Wakefield
Wigan
Wisbech
Wolverhampton
Woolwich
Worksop
Wrexham
York
Ystradgynlais

Mr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans she has to sell off Remploy; and if she will make a statement. [2663]

Mr. Forth: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the right hon. Member for Swansea, West (Mr. Williams) on 8 November 1995, *Official Report*, column *934*.

Legislative Repeals and Reviews

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what legislation from her Department passed in the last five years contains provision for statutory repeal or review. [2028]

Mr. Paice *[holding answer 27 November 1995]:* Statutes frequently contain provisions for the repeal of other provisions. I am not however aware of any provision in legislation promoted by the former Department for Education or the former Employment Department in the last five years which provides for future repeal or for future review by Parliament.

Training for Work

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what was the number of new recruits to the training for work programme in *(a)* England, *(b)* Wales and *(c)* Scotland in each month since January 1994. [2425]

Mr. Paice *[holding answer 27 November 1995]:* The information requested is in the following table:

Training for work—Number of starts in period ending[1]

	England	*Wales*	*Scotland*
1994			
31/28 January	29,000	1,800	2,700
27/25 February	26,500	1,900	3,200
27/31 March	22,100	1,600	3,100
24/29 April	18,700	1,400	2,600
22/27 May	19,300	1,500	2,500
19 June/1 July	18,900	1,300	3,000
17/29 July	20,300	1,500	1,900
14/26 August	18,800	1,200	2,800
11/30 September	20,200	1,400	3,800
9/28 October	32,600	2,800	2,800
6/25 November	24,000	1,700	2,900
4/30 December	22,900	1,800	2,000
1995			
1 January	11,600	700	n/a
30/27 January	24,200	1,800	2,600
26/24 February	22,400	1,400	2,900
26/30 March	15,800	800	3,300
23/27 April	11,100	700	2,200
21/25 May	15,600	800	2,400
18/22 June	14,400	900	2,800
16/30 July	15,200	800	1,600
13/27 August	13,600	700	2,200

Source:
TEC MI returns, the Welsh Office, the Scottish Office.
[1] First date shown is for England and Wales, the second is for Scotland.
Some trainees may have changed programmes and are therefore counted twice.

Learning Credits

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans she has to provide a scheme of learning credits for those aged 16 years; and if she will make a statement. [2819]

Mr. Paice: The second competitiveness White Paper: "Forging Ahead", published in May, noted that the Government remain attracted in principle to the idea of learning credits for all 16 to 19-year-olds, while recognising that it would have significant practical implications. We have invited comments on the Coopers and Lybrand study of learning credits which was also published in May. We are now considering how best to develop the idea further in the context of the Department's wider programme, set out in the White Paper, to improve education and training for 16 to 19-year-olds.

Grant-maintained Schools

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many school governing bodies she has consulted in respect of modifications to their published proposals for grant-maintained status. [2894]

Mr. Robin Squire: In some 650 cases the school governing body has been consulted.

Mr. Illsley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is the total amount of financial balances held by both local education authority and grant-maintained schools broken down by local authority. [2696]

Mr. Squire: For local education authority schools in England this information was given in respect of 1993–94 in answers to the hon. Member for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey) on 19 January 1995, *Official Report*, column *641-43* and 27 January 1995, *Official Report*, column *410-11*. I shall write to the hon. Member when the Department has completed its examination of the local management of schools outturn statements produced by LEAS for 1994–95.

The financial monitoring of grant-maintained schools is the responsibility of the Funding Agency for Schools. I have asked the chairman of the funding agency to write to the hon. Member.

Mr. Marlow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will compare the trends in the examination results at grant-maintained and non-grant-maintained schools. [2879]

Mr. Squire: Over the last four years pupils at GM schools have, on average, gained better GCSE results than their LEA school counterparts, as the table shows:

Percentage of 15-year-old pupils achieving 5+ GCSE grades A[1]*-C*

Percentage

	1992	*1993*	*1994*	*[1]1995*
LEA maintained schools				
Comprehensive	34.3	36.4	38.5	38.7
Selective	86.9	91.6	94.1	94.0
Modern/other	18.6	22.0	24.1	25.9
Total	35.0	37.0	39.1	39.4
Grant-maintained schools				
Comprehensive	38.8	40.9	43.4	44.7
Selective	89.8	93.2	94.5	93.7
Modern/other	20.3	23.0	24.6	26.2
Total	44.9	45.3	47.4	48.8

[1] The 1995 figures are provisional.

The difference is most marked when the performance of comprehensive school pupils is compared. In 1992 38.8 per cent. of GM school pupils had gained three or more grades A to C, compared with 34.3 per cent. in LEA-maintained schools, a gap of 4.5 per cent. By 1995 this gap has risen to 6 per cent.

Information is not yet available on trends in results at GM and LEA primary schools. In 1994 the key stage 1 results for GM and LEA primary schools were as follows:

Percentage of pupils achieving level 2 or above

Reading		*Writing*		*Number*	
GM	*LEA*	*GM*	*LEA*	*GM*	*LEA*
84	80	72	67	85	82

Equivalent information on key stage one results in 1995 will be available early in the new year, together with results for key stages 2 and 3 for the first time.

Supplementary Credit Approvals

Sir Irvine Patnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what applications were made by metropolitan districts for supplementary credit approvals in each of the last three years; how much of each sum granted was *(a)* unused or *(b)* not used within the time limit attached to the approval; and if she will make a statement. [2871]

Mrs. Gillan: The information requested on applications is as follows:

Year	*Sum of bids £ m*	*Number of bids*
1993–94	22.9	94
1994–95	36.3	104
1995–96	43.3	103

Further bids are likely during the remainder of the 1995–96 financial year.

Information on supplementary credit approvals which authorities have not used is not held centrally.

Education, Nottinghamshire

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many representations she has received about the need to maintain and improve education services in Nottinghamshire in 1996–97; if she will summaries these representations; and if she will list the individuals and organisations that have sent them. [2756]

Mr. Robin Squire: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has received a number of such representations, many of which have requested increased funding for school budgets in 1996–97. It is not possible to list the individuals and organisations that have made these representations.

Statutory Instruments

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many statutory instruments her Department sponsored in the last Session of Parliament; and how many of these *(a)* constituted a new rule or regulation, *(b)* were introduced to implement European Community directives and *(c)* amplify the minimum standards set out in an original European Community directive. [2468]

Mr. Paice: The Department for Education, Employment Department and the Department for Education and Employment sponsored a total of 92 statutory instruments of which seven wholly or partly were introduced to implement European Community directives. None of these amplify the minimum standards set out in the original directive.

Departmental Expenditure Plans

Mr. Coe: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans she has for her Department's expenditure in 1996–97; and if she will make a statement. [3233]

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: As my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced in a statement today, the Government intend to provide £14,040 million for the Department's voted expenditure in 1996–97. This will be in addition to expenditure on schools provided through the local authority finance settlement.

SCHOOLS

Provision for schools is to increase by £878 million. The bulk of this will be provided through the local authority finance settlement. Detailed allocations for individual local authorities will be announced by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment on 30 November. The local authority settlement will allow for an increase of 4.5 per cent. for schools. It is for local authorities to decide how to allocate the available funding, but the Government expect that priority will be given to schools. The total package of Government and local authority funding for schools—including provision for the under-fives—represents an increase over 1995–96 of 4.9 per cent.

Schools capital

In 1996–97, the amount available for school building will be £625 million, an increase of £40 million or 6.8 per cent. on the current year. This includes an extra £8 million for grant-maintained schools, £5 million for voluntary aided schools, and £27 million for local authority schools. Alongside these extra resources lie the new opportunities arising from the private finance initiative; the proposed legislation enabling grant-maintained schools to borrow commercially; the full use of proceeds from asset disposals by grant-maintained schools; and the relaxations on the capital controls which apply to disposals of local authority school property. Overall this is an excellent outcome which will help to maintain the school building programme at record levels and to introduce a substantial challenge fund for school renewal, further details of which will be announced shortly.

Grant-maintained Schools

The Government will continue to ensure that GM schools receive the necessary funding to meet their extra responsibilities and particular circumstances.

The plans provide for spending on special purpose grants to be maintained broadly at current levels. The Funding Agency for Schools is considering the balance of provision between the various grants.

Specialist schools

The settlement includes £23 million in 1996–97, £28 million in 1997–98 and £27 million in 1998–99 for our specialist schools programme. Already, 101 schools are operating as technology colleges and six as language colleges. The settlement, with provision higher than announced last year, will enable us to expand the network of schools to well over 250 schools by 1998–99.

Teacher Training Agency

The total grant for the Teacher Training Agency for recurrent and capital expenditure is planned at £198 million, £208 million and £214 million in 1996–97, 1997–98 and 1998–99 respectively. The grant takes account of changes in forecast student numbers which reflect, among other things, revised targets for intakes into initial teacher training courses. It also covers the Headlamp scheme, and work on the development and piloting of the new national professional qualification for headteachers.

FURTHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING

16–19 and further education student numbers

The plans provide for the forecast increase in demand from 16–19 year olds for education and training in schools, colleges or by work-based routes to be met. This will contribute to the achievement of the national targets which the Government have endorsed for the year 2000. The number of students in further education is forecast to increase by 50,000 students in 1996–97 overall and 20 per cent. in all between 1994 and 1999.

Grant to further education funding council

The total grant to the FEFC is planned at £3,069 million in 1996–97, £3,049 million in 1997–98 and £3,016 million in 1998–99. Within those totals, reflecting the priority accorded to this sector of education, the level of recurrent grant per year has been maintained at just under £2.96 billion per year, as announced a year ago. These figures imply continuing efficiency gains over the next three years to help meet the forecast increases in student numbers.

I have set as a condition of my grant to the FEFC that it requires institutions in the further education sector to take account of the principles set out in the Chancellor's statement on public sector pay of 18 September 1995. Any failure by institutions to observe these principles may be expected to have an adverse effect on the level of grant made available to the council in 1997–98.

Modern apprenticeships and youth training

Government funding on modern apprenticeships and youth training is planned to increase by £116 million next year against anticipated expenditure in 1995–96 to £783 million. Plans allow for 60,000 entrants to modern apprenticeships next year, a doubling of the number of entrants to the programme compared to the anticipated level of entrants in 1995–96.

EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING

Employment service programmes

The welcome reduction in the past year in the number of people out of work for over six months has enabled the Government to make savings in existing employment programmes. The Government have also taken the opportunity to rebalance provision so that it supports the key aims of the jobseekers allowance. The "1-2-1" programme of intensive help for individual long-term unemployed people will be more than doubled to support active job search. A new package of help and assistance with fares to interviews for people who have been unemployed for 13 weeks will be introduced. Community action will cease at the end of 1995–96, and we will conduct pilots of a programme of mandatory work experience for people out of work for two years or more, who have failed to benefit from other help provided by the Employment Service.

Training for work

The planned reduction in the number of people joining training for work next year—12 per cent.—is broadly in line with the reduction in the number of people reaching six months' unemployment. The programme will continue to focus on getting more trainees into jobs. Participation on the programme of people with special needs, and younger long-term unemployed people, will be maintained at broadly the same levels as this year.

Lifetime learning

The major programme initiatives to support lifetime learning—skills for small businesses and employer investment in people—are being broadly maintained at their previously planned levels. Over the survey period some £150 million is planned to be spent encouraging employers to invest in the training and development of their employees.

Jobseeker's allowance

The provision that my Department has been given will include the resources required to introduce JSA in October 1996. We regard JSA as a most important step in our wide-ranging labour market reforms.

Total opportunities

Overall, some 1.5 million opportunities will be provided for unemployed people in 1996–97, broadly the same level as in the current year.

TRAINING AND ENTERPRISE COUNCILS

Provision for programmes delivered by training and enterprise councils, at £1,437 million is set to rise by 5 per cent. from anticipated expenditure this year. TEC budgets, within these programmes, are estimated at £1,173 million, 5 per cent. more than forecast expenditure by TECs this year.

HIGHER EDUCATION

The Government have maintained their plans for student numbers in higher education. Within the planned totals, it should be possible for universities and colleges to expand further the numbers of part-time students and to keep the participation rate for young people at over 30 per cent. through to 1998–99. I have asked the Higher Education Funding Council for England to continue to exercise tight controls over the number of full-time and sandwich undergraduate students in the next three years, in order to contain forecast spending and to protect quality.

Tuition fees

The maximum tuition fees reimbursed through mandatory awards in 1996–97 will be the same as for 1995–96: £750 for classroom-based courses; £1,600 for laboratory and workshop-based courses; and £2,800 for the clinical elements of medical, dental and veterinary courses. The maximum tuition fee paid through postgraduate awards funded by my Department will be £2,490 in 1996–97.

HEFCE grant

The total provision for the HEFCE for recurrent and capital expenditure is planned at £3,438 million, £3,381 million and £3,336 million in 1996–97, 1997–98 and 1998–99 respectively. Within these totals, the settlement confirms the plans for recurrent expenditure announced a year ago. I have asked the funding council to have regard to equipment needs, especially equipment for research, in allocating grant to institutions. I have set as a condition of my grant to the HEFCE, and also to the TTA, that they require institutions in the high education sector to take account of the principles set out in the Chancellor's statement on public sector pay of 18 September 1995. Any failure by institutions to observe these principles may be expected to have an adverse effect on the level of grant made available to the council in 1997–98.

Student support

The plans allow for the level of student support through the main rates for grants and loans to be increased over the next three years in line with inflation. In 1996–97, loan

and grant taken together will increase by 2.6 per cent., in line with the forecast change in the retail prices index, exclusive of mortgage interest payments. The main allowances, including dependants' allowances, will also be increased by 2.6 per cent. in 1996–97. Planned expenditure in the financial year 1996–97 is £698 million in loans and £2,009 million on mandatory awards covering maintenance grants and tuition fees. Access funds are being maintained at £28 million a year.

The Government decided in 1993 to accelerate the shift from grant to loan so that by 1996–97 the main rate of grant and loan would be broadly equal. The new rates provide for the main rates of grants to be reduced by about 9 per cent. in 1996–97 with a corresponding increase in the loan rates, so that broad parity will be achieved. The parental contribution scales under the awards regulations will be adjusted so that, for parents whose residual income has risen at the same rate or slower than the rise in national average earnings, the assessed contribution will continue to fall in real terms.

FURTHER AND HIGHER EDUCATION CAPITAL

The Government believe that within the framework of the private finance initiative, colleges in the further education sector and higher education institutions can, and should, be enabled to make much greater use of private finance in funding capital works. Within the total grant to the FEFC, the plans provide for capital grant of £110 million in 1996–97, £92 million in 1997–98 and £59 million in 1998–99. The capital grant to the HEFCE provides for £243 million in 1996–97, £228 million in 1997–98 and £189 million in 1998–99.

OTHER INITIATIVES

On top of the increase in general provision for schools, extra funding is also being provided for a range of programmes designed to widen choice, enhance diversity and promote excellence across all educational sectors:

Nursery provision

The settlement for under-fives in 1996–97 is £37 million—of which £16 million is transferred from education standard spending. Phase 1 of the nursery education voucher scheme will start in a limited number of local authority areas in April 1996. The scheme will be implemented throughout England in April 1997 subject to the passage of necessary legislation.

Grants for educational support and training

The overall level of funding available for grants for educational support and training will increase by 6 per cent. over the 1995–96 equivalent programme. The new total will provide £264 million for schools and local education authorities to spend on a range of important educational priorities—in particular measures for improving school effectiveness. Two new grants will be introduced, providing support for improving literacy and numeracy, and pupil behaviour and discipline. The scheme to raise standards of literacy and numeracy would support the establishment, in close co-operation with Ofsted, of a network of centres which would work with groups of local primary schools to help them improve the teaching and learning of these core skills. Full details of all GEST programmes will be announced shortly.

Assisted places scheme

The plans include provision for a further expansion of the assisted places scheme. The scheme will be doubled in size over time, with the pace of expansion depending on the supply of new places—for which I have invited bids from eligible schools—and on parental demand.

Out-of-school care initiative

The out of school childcare programme will continue to offer parents with school-age children the chance to participate more fully in the labour market. Funding will be available to make grants to childcare projects to cover the initial set up costs, and contribute towards operating costs for up to 12 months while the project becomes firmly established.

Training and Enterprise Councils

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what progress is being made with the arrangements to introduce three-year licences for TECs, and if she will make a statement. [3234]

Mr. Paice: I am pleased to be able to announce today that 13 training and enterprise councils have completed the process of meeting the rigorous standards we set for the award of three-year licences. The licences will be effective from April 1996. The TECs are:

Central England
Co. Durham
Coventry and Warwickshire
Devon and Cornwall
Dorset
Greater Nottingham
Leeds
Norfolk and Waveney
Normid TEC
Rochdale
Teesside
Tyneside
Wolverhampton

A number of other TECs are close to completing the process. I expect to make shortly further announcements of TECs to be awarded licences from April 1996.

This announcement brings the total number of licensed TECs to 42, over half of the TEC network in England. Our expectation has always been that the introduction of licensing for all England TECs would take until 1997.

Youth Training

Mr. McAvoy: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what assistance is given to unemployed young people or those in part-time employment seeking to establish a co-operative run enterprise as a means of creating permanent full-time employment in response to market demand. [1789]

Mr Raymond S. Robertson: I have been asked to reply.

In Scotland, Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise are responsible for the business start-up scheme, which assists unemployed people to become self-employed. In 1995–96, over £11 million has been allocated to this scheme. Resources are not earmarked

specifically for the establishment of co-operative run enterprises, but neither is support precluded. Assistance may also be provided through the main programme, training for work, which helps long-term unemployed people into work. Some local enterprise companies provide financial support, via regional councils, to assist individuals and organisations, particularly in areas of high unemployment, to set up co-operatives.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 29 November 1995

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Quality of Service Survey

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, as representing the House of Commons Commission, if he will list *(a)* the cost of the Serjeant at Arms quality of service survey and *(b)* the payment to Janet Levin Associates for its services in connection with the survey. [2435]

Mr. Beith: The final cost of the survey is dependent on the amount of work which is considered necessary at each stage to complete it satisfactorily. I have asked the Serjeant at Arms to write to the hon. Member with details.

PRIME MINISTER

Cyprus

Mr. Cox: To ask the Prime Minister what issues concerning Cyprus were discussed by him during his recent meeting with the Prime Minister of Turkey; and if he will make a statement. [3171]

The Prime Minister: I discussed with Mrs. Ciller the prospects for a solution of the Cyprus problem. We agreed that the status quo was not acceptable. I urged Mrs. Ciller to bring positive Turkish influence to bear in moving towards a settlement.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Legal Aid

Mr. Marshall: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when the Green Paper on legal aid to the seemingly wealthy was published; when the consultation period ended; and when a decision will be announced. [2001]

Mr. Evans: The Lord Chancellor published his consultation paper on legal aid for the apparently wealthy on 20 December 1994. The consultation period ended on 1 March 1995 and a press release listing the Lord Chancellor's proposals was issued on 26 April 1995. A report by the study group on the establishment of the special investigations unit will go before the Lord Chancellor in the near future. Proposed amendments to the regulations will be placed before Parliament early in 1996.

Justices of the Peace

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many justices of the peace there are per 1,000 persons in each of the district council areas in Northern Ireland. [1668]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: Justices of the peace are appointed to serve in county court divisions. Details of the number of justices of the peace per 1,000 persons in each division in Northern Ireland are as follows:

Ards: 1.7
Antrim: 1.3
Armagh and South Down: 1.6
Belfast: 2.0
Craigavon: 2.0
Fermanagh and Tyrone: 1.0
Londonderry: 2.0.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Crown Prosecution Service

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Attorney-General if he will list for *(a)* each court circuit in Wales, *(b)* for Wales as a whole and *(c)* for England for each of the last three years for which figures are available: (i) the number of cases submitted to the Crown Prosecution Service by the police for consideration of bringing proceedings, (ii) the number of prosecutions brought by the Crown Prosecution Service and (iii) the figures in (ii) expressed as a percentage of (i); and if he will make a statement. [1090]

The Attorney-General: The tables of figures show the number of cases received from the police and those dealt with by the Crown Prosecution Service during the last three years, for Wales and for England. The figures comprise proceedings in the magistrates courts, but do not include the specialised casework handled by the headquarters of the service. No figures are held for individual court circuits.

The percentage of cases discontinued, expressed as a proportion of those dealt with, was:

	Wales percentage	*England percentage*
Year ending September 1993	11.8	13.5
Year ending September 1994	11.1	11.9
Year ending September 1995	12.1	11.9

CPS England
Magistrates' Courts cases

	Received	*Dealt with*[1]	*Of which . . .* *Completed in Magistrates' Courts*	*Discontinued*	*Committed to Crown Court*	*Other disposals*[2]
Year ending September 1993	1,365,586	1,285,624	898,971	173,423	97,121	116,109
Year ending September 1994	1,354,692	1,245,974	868,062	148,440	98,563	130,909

CPS England
Magistrates' Courts cases

	Received	Dealt with[1]	Of which . . . Completed in Magistrates' Courts	Discontinued	Committed to Crown Court	Other disposals[2]
Year ending September 1995	1,293,999	1,243,964	861,904	147,561	89,566	144,933

[1] Cases dealt with comprise all those completed, excluding advice cases and non criminal proceedings.
[2] Other disposals comprise committal hearings in which the defendant was discharged, cases in which the defendant was bound over to keep the peace, instances where the defendant could not be found, and other cases in which the prosecution could not proceed (e.g., through the death of the defendant).

CPS Wales
Magistrates' Courts cases

	Received	Dealt with[1]	Of which . . . Completed in Magistrates' Courts	Discontinued	Committed to Crown Court	Other disposals[2]
Year ending September 1993	105,328	105,407	72,623	12,401	6,144	14,239
Year ending September 1994	100,736	95,759	65,521	10,645	5,698	13,895
Year ending September 1995	95,815	90,826	63,442	11,033	5,662	10,689

[1] Cases dealt with comprise all those completed, excluding advice cases and non criminal proceedings.
[2] Other disposals comprise committal hearings in which the defendant was discharged, cases in which the defendant was bound over to keep the peace, instances where the defendant could not be found, and other cases in which the prosecution could not proceed (e.g., through the death of the defendant).

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Football Trust

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what was the income of the Football Trust in each week since 1 November 1994 *(a)* in total, *(b)* from pool betting duty and *(c)* from "spot the ball". [2268]

Mr. Sproat: The information contained in the following table has been obtained from the Football Trust.

The Football Trust: Weekly income since November 1994

Week ending	Total income £	Pool betting duty £	Spot the ball £
1994			
November			
4	733,750	473,752	259,998
11	724,750	468,851	255,899
18	758,972	479,946	279,026
25	730,158	473,315	256,843
December			
2	703,908	455,816	248,092
9	694,337	450,908	243,429
16	675,709	448,161	227,548
23	696,142	460,085	236,057
30	1,460,364	924,477	535,887
1995			
January			
6	119,323	116,368	2,955
13	161,749	160,420	1,329
20	583,560	393,654	189,906
27	610,005	404,662	205,343
February			
3	614,825	408,250	206,575
10	605,460	408,357	197,103
17	606,123	401,609	204,514
24	599,293	398,305	200,988

The Football Trust: Weekly income since November 1994

Week ending	Total income £	Pool betting duty £	Spot the ball £
March			
3	594,043	398,545	195,498
10	584,063	389,026	195,037
17	579,733	386,974	192,759
24	586,984	386,892	200,092
31	578,654	381,238	197,416
April			
7	565,827	369,835	195,992
14	565,397	372,364	193,033
21	567,903	375,494	192,409
28	551,028	363,933	187,095
May			
5	475,885	349,427	126,458
12	491,057	354,366	136,691
19	483,546	354,411	129,135
26	462,926	336,321	126,605
June			
2	466,731	335,725	131,006
9	459,213	328,176	131,037
16	428,790	311,703	117,087
23	443,163	321,627	121,536
30	434,357	313,315	121,042
July			
7	435,190	312,106	123,084
14	427,861	309,524	118,337
21	411,226	297,011	114,215
28	420,019	304,625	115,394
August			
4	414,367	299,673	114,694
11	399,916	289,773	110,143
18	382,969	279,530	103,439
25	397,699	289,334	108,365
September			
1	409,326	299,532	109,794
8	404,044	297,407	106,637
15	400,544	295,237	105,307
22	410,667	302,533	108,134
29	415,098	306,839	108,259

The Football Trust: Weekly income since November 1994

Week ending	Total income £	Pool betting duty £	Spot the ball £
October			
6	407,116	300,100	107,016
13	405,738	297,780	107,958
20	407,511	298,040	109,471
27	411,044	301,645	109,399
November			
3	405,125	295,681	109,444
10	405,849	298,747	107,102
17	404,842	294,120	110,722

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what has been the annual income of the Football Trust for each year since 1990. [2269]

Mr. Sproat: This information is available from the Football Trust annual reports held in the Library of the House.

Swimming and Recreation Centres

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what is the number of public swimming baths and recreation centres per head of population; what is the equivalent figure for other European Union member states; and if she will make a statement. [1534]

Mr. Sproat: Latest figures for England, based on 1991 population census and the Sports Council's sports facilities database, are for one swimming pool for every 43,429 of the population and one sports centre for every 32,572 of the population. Equivalent figures for Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland are the responsibility of the respective Secretaries of State. We do not hold comparative data for other European Union member states.

Millenium Exhibition

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what provisions are being made to ensure that charity, Church and other non-commercial organisations will be able to fully participate in the millennium exhibition. [373]

Mrs. Bottomley: This is a matter for the Millennium Commission. I shall reply to the hon. Member in my capacity as chairman of the commission and place copies of my reply in the Libraries of the House.

TREASURY

Labour Statistics

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the unemployment rates by sex, age and ethnic origin for each year from 1989 using the latest labour force survey. [2848]

Mrs. Angela Knight: Comparable information on International Labour Organisation unemployment by sex, age and ethnic origin is available from the labour force survey (LFS), quarterly from spring 1992 onwards. It can be obtained via the Quantime LFS service available in the Library. Information for the average of the three years 1989–91 is available from the February 1993 issue of the *Employment Gazette*, which is also available from the Library.

Mr. Hughes: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list employment by broad occupation, by ethnic origin and by sex for each year from 1991. [2850]

Mrs. Knight: Comparable information on employment, by occupation, ethnic origin and sex is available from the labour force survey quarterly from spring 1992 onwards. It can be obtained via the Quantime LFS service available in the Library.

Mr. Hughes: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what are the proportions of *(a)* men and *(b)* women by ethnic origin who are working as (i) full-time employees, (ii) part-time employees and (iii) self-employed. [2847]

Mrs. Knight: Estimates from the labour force survey are shown in the table.

Men and women, by ethnic origin in employment Great Britain, spring 1995

	Proportion (percentage) of those who are in employment who are:		
	Full-time employees	Part-time employees	Self-employed
Men			
White	75	6	18
All ethnic minority groups	71	9	18
Black	73	10	13
Indian	74	7	18
Pakistani/Bangladeshi	61	10	25
Mixed/other origins	70	11	17
Women			
White	51	40	7
All ethnic minority groups	63	30	5
Black	69	26	n/a
Indian	60	32	7
Pakistani/Bangladeshi	61	29	n/a
Mixed/other origins	61	31	n/a

n/a—not available, based on estimate below 10,000.

Mr. Hughes: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list employment by industry for each year from 1991 of *(a)* men and *(b)* women broken down into (i) whites and (ii) ethnic minorities. [2849]

Mrs. Knight: Comparable information on employment, by industry, ethnic origin and sex is available from the labour force survey, quarterly from spring 1992 onwards. It can be obtained via the Quantime LFS service available in the Library.

Executive Agencies

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list for each of his executive agencies for the last financial year in respect of overseas travel by agency staff *(a)* the costs of the travel, *(b)* the countries visited and *(c)* the posts held by the staff concerned. [2283]

Mrs. Knight: The information for the Chancellor of the Exchequer's four agencies is as follows:

Cost of overseas travel 1994–95	*Countries visited*	*Posts held by travelling staff*
Central Statistical Office		
£159,661	Countries of the European Community Switzerland, Scandinavia, United States of America, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, China, Hong Kong	Directors (Grades 1a to Grade 4) Heads of Inquiry Divisions, Branches and Sections (Grades 5–7) Heads of Statistical Units (Grades of 5–7) Heads of Service Divisions, Branches and Sections and staff (Grades EO to Grade 5) Statistical staff (SEO to Assistant Statistician)

PAYMASTER There was no overseas travel by staff of the PAYMASTER in the last financial year.

Royal Mint This information could only be provided at disproportionate cost. The Mint is a commercial organisation which carries out more than two-thirds of its business for export. This necessarily entails extensive overseas visits by Mint staff.

Valuation Office Agency

Only one overseas visit as follows:

Cost of overseas travel 1994–95	*Countries visited*	*Posts held by travelling staff*
£275	Dublin, Ireland	Grade 5 and 7

Single Currency

Mr. Gill: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what preparations have been made within the Treasury in anticipation of the single currency; [2772]

(2) what preparations the Bank of England has made in anticipation of the introduction of the single currency. [2771]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The Chancellor of the Exchequer is a member of the ECOFIN Council. The Governor of the Bank of England is a member of the European Monetary Institute Council. Treasury and the Bank of England both have representatives on the EU monetary committee. Under the EC treaty, ECOFIN, the EMI and the monetary committee are all involved in preparatory work for a single currency.

The United Kingdom's involvement in preparatory work in no way prejudges the UK's decision whether or not to notify our intention to move to stage 3 of EMU, in accordance with the provisions of protocol 11 annexed to the EC treaty.

Under protocol 11 annexed to the UK treaty, the Prime Minister has ensured that the United Kingdom shall not be obliged or committed to move to the third stage of economic union without a separate decision to do so by the Government and Parliament. We will agree to take part in a single currency only if it is in our national interest to do so, given the circumstances at the time.

Tax

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much tax was remitted or written off as irrecoverable in 1994; and how much of this was PAYE contributions. [83]

Mr. Jack: The total amount of tax remitted or written off as irrecoverable in the year ended 28 October 1994 was £1.16 billion—about 1.4 per cent. of the total tax collected, and some 26 per cent. lower than the figure for the previous year.

The amount of PAYE contributions remitted or written off in the year ended 28 October 1994 was £270.13 million, some 32 per cent. less than the previous year.

Insolvencies, where the Inland Revenue has very little control over the amount recoverable, account for the vast majority of tax written off or remitted.

EU Contributions

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was *(a)* the gross contributions, receipts and net contributions or receipts, *(b)* the population and approximate number of households and *(c)* the net contributions or receipts per head and per household of each state which was a member of the EU before the treaty of Corfu for *(a)* 1990 and *(b)* 1994, in (i) ecus and (ii) £ sterling. [2513]

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: This information is set out in the table. This covers the former European Union of 12 member states. Following the conclusions of the European Council in Corfu in June 1994, Sweden, Austria and Finland proceeded to join the Union at the beginning of this year.

Contributions to and receipts from the EU—12 Budget in 1990 and 1994

1990 ecu/£ = 1.39

	Gross contribution (mecu)	*Gross Receipts £ million*	*Net Contribution/Receipt (mecu)*	*£ million*	*(mecu)*	*£ million*
Belgium	1,763.7	1,268.8	989.8	712.1	–773.9	–556.8
Denmark	775.1	557.6	1,197.6	861.6	422.5	304.0
Germany	10,357.5	7,451.4	4,807.1	3,458.3	–5,550.4	–3,993.1
Greece	563.6	405.5	3,033.8	2,182.6	2,470.2	1,777.1
Spain	3,671.1	2,641.3	5,382.7	3,872.4	1,711.3	1,231.2
France	8,089.5	5,819.8	6,284.6	4,521.3	–1,804.9	–1,298.5
Ireland	368.2	264.9	2,260.7	1,626.4	1,892.5	1,361.5
Italy	6,097.7	4,386.8	5,681	4,087.1	–416.7	–299.8

Contributions to and receipts from the EU—12 Budget in 1990 and 1994

1990 ecu/£ = 1.39

	Gross contribution (mecu)	*Gross Receipts £ million*	*Net Contribution/Receipt (mecu)*	*£ million*	*(mecu)*	*£ million*
Luxembourg	74.5	53.6	14.5	10.4	–60	–43.2
Netherlands	2,615.2	1,881.4	2,983.6	2,146.5	368.4	265.0
Portugal	502.4	361.4	1,103.2	793.7	600.8	432.2
United Kingdom	6,534.3	4,700.9	3,147.4	2,264.3	–3,386.9	–2,436.6

1990 ecu/£ = 1.39

	Population Millions	*Number of households Millions*	*Net per head (ecu)*	*£*	*Net per household (ecu)*	*£*
Belgium	9.9	3.95	–78.2	–56.2	–196	–141.0
Denmark	5.1	2.27	82.8	59.6	186	133.9
Germany	79.1	35.26	–70.2	–50.5	–157	–113.2
Greece	10.1	3.2	244.6	176.0	772	555.4
Spain	38.8	11.84	44.1	31.7	145	104.0
France	56.6	21.54	–31.9	–22.9	–84	–60.3
Ireland	3.5	1.03	540.7	389.0	1,837	1,321.9
Italy	56.7	19.91	–7.3	–5.3	–21	–15.1
Luxembourg	0.4	0.15	–150.0	–107.9	–400	–287.8
Netherlands	14.9	6.16	24.7	17.8	60	43.0
Portugal	9.9	3.15	60.7	43.7	191	137.2
UK	57.5	22.42	–58.9	–42.4	–151	–108.7

Notes:

1. Contribution figures are after abatement.
2. Administration costs are not fully allocated by member state in the Court of Auditors Report. Allocation of administrative spending would increase gross receipt figures for Belgium and Luxembourg.
3. Figures for population and households in Germany are for unified Germany for both 1990 and 1994.
4. Figures for number of households are the latest available and refer to 1990–91.

Source:

Court of Auditors Reports and Eurostat.

1994 ecu/£=1.29

	Gross contribution (mecu)	*£ million*	*Gross receipts (mecu)*	*£ million*	*Net contribution (mecu)*	*£ million*
Belgium	2,822.1	2,187.7	2,512.8	1,947.9	–309.3	–239.8
Denmark	1,296.2	1,004.8	1,495.1	1,159.0	198.9	154.2
Germany	21,366.3	16,563.0	7,729.2	5,991.6	–13,637.1	–10,571.4
Greece	992.3	769.2	4,844.2	3,755.2	3,851.9	2,986.0
Spain	4,718.1	3,657.4	7,834.7	6,073.4	3,116.6	2,416.0
France	12,550.9	9,729.4	9,924.5	7,693.4	–2,626.4	–2,036.0
Ireland	638.9	495.3	2,390.9	1,853.4	1,752	1,358.1
Italy	7,759.6	6,015.2	5,219.2	4,045.9	–2,540.4	–1,969.3
Luxembourg	165.4	128.2	419.1	324.9	253.7	196.7
Netherlands	4,245.9	3,291.4	2,416	1,872.9	–1,829.9	–1,418.5
Portugal	1,215.6	942.3	3,042.6	2,358.6	1,827	1,416.3
United Kingdom	6,417.4	4,974.7	5,258.6	4,076.4	–1,158.8	–898.3

1994 ecu/£ = 1.29

	Population millions	*Number of households millions*	*Net per head (ecu)*	*£*	*Net per household (ecu)*	*£*
Belgium	10.1	3.95	–30.6	–23.7	–78	–60.7
Denmark	5.2	2.27	38.2	29.7	88	67.9
Germany	81.3	35.26	–167.7	–130.0	–387	–299.8
Greece	10.4	3.2	370.4	287.1	1,204	933.1
Spain	39.1	11.84	79.7	61.8	263	204.1
France	57.8	21.54	–45.4	–35.2	–122	–94.5
Ireland	3.6	1.03	486.7	377.3	1,701	1,318.6
Italy	57.1	19.91	–44.5	–34.5	–128	–98.9

1994 ecu/£ = 1.29

	Population millions	*Number of households millions*	*Net per head (ecu)*	*£*	*Net per household (ecu)*	*£*
Luxembourg	0.4	0.15	634.3	491.7	1,691	1,311.1
Netherlands	15.3	6.16	–119.6	–92.7	–297	–230.3
Portugal	9.9	3.15	184.5	143.1	580	449.6
UK	58.3	22.42	–19.9	–15.4	–52	–40.1

Notes:
1. Contribution figures are after abatement.
2. Administration costs are not fully allocated by member state in the Court of Auditors Report. Allocation of administrative spending would increase gross receipt figures for Belgium and Luxembourg.
3. Figures for population and households in Germany are for unified Germany for both 1990 and 1994.
4. Figures for number of households are the latest available and refer to 1990–91.

Source:
Court of Auditors Reports and Eurostat.

Agriculture Contributions (EU)

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps have been taken in respect of the conclusions contained in paragraph 1.125, page 44, of the annual report of the Court of Auditors of the European Communities, in respect of the United Kingdom's provision of information and methods of estimating the agriculture component of gross national product. [2800]

Mrs. Angela Knight: In July 1994 the GNP committee discussed a paper by the Commission covering the agriculture component of GNP for all member states. There was a routine request for several member states, including the United Kingdom to supply the Commission with additional information on sources and methods.

Immediately following the meeting, the Central Statistical Office sent the Commission a copy of an inventory on the sources and methods for agriculture, prepared by the Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food. The Central Statistical Office will continue to respond to any reasonable request for information from the Commission and the GNP committee.

Fuel Duty

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received about the effect on market share and exhaust pollution in Sweden of fuel tax related to the sulphur contents of motor vehicle diesel. [3078]

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: None.

Mr. Bottomley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what are the rates of motor vehicle fuel duty for different types of petrol and for diesel. [3077]

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The excise duty rates for petrol and diesel road fuel are as follows:

Leaded petrol: 39.12p per litre

Unleaded petrol: 34.30p per litre

Diesel road fuel: 34.30p per litre.

Mr. Bottomley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the differential in fuel duty needed to achieve common retail prices for ordinary diesel and for low sulphur diesel for motor vehicles. [3075]

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I regret that, because of the wide variation in the pre-tax price of diesel, no meaningful estimate can be made.

Mr. Bottomley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the medium-term change in shares of motor vehicle diesel between ordinary and low sulphur diesel if retail prices were the same. [3076]

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The Government have no information on which to base such an estimate.

Inflation

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of overall inflation in 1995–96. [1932]

Mrs. Angela Knight *[holding answer 27 November 1995]:* The "Financial Statement and Budget Report 1996–97" contains my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor's latest forecast for inflation for the years 1995 and 1996.

World Bank Inspection Panel

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if it is his policy to support the continuation of the World bank inspection panel. [2910]

Mr. Hanley: I have been asked to reply.

Yes. We hope the panel will prove a useful addition to the existing systems of control provided through the board of directors and by management and will enhance measures to increase the openness of the bank's operations.

SCOTLAND

Registered Land

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what percentage and acreage of land in Scotland is unregistered. [2393]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Title to all land in Scotland is registered in the Land Register for Scotland or recorded in the Register of Sasines.

Electoral Wards

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the new council wards which now contain *(a)* the 3,865 electors from Strathclyde electoral division 46 (Chryston) included in the East Dumbartonshire council, *(b)* the 8,099 electors from Strathclyde electoral division 35 (Toryglen/Kingspark) included in the area of South Lanarkshire council, *(c)* the 320 electors from Strathclyde electoral division 8 (Vale of Leven) included in the area of Argyll and Bute council and *(d)* the 248 electors from Tayside electoral division 31 (Sidlaw) included in the area of Dundee city council; and, where any of these groups of electors is contained in more than one new council ward, if he will indicate how many of the electors in question are contained in each of those wards. [2105]

Mr. Kynoch: The information is as follows:

(a) East Dumbartonshire electoral ward 26: South Lenzie/Waterside.

(b) South Lanarkshire:

Electoral ward 62: Rutherglen West (3,507 electors)

Electoral ward 64: Bankhead (3,095 electors)

Electoral ward 65: Spittal/Blairbeth (1,497 electors)

(c) Argyll and Bute electoral ward 31: Rhu/Garelochhead/Luss

(d) City of Dundee:

Electoral ward 13: Menzieshill West (76 electors)

Electoral ward 16: Pitalpin (19 electors)

Electoral ward 17: Ardler (2 electors)

Electoral ward 19: St Mary's West (17 electors)

Electoral ward 20: Downfield (6 electors)

Electoral ward 27: Fintry North (14 electors)

Electoral ward 29: Whitfield North (0 electors)

Electoral ward 35: Balgillo (38 electors)

Electoral ward 36: Dalhousie (76 electors).

Source: GRO (Scotland).

Arts

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to increase funding for the arts in Scotland; and if he will make a statement. [2087]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My right hon. Friend will make an announcement on his future spending plans shortly.

Fire Brigades

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what statutory obligation the fire brigade has to attend flooding, road accidents and other non-fire related incidents. [2680]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: A fire authority is empowered, under section 3(1)(e) of the Fire Services Act 1947, to employ the fire brigade maintained by it, or to use any equipment so maintained, for purposes other than firefighting purposes. There is no statutory obligation on such an authority to do so.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what consideration is given to the activities of the fire brigade that are not related to firefighting or prevention in determining its funding. [2681]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The principal determinants of fire service funding are the personnel, fire stations, and equipment required to provide fire cover. Activities not related to firefighting are undertaken largely with those resources, but any additional requirements in relation to these activities are also taken into account by my right hon. Friend.

Water and Sewerage Authorities

Sir Hector Monro: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will state his proposals for the financing of the new Scottish water and sewerage authorities in 1996–97. [3686]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Water authorities are currently preparing charges schemes for submission to the Customers Council. The financial arrangements that I am announcing today mean that average charges in 1996–97 need increase by no more than 6 per cent. I invite the authorities to be guided accordingly in finalising their charges schemes. It is for each authority to decide upon its own scheme and on the allocation of charges, and of any overall increase in charges among different groups of customers. It is then for the authorities and the Customers Council to consider all aspects of the charges scheme. I become involved only if there remain differences which cannot be resolved.

Section 83(2) of the Local Government etc (Scotland) Act 1994 empowers me to set a rate of return which the authorities should earn on the value of their net assets. I propose that for each authority this rate of return should be 6.5 per cent. to be earned annually on net assets amounting initially to £336 million in the case of the east authority, £260 million in the case of the north authority, and £404 million in the case of west authority. The necessary order will be laid before Parliament shortly.

I have also decided that the external financing limits for 1996–97 for the authorities will amount to £274 million. The allocation to each authority will be announced shortly.

We have already undertaken to provide relief to offset the charge for domestic sewerage which from 1 April next year will be levied direct on customers instead of being a service met from the council tax. I can now announce that we will give the authorities income of £89.7 million to compensate for the charge income they will forgo in 1996–97. Of this, £27.3 million will be available to the east authority, £22.4 million to the north authority and £40 million to the west authority. The necessary order will be laid before Parliament shortly.

I believe that these arrangements which I have announced will establish the new water and sewerage authorities on a sound financial footing and will enable them from the outset to deliver a first class service at the lowest possible cost.

Highland Health Board

Mr. Charles Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the proportionate value of the computer equipment transferred from Highland health board to the Computing Sciences Corporation Ltd. as part of the privatisation process earlier this year; and if he will make a statement. [308]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The proportionate value as at March 1995 of the equipment transferred from Highland health board to the Computing Sciences Corporation Ltd. was 5.5 per cent. of the total market value of the equipment transferred by the NHS in Scotland. This was based on an independent market evaluation.

Public Bodies

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the names of individuals who have been appointed to non-departmental public bodies serving and working within Lanarkshire indicating their political party affiliations, if known. [2953]

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 28 November 1995]:* This information is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. Non-departmental public bodies in Scotland are listed in the annual Cabinet Office publication, "Public Bodies", which includes the addresses of all executive non-departmental public bodies. The hon. Member may wish to approach these bodies direct for the information he seeks. As a general rule, political affiliation is not a criterion for appointment to public bodies and, except where this information is volunteered by the appointee, it is not made a matter for record.

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the total expenditure on non-departmental public bodies in Scotland. [2954]

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 28 November 1995]:* In 1993–94, my Department spent £1,567 million on executive and advisory bodies and tribunals. This is the most recent year for which figures are available. It includes total Government funding to these bodies of £1,562 million and direct expenditure by my Department of £5 million. Details of expenditure by non-departmental public bodies is published annually by Cabinet Office in "Public Bodies".

Orchard House Nursing Home

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will request that BBC Frontline Scotland programme to supply him with its videoed evidence of its investigation into Orchard House nursing home. [2957]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 28 November 1995]:* My right hon. Friend understands that, as part of Lanarkshire health board's inquiry into the standards of care at Orchard House nursing home, the investigating officer was allowed by the British Broadcasting Corporation to view its videoed evidence of the Frontline Scotland investigation into Orchard House nursing home. The board's inquiry is now complete and the necessary follow-up action is underway.

Nursing and Residential Homes

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make it his policy to review legislation to give more powers to local authorities and health boards to enable them to introduce stricter controls on registration of nursing homes and residential homes; and if he will make a statement. [2958]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 28 November 1995]:* A Scottish Office working group, which includes representatives of local authorities, care home owners' associations and users, is currently considering residential home registration and inspection issues, including the current legislative arrangements. National standards for the registration and inspection of nursing homes will be the outcome of a project funded by the health board general managers' group.

We shall consider all recommendations from these groups, which would help ensure the continued protection of the potentially vulnerable people cared for in these homes.

Nursing Homes, Lanarkshire

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many residents have died in Lanarkshire nursing homes in the Lanarkshire health board area in each year since 1979. [2959]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 28 November 1995]:* This information was not held centrally before October 1992. The information requested since then is as follows:

Year	*Deaths*
1 October to 31 December 1992	93
1993	538
1994	589
1 January to 30 September 1995	479

Local Enterprise Companies

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what discussions his Department has had with Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise in relation to the levels of beneficial interest declared by local enterprise company directors in local enterprise company contracts; [1191]

(2) what information the directors of local enterprise companies are required to declare in relation to their interests in other enterprise companies; [1320]

(3) if he will instruct the chief executives of Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise to carry out a study of the beneficial interests of local enterprise directors in other local enterprise companies for the purpose of ensuring that this information is publicly accountable; [1192]

(4) what studies his Department has carried out into the involvement of local enterprise company directors in the contracts awarded by local enterprise companies; [1190]

(5) what procedures are currently in place to ensure that the beneficial interests of the director of a local enterprise company in the contracts awarded by a different local enterprise company are open to public scrutiny; [1194]

(6) for what regions information is not currently delivered by directors of local enterprise companies in respect of their interest in other enterprise companies. [2148]

Mr. Kynoch *[holding answer 24 November 1995]:* The local enterprise company operating contracts approved by the Scottish Office require local enterprise companies to have in place registers of directors' interests that are open to public inspection, procedures for avoiding conflicts of interest, and arrangements for publishing details in their annual reports of contracts in which directors have an interest.

The detailed procedures within this overall framework are an operational matter for Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise, which the Department has discussed with them from time to time. Both the Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise networks have adopted procedures which ensure that the private interests of local enterprise company directors are declared and registered, and that directors do not take part in board decisions on matters in which they have an interest. Local enterprise company directors serve on the board of only one local enterprise company, in whose area they must live or work. They play no role in the decisions of any other local enterprise company board, so there is no conflict of interest if another board should take a decision affecting their private beneficial interests.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Japanese Companies

Dr. Bray: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list those Japanese firms which currently have research and development teams operating in the United Kingdom. [3162]

Mr. Eggar: As of 3 October 1995, my Department's Invest in Britain Bureau was aware of 100 Japanese companies engaged in some form of research, development and/or design—RD and D—in the United Kingdom. A full list of these companies with details of their RD and D activities and their locations within the United Kingdom is being placed in the Library of the House.

COPEX Exhibition

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the representatives of Government Departments who visited the COPEX exhibition at Sandown racecourse in November. [1641]

Mr. Lang: The information requested is not held by my Department and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Telephone Disconnections

Mr. Harvey: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the number of telephone disconnections in each year of the five years prior to privatisation; and if he will make a statement. [3098]

Mr. Ian Taylor: This is a matter for BT. The statistics requested are not currently maintained within the Department, or by Oftel.

Offshore Installations

Dr. Godman: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) when he expects to receive the abandonment programme for the North West Hutton platform; and if he will make a statement; [2045]

(2) if he will list the abandonment programmes for off-shore installations, deposited with his Department in each of the past five years; how many were *(a)* accepted; *(b)* rejected and *(c)* returned to the companies concerned for modification; and if he will make a statement. [2046]

Mr. Eggar: Amoco (UK) Exploration Company, the operator of the North West Hutton installation, has been conducting studies since 1992 in connection with the future decommissioning of this installation. The decommissioning date for this installation will depend on a number of factors. I am not yet in a position to say when I will be calling on the owners to submit a programme.

We have approved the following abandonment programmes for offshore installations in each of the past five years:

Year	*Facility*
1991	Crawford
1992	Argyll, Duncan and Innes Blair
1993	Angus Forbes
1994	Fulmar Single Anchor Leg Mooring (SALM) buoy Brent Spar oil storage and tanker loading facility
1995	Esmond (2 installations) and Gordon

Each of these programmes was approved after a series of discussions with my Department and consultation with interested parties. No abandonment programme has been rejected or modified under section 4 of the Petroleum Act 1987.

Nigerian Trade Fairs

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the agreed priority sectors from the United Kingdom for Nigerian regional trade fairs in February and March 1996; and who are *(a)* the bankers and *(b)* the sponsors of the event. [3109]

Mr. Oppenheim: The British high commission is proposing to take a stand at two regional trade fairs in Nigeria in February and March 1996. My Department and the high commission have invited UK companies to exhibit their brochures on the stands. This invitation has been targeted at companies involved in oil and gas, agriculture—agricultural equipment, water and water treatment, food processing, power generation/distribution, medical equipment and pharmaceuticals. There is no UK sponsorship of either trade fair.

Channel 5

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the President of the Board of Trade for what reasons the range of the proposed transmissions of Channel 5 within Northern Ireland has been restricted. [3168]

Mr. Ian Taylor: The coverage plan for Channel 5 is the responsibility of the Independent Television Commission. Limitations on the range of the transmissions are required to avoid causing interference to other television services, and other radiocommunication services, in Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic.

Greenbury Report

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what are his proposals for implementing such recommendations of the Greenbury report as require action or assistance from Her Majesty's Government. [3080]

Mr. Lang: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given to my hon. Friend the Member for Colchester, North (Mr. Jenkin) on 7 November 1995, *Official Report*, columns *702-4*.

Employment Agency Licensing Division

Mr. Steen: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the annual income of the employment agency licensing division arising from *(a)* fees, *(b)* charges and *(c)* fines; what was the total number of staff employed (i) part time and (ii) full time; and what contribution his Department has made towards the annual running costs in each of the past three years. [2751]

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 28 November 1995]:* The licensing requirements of the Employment Agencies Act 1973 were abolished on 3 January 1995. Fees for licenses issued under the Act and fines imposed by magistrates courts for offences against the Act were paid to the Consolidated Fund. They could therefore not be set against departmental expenditure.

	Fees paid £million	*Fines imposed £thousands*
1992–93	1.7	1.9
1993–94	1.7	3.2
1994–95	[1]1.4	1.1

[1] To 3 January 1995 only.

Staff employed on administering the 1973 Act in 1992–93 and 1993–94 were 50.5 and 51.5 respectively. During 1994–95 the number fell to 35. The number of part-time staff did not exceed five at any time in the three years.

Power Cables

Ms Lynne: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what consideration he has given to introducing a statutory requirement on electricity companies to pay compensation to householders living beneath power cables where it can be proved that householders have faced *(a)* a decline in the value of their property and *(b)* a deterioration in their health. [1962]

Mr. Eggar *[holding answer 27 November 1995]:* The Government have no plans to introduce such a requirement.

With regard to item *(a)*, I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to her by my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment on 27 November 1995, *Official Report*, column *422*.

With regard to item *(b)*, the National Radiological Protection Board advises the Government on scientific matters relating electromagnetic fields to alleged effects on human health. To date, there is insufficient scientific evidence to establish a link between electromagnetic fields and cancer or leukaemia, the diseases of most concern, or to any other serious illness.

Foreign Assets

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if his Department has seized or frozen personal accounts and assets of members of foreign Governments; what was seized or frozen; and if he will make a statement. [2918]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: I have been asked to reply.

I refer the hon. Gentlemen to the answer given to his previous question on 27 November, *Official Report*, column *429*.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Student Loans

Mr. Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will make a statement on the support that will be available to students through mandatory awards and student loans in the academic year 1996–97. [3499]

Mr. Forth: My right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced on 28 November that the total level of support available to students through the main rates of grant and loan together in 1996–97 will be 2.6 per cent. higher than for 1995–96, in line with forecast price increases. I am placing a memorandum in the Library giving full details of the new grant and fee rates for 1996–97. These rates will be incorporated in the Education (Student Loans) Regulations to be laid before Parliament in due course.

Assisted Places Scheme

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what detailed arrangements she proposes for expanding the assisted places scheme. [3500]

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister announced on 13 October that the assisted places scheme is to be doubled in size. I am today announcing the plans for implementation in England. My right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Wales and Scotland will make statements about the arrangements for their schemes.

The pace of this expansion over time will depend on the supply of eligible high-quality places and on parental demand. This Department is inviting bids from independent schools—whether they are already participating in the scheme or not—for the first instalment of new places in September 1996. We look forward to receiving bids for:

(a) new day places mainly for entry at age 11, but also at age 13 and for the sixth form, in mainstream independent secondary schools;

(b) some new day places for children below age 11 in integral junior departments of independent secondary schools;

(c) some new aided places in specialist schools of music or ballet for talented pupils.

To be eligible, schools must provide a broad-balanced curriculum, have an excellent record of GCSE and A-level performance and maintain a strong sixth form. I will also be seeking an equitable distribution between boys and girls, and will especially welcome bids from schools serving inner-city areas.

The scheme will continue to be aimed at able children from low-income families who would not otherwise have had the opportunity of the education offered in these schools. Schools will continue to select pupils according to their own academic entry criteria and the general eligibility conditions prescribed in the regulations. I will encourage them to give priority to those with potential to benefit from the distinctive facilities the school offers, including where appropriate pupils from inner-city areas and the ethnic minority communities.

I intend to continue the present broad framework of means-tested parental contributions towards approved fees. The arrangements for means testing and fee setting are reviewed annually for the purpose of the regulations, and I will consider any representations on these matters for the reviews in 1996 and subsequent years.

I aim to announce the successful bidders for the first instalment of new places early in 1996, and to ensure that parents are fully aware of the new opportunities open to them. I am confident that they will widely welcome the expansion of choice, diversity and excellence which this initiative offers.

Doncaster and Mexborough Jobcentre

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment for what reason the reply in respect of jobcentres in Doncaster and Mexborough, from her chief executive of the Employment Service referred to in her answer of 23 October, was not published in the *Official Report* as well; and if she will make a statement. [1103]

Mr. Forth: I regret the fact that, due to an administrative error in the Department, the reply was not published in the *Official Report*. A copy of the chief executive's reply to the hon. Member has now been placed in the Library.

Expenditure, Calderdale

Sir Donald Thompson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what proportion of Calderdale's *(a)* total and *(b)* secondary education sector is grant maintained; and what proportion of total public expenditure on education in Calderdale is in the grant-maintained sector. [1467]

Mr. Robin Squire: According to the local education authority's expenditure return for 1993–94, the latest year for which figures are available, the proportion of local authority net recurrent expenditure, which was allocated as recurrent funding to grant-maintained schools in Calderdale was 11 per cent. NRE is gross expenditure on schools, continuing education and management and support services related to education, minus income other than that in the form of specific grants and excluding capital. The percentage figures also includes special purpose grants paid to grant-maintained schools by the Funding Agency for Schools.

The proportion of pupils in grant-maintained schools as at January 1994 in Calderdale was *(a)* 15 per cent. of the total and *(b)* 35 per cent. of the secondary sector. At January 1995 the proportions were *(a)* 26 per cent. and *(b)* 56 per cent.

Written Answers

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State For Education and Employment how many written questions her Department has failed to answer since it was established; and if she will give an explanation for each such failure, listing the question and any answer now available. [2248]

Mr. Robin Squire: The matter is currently being investigated and I will write to the hon. Member when this is complete.

Youth Training

Mr. Hall: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many YT trainees *(a)* have gained full employment *(b)* have gone on to further training and *(c)* became unemployed at the end of their training in each year since the scheme began. [2315]

Mr. Paice: The information requested is given in the table:

Percentage of leavers gaining each outcome
Youth Training (including Youth Credits)

England and Wales

	In full-time employment	*In part-time employment*	*In self-employment*	*Full-time education or another training programme*	*Unemployed*
1987–88	57	4	1	16	20
1988–89	63	4	2	15	13
1989–90	63	4	2	14	14
1990–91	53	4	1	16	20
1991–92	46	4	1	16	25
1992–93	44	5	1	17	28
1993–94	47	5	1	17	25
April 1994–January 1995	50	5	1	15	22

Source:
YT National Follow-up Survey.
The YT National Follow-up Survey records 8 separate labour market outcomes plus "not stated". These are; full-time job with same employer, full-time job with different employer, self-employment, part-time job, unemployed, another government training programme, full-time education and something else as stipulated by the trainee.

Sheffield TEC

Sir Irvine Patnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) what negotiations have taken place between her Department and Sheffield TEC to make provision for employment for the over-45 year age group; and if she will make a statement; [2520]

(2) what initiatives her Department is undertaking to make provision for the employment for the over-45 age group in the Sheffield travel-to-work area; and if she will make a statement. [2517]

Mr. Paice: The Department continues to provide a wide range of employment and training measures in the Sheffield area to help unemployed people find a job and employed people to enhance their skill and knowledge levels. It also has a campaign for older workers targeted at employers who impose age restrictions to persuade them of the need to recruit, retain and retrain individuals on the basis of ability and not age.

In addition, the Department has contracted with Sheffield TEC to provide during this financial year training, education and enterprise courses amounting to 4,350 adult places; many of which will be filled by those in the over-45 group.

It is these measures and programmes as part of the Government's policy of maintaining the economic conditions of low inflation and a fully competitive and flexible labour market which continues to maintain existing jobs and creates new employment opportunities for all large groups including the over-45s.

Over the last two years, in the Sheffield travel-to-work area, unemployment in the 45-and-over age group has fallen by almost 17 per cent., and long-term unemployment in the same group by almost 11 per cent.

Child Care Expenses

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will introduce guidelines governing the payment of child care expenses by governing bodies to school governors attending meetings. [2737]

Mr. Robin Squire: No. Being a school governor is a voluntary, unpaid activity. The Government applaud the 300,000 volunteers who give their time and energy to this important work. Governors may receive reimbursement for travel and subsistence costs, but the law does not currently allow payments beyond that, nor does the current pattern of governor recruitment suggest a need to change these arrangements.

National Vocational Qualifications

Sir Irvine Patnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is the average cost of obtaining an NVQ; and how many of these have been obtained in Sheffield. [2519]

Mr. Paice: Research carried out by KPMG Management Consultants in 1994 found that, among the 60 firms studied, the median cost to an employer for one member of staff obtaining a national vocational qualification was £200 on direct outlays, such as NVQ registration and certification fees. In addition, staff time was spent on training, assessment and other activities related to achieving an NVQ, and for the typical employer in that survey this amounted to around £3,000.

More than 2 million NVQs have been awarded since their launch. Information on the numbers awarded on the Sheffield area is not available

Oxford University (Admissions)

Mr. Walden: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what percentage of pupils from state schools gained admission to Oxford university in *(a)* 1969, *(b)* 1979 and *(c)* 1994. [2892]

Mr. Forth: Detailed information on admissions to individual universities is not collected centrally. It is for each university to decide its own criteria for the admission of students. I understand that the admissions office of Oxford university produces annual statistics along these lines and my hon. Friend might care to speak to it directly.

Grant-maintained Schools

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what was the date of *(a)* the close of the ballot, *(b)* publication of proposals and *(c)* the Secretary of State's decision in respect of each school which has become grant-maintained since 31 August 1994; and whether the ballot was initiated by the governors' resolution or parents' petition. [2893]

Mr. Robin Squire: The information requested is set out in the table:

Name of school	*LEA of school*	*Ballot initiated by*	*Ballot closed*	*GM proposal published*	*Secretary of State decision*	*Implementation of GM status*
North Somercotes CE Primary School	Lincolnshire	G	24/02/93	04/03/93	07/07/94	01/09/94
Totley All Saints' CE Junior and Infant School	Sheffield	G	10/03/93	05/04/93	01/03/94	01/09/94
Dr. John Bingham Primary School	Sheffield	P	31/03/93	23/07/93	11/02/94	01/09/94
Barkston and Syston CE (GM) Primary School	Lincolnshire	G	02/06/93	08/11/93	24/03/94	01/09/94
Cheltenham Kingsmead School	Gloucestershire	G	03/06/93	18/10/93	14/03/94	01/09/94
The Barr Beacon School	Walsall	G	07/06/93	24/09/93	18/07/94	01/09/94
The Corbett CE GM Primary School	Staffordshire	G	30/07/93	14/01/94	27/06/94	01/09/94
Little Reddings Primary School	Hertfordshire	G	30/07/93	20/10/93	10/03/94	01/09/94
Broomhill Infant School	Sheffield	P	02/08/93	13/09/93	11/02/94	01/09/94
The John Warner Grant Maintained School	Hertfordshire	G	15/10/93	31/03/94	15/08/94	01/09/94
Wincheap Primary School	Kent	G	15/10/93	24/02/94	26/05/94	01/09/94
St. Mary's High School	Hertfordshire	G	25/10/93	28/01/94	17/06/94	01/09/94
Tadworth Primary School	Surrey	G	01/11/93	14/01/94	16/05/94	01/09/94
Hayes Primary School	Bromley	G	12/11/93	31/12/93	09/07/94	01/09/94
Highfield Infant School	Bromley	G	19/11/93	31/01/94	04/05/94	01/09/94
Highfield Junior School	Bromley	G	19/11/93	31/01/94	04/05/94	01/09/94
Shirley High School	Croydon	G	22/11/93	29/11/93	16/03/94	01/09/94
Charlton Horethorne CE Primary School	Somerset	G	26/11/93	10/12/93	26/07/94	01/09/94
Atwood Primary School	Croydon	G	01/12/93	31/01/94	06/05/94	01/09/94
Wilmington Primary School	Kent	G	03/12/93	19/01/94	11/05/94	01/09/94
Chatham House Grammar School	Kent	G	03/12/93	30/03/94	03/08/94	01/09/94
Boston Grammar School	Lincolnshire	G	03/12/93	06/01/94	16/05/94	01/09/94
Castle Primary School, Ludgershall	Wiltshire	G	03/12/93	04/03/94	13/07/94	01/09/94
Westgate Junior School	Lincolnshire	G	07/12/93	25/01/94	06/05/94	01/09/94
Brymore School	Somerset	G	07/12/93	28/01/94	21/07/94	01/09/94
Loddon First School	Norfolk	G	13/12/93	31/01/94	19/06/94	01/09/94
Sutton Benger CE Primary School	Wiltshire	G	17/12/93	17/01/94	14/04/94	01/09/94
Hollingwood First School	Bradford	G	17/12/93	11/02/94	06/05/94	01/09/94
The Curzon CE Primary School	Derbyshire	G	20/12/93	04/02/94	21/07/94	01/09/94
Salesbury CE Primary School	Lancashire	G	20/12/93	31/12/93	15/05/94	01/09/94
Heathfield High School	Sandwell	G	20/12/93	26/01/94	26/05/94	01/09/94
Ashton CE Middle School	Bedfordshire	G	20/12/93	20/04/94	11/08/94	01/09/94
The Archbishop Lanfranc School	Croydon	G	21/12/93	28/01/94	12/05/94	01/09/94
Hill Top CE First School	Bradford	G	22/12/93	11/01/94	20/04/94	01/09/94
Fir Ends School	Cumbria	G	07/01/94	22/04/94	29/07/94	01/09/94
Durand Primary School	Lambeth	G	19/01/94	04/05/94	11/08/94	01/09/94
Halfway Houses Primary School	Kent	G	19/01/94	03/02/94	16/05/94	01/09/94
Brookmans Park School	Hertfordshire	G	25/01/94	27/01/94	01/07/94	01/09/94
Chestnut School Grant Maintained	Hertfordshire	G	25/01/94	11/02/94	01/07/94	01/09/94
The Grange Junior School	Shropshire	G	25/01/94	29/04/94	19/07/94	01/09/94
St. Catherine of Sienna School	Hertfordshire	G	26/01/94	25/03/94	19/08/94	01/09/94
Loudwater Combined School	Buckinghamshire	G	26/01/94	04/03/94	27/06/94	01/09/94
Greenacres Primary School	Shropshire	G	31/01/94	14/05/94	10/08/94	01/09/94
Greatstone Primary School	Kent	G	31/01/94	03/02/94	10/05/94	01/09/94
Glebe Infants School	Gloucestershire	P	31/01/94	28/02/94	20/05/94	01/09/94
Greenway Junior School	West Sussex	G	31/01/94	17/02/944	06/07/94	01/09/94
St. David's School (Grant Maintained)	Gloucestershire	G	31/01/94	31/03/94	06/07/94	01/09/94
Holy Trinity CE School	Wiltshire	G	01/02/94	09/03/94	29/06/94	01/09/94
St. Joseph's RC Primary School	Wiltshire	G	02/02/94	03/02/94	30/06/94	01/09/94
St. Joseph's RC Primary School	Kent	G	07/02/94	31/03/94	28/07/94	01/09/94
Swindon Village Primary School	Gloucestershire	G	07/02/94	28/03/94	08/07/94	01/09/94
Dersingham First School	Norfolk	G	14/02/94	08/03/94	20/07/94	01/09/94
Cam Woodfield Junior School	Gloucestershire	G	14/02/94	16/03/94	28/06/94	01/09/94
Reay Primary School	Lambeth	G	16/02/94	15/03/94	08/07/94	01/09/94
Preston Manor High School	Brent	G	16/02/94	05/05/94	30/08/94	01/09/94
Immanuel and St. Andrew CE Primary School	Lambeth	G	16/02/94	15/03/94	29/06/94	01/06/94
Lincoln School of Science and Technology	Lincolnshire	G	23/02/94	28/03/94	21/07/94	01/09/94
Myrtle Park First School	Bradford	G	28/02/94	25/03/94	01/07/94	01/09/94
Whyteleafe School	Surrey	G	28/02/94	10/03/94	03/06/94	01/09/94
Prospect School	Berkshire	G	04/03/94	18/03/94	04/08/94	01/09/94
Earls Colne Primary School	Essex	G	07/03/94	29/04/94	21/07/94	01/09/94

Name of school	LEA of school	Ballot initiated by	Ballot closed	GM proposal published	Secretary of State decision	Implementation of GM status
Flimby Primary School	Cumbria	G	09/03/94	06/05/94	19/08/94	01/09/94
Healey Primary School	Rochdale	G	14/03/94	18/03/94	29/06/94	01/09/94
Wallace Fields Junior School	Surrey	G	14/03/94	21/04/94	16/08/94	01/09/94
Wicklewood Primary School	Norfolk	G	18/03/94	27/04/94	10/08/94	01/09/94
High Faringdon School	Berkshire	G	21/03/93	22/04/94	26/08/94	01/09/94
Oakworth First School	Bradford	G	24/03/94	14/04/94	25/07/94	01/109/94
Fullbrook School	Surrey	G	25/03/94	20/04/94	15/08/94	01/09/94
Christ Church Primary School	Gloucestershire	G	25/03/94	27/04/94	01/08/94	01/09/94
Woodlands Community School	Derbyshire	G	28/03/94	18/04/94	22/08/94	01/09/94
St. John Houghton RC School	Derbyshire	G	05/04/94	27/04/94	31/08/94	01/09/94
Hollingworth High School	Rochdale	G	06/04/94	16/04/94	22/07/94	01/09/94
Thrapston Primary School	Northamptonshire	G	11/04/94	15/04/94	22/08/94	01/09/94
Fair Meadows Primary School	Derbyshire	G	11/04/94	15/04/94	22/08/94	01/09/94
Two Mile Ash Middle School	Buckinghamshire	G	26/04/94	10/05/94	25/08/94	01/09/94
Severnbanks Primary School	Gloucestershire	G	02/05/94	09/05/94	28/07/94	01/09/94
The Winston Churchill School	Surrey	G	13/05/94	01/06/94	25/08/94	01/09/94
Beaconside CE Infant School	Cumbria	G	24/05/94	28/05/94	07/11/94	01/12/94
Beaconside CE Junior School	Cumbria	G	24/05/94	28/05/94	08/11/94	01/12/94
Barmby Moor CE Primary School	Humberside	P	02/06/93	01/02/94	11/10/94	01/01/95
Mount Street Infant School	Lincolnshire	G	31/01/94	14/05/94	30/11/94	01/01/95
Nun Monkton GM School	North Yorkshire	P	11/02/94	18/02/94	08/12/94	01/01/95
Pott Shrigley Church School	Cheshire	P	22/02/94	17/06/94	21/11/94	01/01/95
St. Hilda's CE High School	Liverpool	G	25/02/94	25/05/94	06/09/94	01/01/95
Petersfield School	Hampshire	G	07/03/94	25/05/94	22/09/94	01/01/95
The Turnpike School	Berkshire	G	09/03/94	28/03/94	18/10/94	01/01/95
Sir William Romney's Community School	Gloucestershire	G	14/03/94	11/07/94	02/12/94	01/01/95
Ursuline Convent High School	[illegible]erton	G	21/03/94	22/04/94	05/10/94	01/01/95
Sandwich High School	Kent	G	22/03/94	30/06/94	02/11/94	01/01/95
Halifax Catholic High School	Calderdale	G	29/03/94	14/06/94	08/12/94	01/01/95
Lightcliffe CE Junior and Infants School	Calderdale	G	05/04/94	08/07/94	28/11/94	01/01/95
Ruskington Chestnut Street CE Primary School	Lincolnshire	G	18/04/94	25/05/94	17/10/94	01/01/95
Castle Carrock Primary School	Cumbria	G	29/04/94	15/07/94	01/11/94	01/01/95
Stanion CE Primary School	Northamptonshire	G	02/05/94	30/05/94	03/11/94	01/01/95
Bamford Primary School	Rochdale	G	03/05/94	28/05/94	01/09/94	01/01/95
Surrey Square Infant and Junior School	Southwark	G	16/05/94	08/07/94	24/10/94	01/01/95
Toftwood First School	Norfolk	G	02/06/94	23/06/94	27/10/94	01/01/95
West Vale Junior and Infants School	Calderdale	G	10/06/94	08/07/94	16/11/94	01/01/95
Burpham Primary School	Surrey	G	13/06/94	12/08/94	19/12/94	01/01/95
Milton Hall GM Primary School	Essex	G	15/06/94	22/06/94	23/12/94	01/01/95
Docking Primary School GM	Norfolk	G	27/06/94	15/07/94	04/11/94	01/01/95
Moat Junior School	Gloucestershire	P	01/07/94	12/09/94	15/12/94	01/01/95
Hinchley Wood School	Surrey	G	30/06/93	01/10/93	09/03/95	01/04/95
Minchinhampton School	Gloucestershire	G	16/02/94	25/05/94	03/11/94	01/04/95
Haselor School	Warwickshire	P	14/03/94	18/04/94	09/11/94	01/04/95
The Central School	Lincolnshire	G	05/04/94	23/12/94	29/03/95	01/04/95
St. Joseph's RC Primary School	Brent	G	27/04/94	17/11/94	16/03/95	01/04/95
Holmshill School	Hertfordshire	G	31/05/94	15/07/94	30/01/95	01/04/95
Heron Primary School	Gloucestershire	G	13/06/94	10/10/94	09/02/95	01/04/95
Pippins First School	Berkshire	G	15/06/94	01/09/94	27/03/95	01/04/95
Caister High School	Norfolk	G	01/07/94	21/10/94	23/02/95	01/04/95
Mill Hill School	Derbyshire	G	26/10/94	04/11/94	28/02/95	01/04/95
Shelton Junior School	Derbyshire	G	31/10/94	20/12/94	27/03/95	01/04/95
Langley Park School for Girls	Bromley	G	04/11/94	30/11/94	15/02/95	01/04/95
Stalbridge GM Primary School	Dorset	G	21/11/94	24/11/94	28/03/95	01/04/95
Keelham First School	Bradford	G	23/11/94	20/12/94	29/03/95	01/04/95
The Ravensbourne School	Bromley	G	29/11/94	19/12/94	16/03/95	01/04/95
The Hayfield School	Doncaster	G	30/11/94	22/12/94	29/03/95	01/04/95
Crosby on Eden CE Primary School	Cumbria	G	02/12/94	23/12/94	29/03/95	01/04/95
Pitton Primary School	Wiltshire	G	22/11/94	11/01/95	18/05/95	01/06/95
St. Kentigerns RC Primary School	Manchester	G	06/12/94	07/12/94	23/05/95	01/06/95
Brookfield Junior School	Kent	P	12/12/94	20/01/95	01/06/95	01/07/95
Keswick School	Cumbria	G	10/03/95	14/03/95	28/06/95	01/07/95
Bestwood Community School	Nottinghamshire	G	23/03/94	15/04/94	28/04/95	01/09/95
Clarendon Infants School	Wiltshire	G	23/03/94	14/06/94	07/07/95	01/09/95
Clarendon Junior School	Wiltshire	G	23/03/94	14/06/94	07/07/95	01/09/95
Dunchurch First School	Warwickshire	P	29/03/94	13/05/94	08/08/95	01/09/95
Dunnington CE Primary School	Warwickshire	P	30/03/94	15/04/94	18/07/95	01/09/95
Middlemarsh Middle School	Warwickshire	P	26/04/94	08/06/94	07/07/95	01/09/95
Wolverton Primary School	Warwickshire	P	24/08/94	25/11/95	07/07/95	01/09/95
Longridge GM Primary School	Lancashire	G	22/11/94	19/12/94	15/08/95	01/09/95
Pennine Way Junior School (G.M.)	Derbyshire	G	09/12/94	27/02/95	04/08/95	01/09/95
Longtown Junior School	Cumbria	G	27/12/94	06/02/95	02/05/95	01/09/95
William Hildyard C of E Primary School	Lincolnshire	G	28/12/94	14/01/95	16/06/95	01/09/95
Engaines Primary School	Essex	G	11/01/95	15/02/95	21/06/95	01/09/95
Zouch Primary School	Wiltshire	G	18/01/95	24/02/95	23/06/95	01/09/95
Rochford Primary School	Essex	G	01/03/95	20/04/95	24/08/95	01/09/95
Harcourt Primary School	Kent	G	06/03/95	30/03/95	18/08/95	01/09/95

Name of school	LEA of school	Ballot initiated by	Ballot closed	GM proposal published	Secretary of State decision	Implementation of GM status
All Souls' CE Primary School	Kent	G	06/03/95	16/03/95	21/06/95	01/09/95
Gravesend Grammar School for Boys	Kent	G	31/03/95	07/04/95	11/08/95	01/09/95
St. Mary's R C Primary School	Lambeth	G	03/04/95	07/04/95	20/07/95	01/09/95
Castledown Comprehensive School	Wiltshire	G	07/04/95	09/06/95	15/08/95	01/09/95
Carrant Brook Junior School	Gloucestershire	G	07/04/95	16/05/95	02/08/95	01/09/95
Kilburn Park Junior School	Brent	G	16/05/95	22/05/95	31/08/95	01/09/95
Enmore CE GM Primary School	Somerset	G	13/03/95	21/03/95	28/09/95	01/10/95
King David Primary School	Liverpool	G	13/06/94	30/09/94	09/10/95	01/11/95
St. Mary's RC Primary School	Wiltshire	G	08/07/94	11/11/94	15/08/95	01/11/95

Note:
In the 'ballot initiated by' column 'P' = Parents and 'G' Governors.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list the grant-maintained schools which have applied for loans under section 92 of the Education Act 1993, in each case stating *(a)* the size of loan requested, *(b)* the purpose for which the loan was agree, *(c)* the size of the loan agreed, *(d)* the period of repayment and *(e)* the interest rate applied. [2895]

Mr. Robin Squire: These matters are now the responsibility of the Funding Agency for Schools. I have asked its chairman to write to the hon. Member with this information.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list the grant-maintained schools which have applied for special purpose grant (restructuring), in each case stating *(a)* the number of (i) teaching and (ii) non-teaching posts affected, *(b)* the posts for which grant was awarded and *(c)* if (i) premature retirement compensation or (ii) statutory redundancy payment was awarded. [2897]

Mr. Squire: These matters are now the responsibility of the Funding Agency for Schools. I have asked its chairman to write to the hon. Member with this information.

Pupil Achievements

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what percentage of *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary school children perform two or more years below their chronological age in (i) English and (ii) maths. [2992]

Mr. Robin Squire: This information is not collected by the Department. The table shows for 1994 the proportion of pupils in England at the end of key stages 1 and 3 reaching the expected national curriculum level of their age group. Figures for 1995, which for the first time will show the results of pupils at the end of key stages 1, 2 and 3, should be available in the new year, and will be placed in the Library.

Percentage of pupils at the end of key stage 1 reaching or exceeding level 2

	Teacher assessment	Test
Reading	80	80
Writing	70	67
Spelling	73	71
Handwriting	81	80
Mathematics	81	81

Based on a response rate from schools of about 52 per cent.

Percentage of pupils at the end of key stage 3 reaching or exceeding level 5

	Teacher assessment	Test
English	63	58
Mathematics	65	60

Based on a response rate from schools of about 22 per cent.

Departmental Targets

Ms Armstrong: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is the published recommended response times within which her Department is expected to reply to letters from the public. [2998]

Mr. Paice: The Department aims to respond to all letters from members of the public within 20 working days, which is the target set in the code of practice on access to Government information.

Opting-out

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many *(a)* schools, *(b)* primary schools and *(c)* secondary schools there are in England and Wales and in each county; how many schools have (i) held ballots to decide whether or not to opt out of local authority control and (ii) decided to opt out of local education authority control; and what are (i) and (ii) as a percentage of *(a)*, *(b)* and *(c)* for each county and for England and Wales. [640]

Mr. Robin Squire: Information in respect of maintained schools in all local education authorities in England is set out in the table. Information for Wales is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

LEA area	Primary					Secondary					Total schools'				
	Schools[1]	Schools balloted on GM status	Per cent. of schools held GM ballots	Schools voted 'yes'	Per cent. of schools voted 'yes'	Schools[1]	Schools balloted on GM status	Per cent. of schools held GM ballots	Schools voted 'yes'	Per cent. of schools voted 'yes'	Schools	Schools balloted on GM status	Per cent. of schools held GM ballots	Schools voted 'yes	Per cent. of schools voted 'yes'
Corporation of London	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
Camden	41	0	0	0	0	11	3	27	2	18	60	4	7	2	3

LEA area	Primary					Secondary					Total schools[1]				
	Schools[2]	Schools balloted on GM status	Per cent. of schools held GM ballots	Schools voted 'yes'	Per cent. of schools voted 'yes'	Schools[2]	Schools balloted on GM status	Per cent. of schools held GM ballots	Schools voted 'yes'	Per cent. of schools voted 'yes'	Schools	Schools balloted on GM status	Per cent. of schools held GM ballots	Schools voted 'yes'	Per cent. of schools voted 'yes'
Greenwich	75	1	1	1	1	15	1	7	0	0	98	2	2	2	2
Hackney	62	1	2	1	2	10	1	10	0	0	78	2	3	1	1
Hammersmith and Fulham	37	2	5	1	3	9	1	11	1	11	52	3	6	2	4
Islington	57	0	0	0	0	9	0	0	0	0	71	0	0	0	0
Kensington and Chelsea	27	2	7	2	7	4	1	25	1	25	33	3	9	3	9
Lambeth	77	10	13	9	12	11	6	55	6	55	103	17	17	16	16
Lewisham	70	1	1	1	1	13	2	15	0	0	90	3	3	1	1
Southwark	73	7	10	6	8	13	4	31	4	31	96	11	11	10	10
Tower Hamlets	75	0	0	0	0	15	2	13	1	7	97	2	2	1	1
Wandsworth	60	5	8	3	5	9	8	89	7	78	80	13	16	10	13
Westminster	41	0	0	0	0	8	1	13	0	0	52	1	2	0	0
Barking and Dagenham	55	0	0	0	0	8	0	0	0	0	66	0	0	0	0
Barnet	89	6	7	2	2	21	11	52	10	48	114	17	15	12	11
Bexley	64	4	6	3	5	16	7	44	5	31	84	11	13	8	10
Brent	60	7	12	7	12	13	12	92	12	92	78	19	24	19	24
Bromley	78	7	9	6	8	17	18	106	17	100	100	26	26	24	24
Croydon	98	5	5	3	3	20	9	45	9	45	124	14	11	12	10
Ealing	66	4	6	4	6	12	8	67	6	50	85	12	14	10	12
Enfield	67	4	6	1	1	16	6	38	5	31	88	10	11	6	7
Haringey	76	0	0	0	0	9	0	0	0	0	90	0	0	0	0
Harrow	54	0	0	0	0	10	1	10	1	10	68	1	1	1	1
Havering	71	3	4	0	0	18	4	22	4	22	92	7	8	4	4
Hillingdon	71	10	14	10	14	15	12	80	14	93	94	22	23	24	26
Hounslow	62	0	0	0	0	14	2	14	2	14	81	2	2	2	2
Kingston	36	1	3	1	3	10	4	40	4	40	49	5	10	5	10
Merton	49	1	2	0	0	11	1	9	1	9	64	2	3	1	2
Newham	66	0	0	0	0	14	1	7	1	7	85	1	1	1	1
Redbridge	54	0	0	0	0	15	1	7	1	7	74	1	1	1	1
Richmond	39	0	0	0	0	8	0	0	0	0	50	0	0	0	0
Sutton	43	6	14	3	7	14	8	57	8	57	60	14	23	11	18
Waltham Forest	62	2	3	1	2	16	2	13	2	13	84	5	6	4	5
Birmingham	332	10	3	5	2	79	24	30	17	22	444	34	8	22	5
Coventry	89	1	1	0	0	19	0	0	0	0	119	1	1	0	0
Dudley	83	1	1	1	1	22	9	41	7	32	112	10	9	8	7
Sandwell	112	0	0	0	0	20	4	20	2	10	143	4	3	2	1
Solihull	70	1	1	1	1	13	2	15	1	8	87	3	3	2	2
Walsall	103	3	3	2	2	20	9	45	7	35	131	12	9	9	7
Wolverhampton	98	2	2	0	0	20	7	35	5	25	124	9	7	5	4
Knowsley	64	0	0	0	0	11	3	27	1	9	83	3	4	1	1
Liverpool	174	2	1	1	1	35	9	26	4	11	231	11	5	5	2
St. Helens	66	1	2	1	2	12	1	8	0	0	83	2	2	1	1
Sefton	93	0	0	0	0	22	2	9	0	0	121	2	2	0	0
Wirral	106	0	0	0	0	21	4	19	2	10	139	4	3	2	1
Bolton	105	3	3	1	1	16	3	19	3	19	128	6	5	4	3
Bury	71	2	3	1	1	14	0	0	0	0	89	2	2	1	1
Manchester	171	1	1	1	1	28	1	4	0	0	225	2	1	1	0
Oldham	102	0	0	0	0	15	1	7	0	0	124	1	1	0	0
Rochdale	76	9	12	6	8	14	4	29	2	14	97	13	13	8	8
Salford	88	0	0	0	0	18	4	22	1	6	113	4	4	1	1
Stockport	109	0	0	0	0	15	2	13	0	0	131	2	2	0	0
Tameside	80	1	1	0	0	18	6	33	3	17	105	7	7	3	3
Trafford	78	0	0	0	0	16	7	44	5	31	101	7	7	5	5
Wigan	121	1	1	0	0	21	1	5	1	5	151	2	1	1	1
Barnsley	92	1	1	1	1	14	2	14	0	0	109	3	3	1	1
Doncaster	110	5	5	4	4	34	2	6	1	3	151	7	5	5	3
Rotherham	115	0	0	0	0	17	1	6	0	0	139	1	1	0	0
Sheffield	149	17	11	15	10	31	8	26	6	19	197	25	13	21	11
Bradford	165	10	6	8	5	87	11	13	6	7	265	21	8	14	5
Calderdale	91	8	9	6	7	15	11	73	9	60	109	19	17	15	14
Kirklees	158	4	3	0	0	32	6	19	3	9	199	10	5	3	2
Leeds	247	4	2	2	1	46	3	7	1	2	307	7	2	3	1
Wakefield	131	2	2	2	2	29	1	3	1	3	170	3	2	3	2
Gateshead	80	1	1	0	0	13	2	15	0	0	99	3	3	0	0
Newcastle upon Tyne	79	1	1	0	0	31	1	5	0	0	110	2	2	0	0
North Tyneside	58	2	3	1	2	13	3	13	2	9	86	5	6	3	3
South Tyneside	58	0	0	0	0	11	0	0	0	0	74	0	0	0	0
Sunderland	100	0	0	0	0	17	0	0	0	0	125	1	1	0	0
Isles of Scilly	4	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	5	0	0	0	0
Avon	367	7	2	0	0	60	5	8	2	3	453	12	3	2	0
Bedfordshire	219	5	2	3	1	70	20	29	11	16	303	26	9	15	5
Berkshire	272	11	4	8	3	59	17	29	13	22	344	28	8	21	6
Buckinghamshire	286	12	4	8	3	44	11	25	10	23	350	23	7	18	5
Cambridgeshire	265	10	4	7	3	44	23	52	17	39	325	33	10	24	7
Cheshire	435	10	2	7	2	67	11	16	4	6	523	21	4	11	2
Cleveland	201	1	0	0	0	44	3	7	0	0	261	4	2	0	0
Cornwall	247	2	1	1	0	31	0	0	0	0	282	2	1	1	0
Cumbria	300	35	12	27	9	42	16	38	16	38	347	51	15	43	12
Derbyshire	449	21	5	12	3	61	27	44	17	28	530	48	9	29	5
Devon	439	11	3	2	0	63	11	17	7	11	523	22	4	9	2
Dorset	198	3	2	2	1	56	14	25	12	21	266	21	8	16	6
Durham	295	0	0	0	0	43	2	5	0	0	351	2	1	0	0
East Sussex	218	1	0	0	0	35	2	6	0	0	272	3	1	0	0
Essex	578	84	15	77	13	103	75	73	72	70	715	162	23	152	21
Gloucestershire	257	24	9	21	8	42	32	76	30	71	316	56	18	51	16
Hampshire	567	21	4	18	3	93	23	25	18	19	705	45	6	37	5
Hereford and Worcester	286	3	1	1	0	76	9	12	5	7	376	12	3	6	2
Hertfordshire	429	15	3	12	3	89	32	36	29	33	547	47	9	41	7
Humberside	352	6	2	4	1	60	4	7	0	0	427	10	2	4	1
Isle of Wight	46	0	0	0	0	21	0	0	0	0	69	0	0	0	0

LEA area	Primary					Secondary					Total schools[1]				
	Schools[2]	schools balloted on GM status	Per cent. of schools held GM ballots	Schools voted 'yes'	Per cent. of schools voted 'yes'	Schools[2]	schools balloted on GM status	Per cent. of schools held GM ballots	Schools voted 'yes'	Per cent. of schools voted 'yes'	Schools	Schools balloted on GM status	Per cent. of schools held GM ballots	Schools voted 'yes	Per cent. of schools voted 'yes'
Kent	567	31	5	29	5	128	76	59	74	58	729	107	15	103	14
Lancashire	598	10	2	6	1	106	18	17	9	8	746	28	4	15	2
Leicestershire	332	4	1	0	0	79	10	13	5	6	429	15	3	6	1
Lincolnshire	290	33	11	29	10	63	31	49	30	48	372	64	17	59	16
Norfolk	394	27	7	21	5	52	19	37	13	25	458	46	10	34	7
North Yorkshire	392	5	1	1	0	59	3	5	0	0	466	9	2	2	0
Northamptonshire	270	17	6	13	5	63	21	33	13	21	346	38	11	26	8
Northumberland	144	1	1	1	1	61	0	0	1	2	214	1	0	2	1
Nottinghamshire	424	1	0	0	0	82	9	11	4	5	533	11	2	5	1
Oxfordshire	237	1	0	1	0	44	2	5	0	0	296	4	1	2	1
Shropshire	212	6	3	6	2	35	7	20	7	20	256	13	5	12	5
Somerset	228	6	3	4	2	39	3	8	2	5	275	9	3	6	2
Staffordshire	409	5	1	4	1	85	10	12	5	6	523	15	3	9	2
Suffolk	256	0	0	0	0	77	1	1	0	0	343	1	0	0	0
Surrey	332	24	7	22	7	52	18	35	17	33	408	42	10	39	10
Warwickshire	235	15	6	12	5	37	9	24	8	22	285	24	8	20	7
West Sussex	247	1	0	1	0	41	4	10	0	0	303	5	2	1	0
Wiltshire	294	27	9	24	8	44	24	55	17	39	351	51	15	41	12
England	18,551	678	4	507	3	3,614	893	25	682	19	23,385	1,589	7	1,204	5

[1] Figures for total numbers of maintained schools in England include special schools.
[2] Figures for numbers of maintained schools, primary, secondary and total, are derived from the January 1995 DfEE Annual Schools' Census, and exclude those schools which have closed subsequent to holding a ballot on GM status. Figures for the proportion of schools that have held GM ballots need to be viewed accordingly.

Education Vouchers

Ms Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what sums of money *(a)* have been and *(b)* will be paid to Capita Managed Services Ltd. for issuing and redeeming nursery education vouchers for phase 1 of the voucher scheme. [3373]

Mr. Robin Squire: The Government's contract with Capita Managed Services Ltd. to administer phase 1 of the nursery voucher scheme was awarded after a competitive tender. The financial details are commercially confidential.

HEALTH

Nurses

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* district nurses and *(b)* health visitors were in training for each of the years between 1988 and 1995 inclusive broken down by real frequency and whole-time equivalents. [1270]

Mr. Bowis: This information is not available centrally. I refer the hon. Member to the English National Board for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting annual reports, copies of which are available in the Library.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many nurses *(a)* entered and *(b)* left the profession in each year since 1990; and if he will make a statement. [3140]

Mr. Bowis: This information is not available centrally.

Clinical Depression

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment his Department has made of the incidence of clinical depression in the United Kingdom. [2223]

Mr. Bowis: The report of the first national survey of psychiatric morbidity in Great Britain, commissioned by my Department, was published in May 1995. This described the prevalence of psychiatric disorders among adults aged 16 to 64 living in private households and showed that in this population 77 per 1,000 adults were suffering from mixed anxiety and depressive disorder and 21 per 1,000 adults from a depressive episode.

Family Health Service Authorities

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will instruct family health service authorities to include in the public papers of their meetings details of all cases where they have withheld remuneration from general practitioner practices to the value of £500 or more. [2240]

Mr. Malone: No. Decisions to withhold remuneration from a general practitioner are taken by family health services authorities under the National Health Service (Service Committee and Tribunal) Regulations 1992, as amended. Regulation 9(9) provides for the FHSA's decision to be communicated only to the parties to the proceedings, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and where reasonably requested to do so by either party, to any Member of either House of Parliament.

Prozac

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the prescription by psychiatrists of Prozac to children. [2229]

Mr. Bowis: The use of Prozac for children is not recommended under the terms of the product licence but the application of this advice is a matter for individual clinical judgment.

Adoption and Fostering

Mr. John Townsend: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* adoptions there have been in the United Kingdom and *(b)* children have been put out to foster in each of the last 10 years; and what has been the total cost to public funds of fostering in the last year. [2133]

Mr. Bowis: Numbers of adoptions in England and Wales are published in "Marriage and Divorce Statistics: England and Wales 19XX. OPCS series FM2", copies of which are available in the Library. Information about adoptions in Scotland and Northern Ireland is a matter for

my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland and my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

Numbers of children placed with local authority foster parents in England in the 10 years to 31 March 1993 are contained in historical tables in "Children Looked After by Local Authorities, 14 October 1991 to 31 March 1993. A/F 93/12", copies of which are available in the Library. The provisional figure for 31 March 1994 was 32,000.

Net expenditure by local authorities on children boarded out in 1993–94, the latest year for which the information is available, was £244 million.

West Midlands Regional Health Authority

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if the unauthorised ex gratia payment to the former director of regionally managed services of the West Midlands regional health authority has been recovered. [2473]

Mr. Malone: The prospects for recovering this payment are presently being reviewed, taking account of recent legal advice.

Dental Amalgam

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what evaluation his Department has carried out in the past two years of the level of toxicity of mercury fillings in current use in dentistry; and if he will make a statement; [2488]

(2) what assessment he has made of the cost to the NHS of a ban on the use of mercury-based amalgams in dentistry and the use of alternative non-mercury based amalgams; and if he will make a statement; [2522]

(3) what recent research has been undertaken or commissioned by his Department into the exposure of patients to mercury following the use of dental silver amalgam; and if he will make a statement; [2489]

(4) what representations he has received in respect of the ban imposed by the German Ministry of Health on the use of mercury amalgam in dentistry; and if he will make a statement; [2654]

(5) what assessment his Department has made of the ban by the Austrian Government of the use of mercury amalgams in dental fillings for children from 1996; and if he will make a statement; [2521]

(6) what research his Department has undertaken into mercury hypersensitivity from dental amalgam in patients giving rise to oral lichen planus lesions; and if he will make a statement; [2529]

(7) what research his Department has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated into the level of mercury concentration in the hippocampus, the amygdala and the nucleus basalis of people who have died of Alzheimer's disease; and if he will make a statement; [2523]

(8) if he will evaluate the research material upon which the Swedish Government have now introduced a gradual phasing out of the use of mercury amalgam for dental fillings; and if he will make a statement. [2671]

Mr. Malone: The Committee on Toxicity advised in 1986 that the use of dental amalgam is free from the risk of systemic toxicity and that only a few cases of hypersensitivity occur. The subsequent research findings and recent evaluations by other authoritative national and international expert committees are consistent with that advice. The Department continues to monitor and evaluate research in this area.

There are neither reasons to ban dental amalgam nor to carry out a cost assessment of the use of amalgam or alternative materials.

In 1994, the South and West regional health authority commissioned research by Bristol dental school into whether amalgam-related treatment should be avoided during pregnancy.

A European working group, which includes United Kingdom representatives, is currently reviewing dental amalgam in the context of the requirements of the European medical devices directive.

The Department is aware that the European Commission has received notification from German authorities of an intention to restrict the use of amalgam for certain patients. However, the Department has not received any formal notification of any German or Austrian ban on the use of amalgam.

There are only a few documented cases of hypersensitivity to dental amalgam in literature and there has been no evidence to suggest an increase. The Committee on Toxicity advised that there was no need for further research.

The Department has commissioned no research into the preponderance of mercury concentration on the brains of people who have died of Alzheimer's disease. An information sheet, prepared for the Alzheimer's Disease Society by Professor Jim Edwardson director of the MRC Neurochemical Pathology unit, concludes that there is very little evidence to link this metal with Alzheimer's disease.

The Department has received and considered the 1994 report from Sweden which states that the expert group found no evidence that there is a connection between dental amalgam and general or specific ill health except in rare cases of hypersensitivity.

Alzheimer's Disease

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research his Department has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated into the causes of high concentrations of mercury in the brain cells of deceased victims of Alzheimer's disease; if he will list the conclusions of his Department in respect of the causes; and if he will make a statement. [2524]

Mr. Bowis: The Department has not commissioned any such research.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many cases of Alzheimer's disease were reported in the United Kingdom *(a)* 1970, *(b)* 1975, *(c)* 1980, *(d)* 1985, *(e)* 1990 and *(f)* 1995; and if he will make a statement. [2525]

Mr. Bowis: This information is not available centrally. It is estimated that there are currently around 600,00 sufferers from dementia in England and Wales.

Royal London Hospital

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health on what grounds a payment of £140,000 was made to a former finance director at the Royal London hospital. [3114]

Mr. Malone: This is a matter for the Royal Hospitals national health service trust. The hon. Member may wish to contact Sir Derek Boorman, chairman of the trust, for details.

NHS Pension

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the time scale for decision-taking in respect of the matter referred to in his answer 7 November, *Official Report*, column *678*. [3086]

Mr. Malone: When all relevant factors have been taken into account.

Health Visitors

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, how much time health visitors spend each week administering purchasers' contracts. [3122]

Mr. Bowis: This information is not available centrally. National health service trusts and health authorities are expected locally to ensure that health visitors activity is both clinically and cost effective.

Management Costs

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will publish the league table of management costs in NHS trusts and health authorities. [3380]

Mr. Malone: We will be publishing information shortly.

Clinical Negligence

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is *(a)* the number of cases reported alleging clinical negligence, *(b)* the total amount of money claimed in these cases, *(c)* the total amount of money advised by solicitors of the trusts or otherwise resolved by them in settlement of such claims and *(d)* the figures for *(c)* expressed as a percentage of turnover, for each health trust and for England as a whole for each of the last two years for which information is available. [642]

Mr. Malone: This information is not available centrally.

GP Fundholding

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of general practitioners are now fundholders. [2551]

Mr. Malone: As at April 1995, just over 39 per cent. of general practitioners are fundholders serving 41 per cent. of the population.

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many general practitioners have moved to fundholding status in each year since the inception of the scheme. [2552]

Mr. Malone: The information requested is shown in the table.

	Number of fundholding general practitioners
1991–92	1,715
1992–93	1,444
1993–94	2,944
1994–95	2,657
1995–96	1,650

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the percentage of general practitioners expected on present trends to move to fundholding status *(a)* in 1995, *(b)* 1996 and *(c)* 1997. [2553]

Mr. Malone: From April 1995, over 39 per cent. of general practitioners in England are in the fundholding scheme. This is expected to increase to over 50 per cent. by April 1996 with more preparing to join in 1997.

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what were the total administrative costs of running general practitioner fundholding schemes in each year since the inception of the scheme. [2554]

Mr. Malone: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the right hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) on 17 January, *Official Report*, columns *425–26*. For 1994–95, expenditure on management allowances was £66 million.

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what discussions he had with the medical profession to improve the workings of general practitioner fundholding schemes. [2555]

Mr. Malone: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has regular meetings with the medical profession to discuss a range of issues including general practitioner fundholding.

Community Health Councils

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has for the reorganisation of community health councils in the Plymouth and Torbay area; and if he will make a statement. [2700]

Mr. Malone: None. The re-organisation of community health councils is a matter for regional health authorities, in their capacity as the establishing body for community health councils. They have a responsibility to ensure that CHCs are able to reflect the views of the communities they serve, for example when the establishing body are considering CHC mergers or boundary changes the first consideration must always be whether maintaining the existing CHCs will best serve the local interest.

With specific reference to the Plymouth and Torbay area, the hon. Member may wish to contact Ms Rennie Fritchie, chairman of the RHA for details.

ENVIRONMENT

Carbon Monoxide Poisoning

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information, advice and facilities will be made available to *(a)* the relatives of victims and *(b)* victims of carbon monoxide poisoning, and by whom, after the introduction of competition in the domestic gas supply market. [2004]

Sir Paul Beresford: All carbon monoxide, CO, fatalities that are notified to the Health and Safety Executive will continue to be investigated. The question of whether the industry will have a duty to conduct separate investigations into CO deaths has yet to be agreed by the Health and Safety Commission. HSE inspectors will continue to follow the general HSE policy of keeping interested parties, including those affected by CO poisoning and the families of victims, informed of progress with the investigations; informing them of any legal proceedings to be taken; liaising closely with the police and coroners courts in the case of fatal accidents; and liaising with the crown Prosecution Service if manslaughter charges should be considered. HSE inspectors also issued the leaflet "Advice to Bereaved Families" in respect of all work-related fatalities.

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what procedures the public gas transporters and emergency service providers will adopt to deal with carbon monoxide poisoning after the introduction of competition in the domestic gas supply market. [2006]

Sir Paul Beresford: Regulation 6(1) of the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangers Occurrences Regulations 1985 require suppliers of flammable gas to notify the Health Safety Executive forthwith of any incident notified to them, which has led to a death or other specified condition arising from exposure to carbon monoxide, CO from the incomplete combustion of gas. The supplier is also required to make a report in writing within 14 days.

It is proposed that a revision to RIDDOR, which is expected to come into force on 1 April 1996, will transfer the duty to notify and report to HSE from suppliers to gas conveyors.

The Health and Safety Commission issued a consultative document on draft Gas Safety (Management) Regulations in July 1995. One of the proposals was that when a gas conveyor is notified of a suspected or actual release of CO, it should attend the premises to make the situation safe.

The HSC will shortly be considering the results of the consultation exercise, including the arrangements for dealing with CO poisoning incidents. It is intended that the new regulations will come into force on 1 April 1996.

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment who will have responsibility for investigating cases of carbon monoxide poisoning after the introduction of competition in the domestic gas market. [2007]

Sir Paul Beresford: The Health and Safety Commission issued a consultative document in July 1995 on the draft Gas Safety (Management) Regulations. One of the proposals on which the commission specifically sought views was that a duty should be placed on gas suppliers to investigate carbon monoxide poisoning incidents.

The HSC will shortly be considering the results of the consultation exercise, including the arrangements for dealing with CO poisoning incidents. It is intended that the new regulations will come into force on 1 April 1996.

Mining Accident Statistics

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the private coal mining companies which publish accident figures on a six-monthly basis; what considerations apply in determining which companies provide such statistics on this basis; and what plans Her Majesty's inspectorate has to publish figures on this basis for the whole of the United Kingdom coal industry. [2053]

Sir Paul Beresford: The Health and Safety Executive is not aware of the private coal companies which publish accident figures on a six-monthly basis. The decision whether to publish company accident statistics is a matter for the individual company concerned. The HSE mines inspectorate publishes accident statistics for the whole of the mining industry on an annual basis and has no plans to publish any on a company basis.

Stonehenge

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what discussion his Department had with *(a)* English Heritage and *(b)* the Wiltshire county archaeologist about the proposal to build three houses inside the enclosure known as Vespasian's Camp in the Stonehenge world heritage site before planning permission was granted; what assessment he has made of the conformity of the permission with PPG15; what requests he has received to revoke it; and if he will make a statement. [2367]

Sir Paul Beresford: The Government office for the south-west received representations from English Heritage and the Wiltshire county archaeologist, as well as Salisbury district council and Chapman Warren, agents for the applicants. The planning permission was issued by Salisbury district council on 2 December 1994, including a condition which provides for archaeological investigation prior to development. On the same day, Wiltshire county council wrote to request call-in by the Secretary of State.

The land involved is not an scheduled ancient monument and in those circumstances the district council felt unable to refuse planning consent, which was consistent with the unchallenged housing provisions of the draft local plan, unless English Heritage gave an undertaking to meet the costs of any award against the council at appeal. No such undertaking was given and English Heritage did not press the Secretary of State to call in the application.

I have received no requests to revoke the planning permission.

EAGA Services Ltd.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the relationship between the energy action grants agency and EAGA Services Ltd. and on the role referred by EAGA Services Ltd. [2136]

Mr. Clappison: The energy action grants agency was recently renamed EAGA Ltd. EAGA Ltd. and EAGA Services Ltd. are sister companies within the EAGA group of companies. EAGA Ltd. works within the public sector, and its major contract is with the Department of the Environment to administer the home energy efficiency scheme. EAGA Services Ltd. tenders for work outside the public sector.

Rail Deregulation

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment which Minister has ultimate responsibility for the deregulation of rural business. [2640]

Sir Paul Beresford: I report to the Secretary of State for the Environment on the deregulation of the burdens on business which fall within this Department's areas of responsibility.

Mr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what mechanisms exist to co-ordinate the rail transport policy with the Department of Transport. [2642]

Sir Paul Beresford: My Department is in regular contact with the Department of Transport on all policy issues affecting the environment.

Development Corporations

Sir Irvine Patnick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the development corporations in the United Kingdom that were originally formed; how many are still in existence; what are their respective time limits; how much land each has reclaimed; how many jobs have been created by each corporation's activities; what value of private sector funding has been attracted by each; and if he will make a statement. [2518]

Mr. Curry: The information is given in the table:

UDC	*Wind-up date*	*Land reclaimed (hectares)*	*Jobs created (gross)*	*Private investment (£million)*
London Docklands	31 March 1998	709.0	63,025	6,084.4
Merseyside	31 March 1998	342.0	14,458	394.0
Black Country	31 March 1998	257.7	13,357	690.0
Teesside	31 March 1998	355.6	7,682	837.3
Trafford Park	31 March 1998	142.3	16,197	914.6
Tyne and Wear	31 March 1998	456.4	19,649	758.4
Bristol	31 December 1995	60.0	4,250	200.0
Sheffield	31 March 1997	234.5	11,342	553.1
Central Manchester	31 March 1996	33.0	4,909	344.8
Leeds	31 March 1995	68.0	9,066	357.0
Birmingham Heartlands	31 March 1998	54.0	1,773	106.8
Plymouth	31 March 1998	5.5	8	0

All corporations except Leeds are still in existence.

Responsibility for the Cardiff bay and Laganside development corporations lies with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales and my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland respectively.

All outputs are cumulative to 31 March 1995.

Housing Corporation

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many houses the Housing Corporation has built in rural areas; and how many he expects to be built in *(a)* 1996 and 1997 and *(b)* in each year since 1992. [2641]

Mr. Clappison: Since 1989–90, some 10,800 new homes have been approved in rural areas—defined as settlements with a population of 3,000 or less—through the Housing Corporation's rural programme. Of these, some 1,660 new homes were completed in 1992–93, 1,700 in 1993–94 and 1,890 in 1994–95. Rural schemes can be more difficult to develop and take longer to reach completion. We have therefore enabled the Housing Corporation to enhance grants to housing associations from 1996–97 to recognise the higher costs of developing small schemes in villages.

Forecast figures for future years will not be available until early in the new year, when the Housing Corporation has finalised its approved development programme.

Out-of-town Supermarkets

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations his Department has received from organisations representing small rural businesses expressing concern about the impact on their trade of out-of-town supermarkets in the last year. [2574]

Sir Paul Beresford: We have received a small number of representations from rural business interests and local authorities in response to the draft PPG6 and the consultation exercise on the rural White Paper.

Dearne Valley Partnership

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many ministerial visits have been made to the Dearne Valley Partnership since April 1992; and what has been the total cost involved of each visit. [2388]

Sir Paul Beresford: There have been 14 visits by sponsor Ministers and three visits by other DOE Ministers to the Dearne valley; information on the total cost of visits is not readily available.

Government Office for the East Midlands

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list in total and by individual department the number of staff who were at the Government office for the east midlands. [2764]

Sir Paul Beresford: At the start of this financial year, 247 staff were attached to the Government office for the east midlands. Departments are currently meeting the office's pay costs in the following proportions:

Department of Trade and Industry: 36 per cent.

Department of the Environment: 33 per cent.

Department for Education and Employment: 26 per cent.

Department of Transport: 5 per cent.

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what are the annual revenue costs of the Government office for the east midlands. [2765]

Sir Paul Beresford: GOEM's pay and non-pay running costs totalled £7.3 million in 1994–95.

Local Government Reorganisation

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what resources he will make available to authorities that have been or are to be reorganised on 1 April 1994, 1996 or 1997 for reorganisation costs incurred by them in 1995–96; and if he will make a statement. [3687]

Mr. Curry: On 27 July I invited authorities that have been, or are to be, reorganised on or before 1 April 1997 to submit estimates of the amount of expenditure that they expect to incur on transitional costs of reorganisation in 1995–96. On the basis, *inter alia*, of the information provided by the authorities, I have decided the maximum amounts that it would be appropriate to allocate towards such costs in 1995–96. I have given priority to authorities that are to be reorganised on 1 April 1996 and within that group, to the shadow authorities that are to become the new unitary authorities, and to the redundancy costs of authorities that are to be abolished.

The amounts are as follows:

Authority	Maximum amounts: £000s rounded 1995–96	Total 1994–95 and 1995–96
Isle of Wight		
Isle of Wight council	1,750	3,494
Cleveland		
Cleveland county council	2,500	—
Hartlepool borough council	3,200	3,748
Langbaurgh on Tees borough council	2,550	2,637
Middlesbrough borough council	2,160	2,354
Stockton on Tees borough council	2,930	3,428
Avon		
Avon county council	2,500	—
Bristol city council	3,000	—
Woodspring district council	3,250	—
In Bath and North East Somerset, of which:	3,000	—
Bath and North East Somerset council	1,810	—
Bath city council	600	—
Wansdyke district council	590	—
In South Gloucestershire, of which:	3,000	—
South Gloucestershire council	1,800	—
Kingswood borough council	650	—
Northavon district council	550	—
Humberside		
Humberside county council	2,500	—
Hull city council	3,000	—
In the East Riding of Yorkshire, of which:	3,200	—
East Riding of Yorkshire council	1,200	—
Beverley borough council	650	—
Boothferry borough council	300	—
East Yorkshire borough council	550	—
Holderness borough council	500	—
In North Lincolnshire, of which:	2,900	—
North Lincolnshire council	1,800	—
Glanford borough council	550	—
Scunthorpe borough council	550	—
In North East Lincolnshire, of which:	2,950	—
North East Lincolnshire DC	1,900	—
Cleethorpes borough council	450	—
Great Grimsby	600	—
North Yorkshire		
North Yorkshire county council	1,500	—
Ryedale district council	410	—
Selby district council	510	—
In York, of which:	3,000	—
York district council	2,550	—
York city council	450	—
Total	49,310	52,824

In addition, £0.2 million has been set aside, for distribution by the Home Office, for the reorganisation costs of combined fire authorities. A reserve of £0.49 million has been retained to meet any unanticipated, exceptional, costs incurred by shadow authorities.

I have considered carefully the bids submitted by authorities that are to be, or might be, reorganised in 1997. The arrangements make it clear that these authorities would have to make an exceptional case and that priority would be given to supporting expenditures that had to be incurred in 1995–96 if reorganisation were to be implemented by the specified date, and that were of a scale that could not reasonably be found from within the authority's budget. In my view, none of the bids established a sufficiently exceptional case to justify an allocation in the current year. These authorities have, however, been invited to submit bids for 1996–97.

Government Offices for the Regions

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the cost to public funds of each of the Government offices for the region since their commencement. [1940]

Sir Paul Beresford *[holding answer 27 November 1995]:* The expected cost to public funds of running each of the 10 Government offices in the two years from their creation in April 1994 to the end of this financial year is as follows:

Government Office	£ Million
North-east	18.160
North-west	21.841
Yorkshire and Humberside	18.850
Merseyside	9.675
West Midlands	21.731
East Midlands	14.508
Eastern Region	12.706
South-west	14.548
South-east	17.252
London	27.484

The Government offices have replaced the regional offices of the Departments of the Environment, Trade and Industry and the training, enterprise and education directorate of the former Employment Department, which together cost £92 million in 1993–94.

Public Bodies

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list annual income from *(a)* fees, *(b)* charges and *(c)* fines; what was the total number of staff employed (i) part time and (ii) full time; and what contribution his Department has made towards the annual running costs in each of the past three years in respect of (1) Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution, (2) the British Waterways Board (3) the Health and Safety Executive, (4) the National Rivers Authority and (5) the drinking water inspectorate. [2743]

Mr. Clappison *[holding answer 28 November 1995]:* The information is as follows with all cash figures in £ thousands and manpower figures in man-years:

Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Pollution

	1992–93	*1993–94*	*1994–95*
Income from:			
(a) Fees	8,912	13,935	16,856
(b) Charges	15	5	5
(c) Fines	Nil	Nil	Nil
Staff Numbers	*1 April 1993*	*1 April 1994*	*1 April 1995*
(i) Part-time	4	3	7
(ii) Full-time	354	433	427
Total	358	436	434
Running costs	14,338	11,252	10,131

British Waterways Board

Income from	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*
(a) Fee and charges	10,500	11,400	11,800
(b) Fines	—	—	—
Average number of persons employed	1,967	1,804	1,696
Grant-in-aid[1]	51,100	49,300	48,900

[1] BW receives a deficit grant (grant-in-aid) to cover the gap between its self-generated income and expenditure.

Health and Safety Executive

	1992–93	*1993–94*	*1994–95*
Income from			
(a) Fees	28,000	28,300	22,800
(b) Charges	10,100	11,300	13,800
(c) Fines	Nil	Nil	Nil
Staff numbers	*1 April 1993*	*1 April 1994*	*1 April 1995*
(i) Part-time	361	361	377
(ii) Full-time	4,357	4,364	4,154
Total	4,718	4,725	4,531
Running costs	163,500	169,000	170,500

National Rivers Authority

	1992–93	*1993–94*	*1994–95*
Income from			
(a) Fees[1]	126,200	136,400	124,000
(b) Charges[2]	209,500	199,000	171,400
(c) Fines	Nil	Nil	Nil
Staff numbers	*1 April 1993*	*1 April 1994*	*1 April 1995*
(i) Part-time[3]	759	636	760
(ii) Full-time	7,483	6,722	6,762
Total	8,242	7,358	7,522
Grant-in-aid[4]	74,700	61,200	60,300

Notes:
[1] Fees for abstraction licences, discharge consents, navigation licences, rod licences and net licences.
[2] Charges are mainly flood defence levies on local authorities.
[3] Includes limited period employees and consultant and agency staff.
[4] NRA receives a general deficit grant (grant-in-aid) to cover the gap between its income and expenditure on functions other than flood defence. It is not hypothecated between running costs and other purposes.

Drinking Water Inspectorate

	1992–93	*1993–94*	*1994–95*
Income from fees, charges and fines	Nil	Nil	Nil
Staff numbers	*1 April 1993*	*1 April 1994*	*1 April 1995*
(i) Full-time	29	31	31
(ii) Part-time	1	0	0
Total	30	31	31
Running costs	1,180	1,413	1,660

Running costs for Drinking Water Inspectorate are funded within the Department's running costs.

Water Services (Yorkshire)

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will set up an independent inquiry into the management of the water supply service in the Yorkshire area. [2940]

Mr. Curry *[holding answer 28 November 1995]:* No. The Director Genral of Water Services is already investigating various aspects of Yorkshire Water's performance.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Deep-sea Fish

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the deep sea fish aspects of the international workshop referred to in his answer of 8 November, *Official Report*, column *878*, considering the competitiveness and consistency of global arrangements for the management of the oceans. [124]

Mr. Baldry: The workshop will consider the key pressure points affecting the sustainability of the oceans, ocean science, linking science to management, and global arrangements for ensuing effective implementation of ocean policies. All of these issues are relevant to intergovernmental co-operation on questions related to deep sea fish.

Moroccan Tomatoes

Mr. Atkins: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what consultations he has had with British horticulture interests over the European Union's proposals to increase access to European countries of Moroccan tomatoes. [2225]

Mr. Boswell: Growers' views on access of Moroccan tomatoes were made very clear by the NFU at the start of the negotiations.

Mr. Atkins: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what discussions he has had with his opposite numbers in Spain and Portugal in connection with their requests for greater access to the European Union of Moroccan tomatoes. [2226]

Mr. Boswell: No bilateral discussions were held with Spanish and Portuguese Agriculture Ministers. The issue was discussed in the Foreign Affairs Council where all member states were represented.

Agricultural Tenancies Act 1995

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he will lay before the House the results of monitoring of the effect of the Agricultural Tenancies Act 1995; and if he will make a statement. [2490]

Mr. Boswell: The Department is planning to obtain relevant information annually from the June agricultural census and a new annual survey of tenanted land commencing in 1996. This information will be published when it becomes available.

Agriculture Fertilisers

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the current level of subsidy and grant aid for the use of lime as an agriculture fertiliser; what was the level in *(a)* 1965 and *(b)* 1970; and if he will make a statement. [2527]

Mr. Boswell: There have been no subsidies or grant aid available for the use of lime as an agriculture fertiliser since 1976. The level of subsidy in the financial year 1964–65 was £9.9 million and in 1965–66 £8.1 million. Subsidies in the financial years 1969–70 and 1970–71 totalled £4.6 million and £5 million respectively. Lime can be beneficial in certain circumstances and decisions on its application are for farmers and growers. We see no need to subsidise its use.

Arable Area Payments

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the highest payment made under the arable area payments scheme in England in 1994. [3020]

Mr. Baldry: For reasons of confidentiality, it is not possible to identify the highest payment under the arable area payments scheme in 1994.

Barley

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what levels of United Kingdom intervention stocks of barley were in each month since November 1994; and what the intervention price was in each month. [159]

Mr. Baldry *[pursuant to his reply, 22 November 1995, c.198]:* The information requested is as follows:

Month	*Physical stock of barley at month end thousand tonnes*	*Intervention price £/tonnes*
December 1994	976	103.94
January 1995	820	105.08
February 1995	732	1st 106.23
		17th 107.59
		21st 108.40
March 1995	559	1st 109.57
		6th 109.78
		16th 111.66
		26th 112.83
April 1995	521	1st 114.04
		15th 114.48
		25th 114.93
May 1995	478	1st 116.14
		15th 116.78
June 1995	477	108.25
July 1995	357	100.59
August 1995	260	100.59
September 1995	195	100.59
October 1995	139	100.59

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

Overseas Aid

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what percentage of overseas aid to *(a)* sub-Saharan Africa, *(b)* Latin America and the Caribbean, *(c)* south and central asia, *(d)* the middle east and north Africa, *(e)* other Asia and Oceania and *(f)* eastern Europe is spent on (i) basic education, (ii) primary health care, (iii) safe drinking water, (iv) adequate sanitation, (v) family planning and (vi) nutrition. [1548]

Mr. Hanley: The requested information is available only for that bilateral expenditure which is allocable by sector. The most recent figures available are for financial year 1994–95, and are given in the table.

The categories are by economic sector and each ODA project or programme is classified to a single sector. This does not present the full picture because there will be further expenditure in each of these sectors through projects which form part of other, more general, sectors. This is particularly so for family planning, which has not been separately identified. In the calendar year 1994, it is estimated that 2.3 per cent. of total United Kingdom aid, both bilateral and multilateral, was spent on reproductive health care.

The table excludes block grants to NGOs and multilateral assistance, as it is not possible to provide a breakdown by sector. Bilateral food aid is included in the expenditure on nutrition. It is not possible to provide a sectoral breakdown of the non food aid component of emergency aid. It is likely that a significant amount of this excluded expenditure contributes to the sectors shown.

This information is provisional until the publication in December of the 1995 edition of "British Aid Statistics".

1994–95 bilateral Gross Public Expenditure (GPEX) on selected sectors as a percentage of total bilateral GPEX in specified regions

	Basic education[1]	*Primary health care*	*Water and sanitation*[2]	*Nutrition*[3]
Sub-Saharan Africa	2.2	4.1	1.0	7.3
Latin America and Caribbean	2.0	3.0	3.2	0.2
South and Central Asia	1.5	6.8	3.2	0.9
Middle East and North Africa	1.3	6.0	4.6	—
Other Asia and Pacific	0.7	1.5	2.1	—
Eastern Europe	—	0.2	—	0.3

[1]The amount spent on basic education comprises around 18.5 per cent. of total bilateral expenditure on education in the regions shown. As for the other categories, some additional expenditure is classified to more general sectors.
[2]Information on water and sanitation projects is presented jointly since a significant amount of expenditure in these sectors is spent on joint projects.
[3]Figures for nutrition include bilateral food aid. Other emergency aid is excluded from the table.

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what percentage of the overseas aid budget is used for *(a)* food, *(b)* medical supplies and equipment, *(c)* housing, *(d)* education and training programmes, *(e)* construction of infrastructure and *(f)* administration of development and aid programmes. [1544]

Mr. Hanley: The information requested in parts *(c)*, *(d)* and *(e)* of the question is available only for that bilateral expenditure which is allocable by sector. The most recent figures available are for financial year 1994–95. Expenditure on food aid and administrative costs relates both to bilateral and multilateral aid, parts *(a)* and *(f)*. It is not possible to identify separately information on medical supplies and equipment, part *(b)*; therefore expenditure on the whole health sector is included. This information is given in the table.

The categories shown have been defined in terms of economic sector and each ODA project or programme is classified to a single sector. This does not present the full picture for the sectors shown. There will be further expenditure in each of these sectors through broad projects which form part of more general sectors.

The figure given for food aid includes emergency food aid. The table excludes other emergency aid, block grants to NGOs and multilateral aid, as a sector breakdown is not available. It is likely that a significant amount of this excluded expenditure contributes to the sectors shown.

The information is provisional until the publication in December of the 1995 edition of "British Aid Statistics".

ODA expenditure on selected sectors as a percentage of total ODA expenditure, 1994–95

	Percentage
Percentage share of total ODA programme	
(a) Food aid[1]	4.1
(f) Administration	2.3

ODA expenditure on selected sectors as a percentage of total ODA expenditure, 1994–95

	Percentage
Percentage share of total ODA bilateral programme	
(a) Food aid	3.3
(b) Health	7.0
(c) Housing[2]	0.5
(d) Education	10.4
(e) Construction of infrastructure[3]	12.8

[1] In 1994–95 £56.8 million of ODA's multilateral expenditure was spent on EC and UN food aid programmes in addition to £36.3 million of bilateral food aid. This includes both regular and emergency contributions.
[2] This figure includes expenditure on slum improvement projects.
[3] Infrastructure is defined according to the 1994 World Development Report to include: public utilities (energy, telecommunications, water, sanitation and sewerage), public works (roads, irrigation and drainage) and transport.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he expects the Government to reach the United Nations target of 0.7 per cent. gross national product for overseas aid. [2224]

Mr. Hanley: We have not set down a timetable for reaching the 0.7 per cent. target. Progress towards the target will depend on our economic circumstances and on other priorities for public expenditure.

In 1994, our ODA-GNP ratio was 0.31 per cent.—above the average for all OECD donors of 0.29 per cent.

Bilateral Aid Programme

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what would be the impact on the bilateral aid programme over each of the next three years of reductions of *(a)* 1 per cent. *(b)* 5 per cent. *(c)* 10 per cent. and *(d)* 12 per cent., levels in the overall aid programme. [1591]

Mr. Hanley: It is not possible to answer this question precisely, since there is some scope to modify certain categories of multilateral spending such as contributions to new multilateral replenishments or voluntary contributions to United Nations or Commonwealth bodies.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received from voluntary organisations regarding the United Kingdom's bilateral aid programme in the last year. [2118]

Mr. Hanley: In the last year, my noble Friend the Minister for Overseas Development and her officials have had frequent contact with voluntary organisations and non-governmental organisations. This dialogue covers a wide range of issues, including the United Kingdom's bilateral aid programme.

Kenya

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Government of Kenya about the work of the international genocide tribunal. [2568]

Mr. Hanley: We have made our views about the work of the international tribunal for Rwanda quite clear to the Government of Kenya. They have given assurances to the United Nations Security Council that they will co-operate with the tribunal.

Commonwealth Institute

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is his policy in respect of the future of the Commonwealth Institute; what proposed legislation will affect the Commonwealth Institute; what recent discussions he has had with the management of the Commonwealth Institute; and if he will make a statement on the outcome of those discussions. [2900]

Mr. Hanley: Discussions have been under way since July this year between Ministers and the executive committee of the Commonwealth Institute on its future operation after March 1996. My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs met the chairman, vice-chairman, director general and chairman of the Commonwealth Institute, Scotland on 24 October to discuss future policy. The annual general meeting on 5 December will allow future options after March 1996 to be considered.

Technical Assistance to the Commonwealth of Independent States

Ms Quin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will supply figures for the amount of money allocated from the TACIS programme for the environment; and what percentage of the total money allocated this represents. [1234]

Mr. Hanley *[holding answer 27 November 1995]:* The amount committed under TACIS to the environment and nuclear safety sector from its inception up to the end of 1994 was 321 mecu—£242.44 million—representing 18.4 per cent. of total commitments.

Land Mines

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what part the United Kingdom has played in the clearance of land mines throughout the world. [835]

Mr. Hanley *[holding answer 29 November 1995]:* We have provided more than £17.3 million over the last four years for humanitarian mine clearance operations in Afghanistan, Angola, Cambodia, northern Iraq, Laos, Mozambique, Rwanda, north-west Somalia, and Yemen.

Gambia

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what discussions he has had with the Gambian regime to ensure that free and fair elections are held in July 1996. [2754]

Mr. Hanley *[holding answer 28 November 1995]:* My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and my noble Friend the Minister for Overseas Development had the opportunity to discuss our concerns with representatives of the regime at the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting in Auckland and to press for a rapid return to a civilian democracy and for the full respect of human rights. The Gambia should benefit from the Millbrook programme, which is intended to advance Commonwealth fundamental political values and support the practice of Harare principles.

Mr. LLoyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received about the human rights situation in the Gambia in the last year; and if he will make a statement. [2753]

Mr. Hanley *[holding answer 28 November 1995]:* We have received numerous representations from individuals and human rights organisations on the Gambia. We have repeatedly called on the regime to respect human rights and demonstrate its own stated commitment to return the Gambia to a civilian democracy in July 1996 by lifting the ban on political activity.

Nigeria

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what international discussions he has had on the possibility of freezing the assets and accounts of the members of the Nigerian military regime. [2597]

Mr. Hanley *[holding answer 27 November 1995]:* We continue to consult closely with Commonwealth, European Union and other United Nations partners on all aspects of our policy towards Nigeria. [2566]

Mr. Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what policy in respect of Nigeria was agreed within the European Union on 20 November; and how the United Kingdom will implement it. [2598]

Mr. Hanley *[holding answer 27 November 1995]:* On 20 November the European Union adopted a common position introducing visa restrictions on civilian Ministers and their families, a full arms embargo and a suspension of non-humanitarian aid. The measures agreed on Nigeria in 1993 remain in force. New and existing measures will be strictly implemented by the United Kingdom.

Mr. Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations his Department has received from, and what meetings it has held and on which dates, with the Nigerian-British Society since November 1993.

Mr. Hanley *[holding answer 27 November 1995]:* We are not aware of any such society. My noble Friend the Minister for Overseas Development met a combined group from the British-Nigeria Association and the Nigerian-British Chamber of Commerce on 15 May, and held a meeting with representatives of the British-Nigeria Association on 24 August. Officials also have regular contact with these and other such organisations.

Mr. Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what instructions were issued to the high commission in Lagos to organise meetings with representatives of *(a)* Shell and *(b)* the Ogoni people; what meetings were organised; and if he will make a statement. [2292]

Mr. Hanley *[holding answer 24 November 1995]:* Our high commission in Lagos has had regular meetings with Shell, as it does with other companies operating in Nigeria

as a matter of routine. It has also had regular meetings with a wide variety of groups in Nigeria, including representatives of Ogoni groups.

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what has been the policy of Her Majesty's Government towards the export of arms to Nigeria in the last two years; and what is the current policy. [2254]

Mr. Hanley *[holding answer 24 November 1995]:* Previous policy was set out in the answer given to the hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Mr. Worthington) on 2 December 1993 at column *676*. On 11 November, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister announced a full UK arms embargo against Nigeria. On 20 November, the European Union agreed to strengthen existing restrictions on arms sales to Nigeria through a full arms embargo.

Sri Lanka

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what discussions he has held recently with the Government of Sri Lanka regarding provision of humanitarian aid to the Jaffna region of Sri Lanka; [2050]

(2) what discussions he has held recently with representatives of the United Nations regarding provision of humanitarian aid to Sri Lanka. [2049]

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what discussions he has had with the Sri Lankan Government about offering food and medical supplies to people living in the northern area of Sri Lanka, with particular reference to Jaffna to alleviate suffering and hardship caused by the present conflict; and if he will make a statement; [1782]

(2) what discussions he has had with the Sri Lankan Government on food and medical aid being made available by the British Government to the Tamil community in northern Sri Lanka; [1705]

(3) what reports he has received from the British high commissioner in Sri Lanka on the present conflict that is taking place, with special reference to the facilities which exist to help people who have become refugees as a result of the conflict; and if he will make a statement. [1702]

Mr. Hanley: The high commissioner in Colombo has frequent and extensive discussions with the Sri Lankan Government and with relief agencies about the conflict and the humanitarian situation in the north of the country.

I refer the hon. Members to the replies I gave to the hon. Member for Ilford, South, (Mr. Gapes) on 21 and 22 November at columns *67–8* and *111*.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Research and Development

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what were the indicative contributions to the EU Budget in respect of research and development for his Department in 1993–94. [1914]

Sir John Wheeler: Table 2.1 of the statistical supplement to the "Forward Look of Government—funded Science, Engineering and Technology" contains indicative figures for the United Kingdom's contributions to the EC budget in respect of research and development. My Department does not have any policy responsibilities for Community R and D expenditure.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Child Support Agency

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will update the figures on revenue collected by the Child Support Agency in his answer of 21 June, *Official Report*, column *252*, with reference to the latest data available and also show for each month since April 1994 *(a)* the amount of revenue demanded attributable to type A interim assessments and *(b)* the amount which offsets state funds. [2266]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the chief executive, Miss Ann Chant. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Miss Ann Chant to Ms Liz Lynne, dated 28 November 1995:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about revenue collected by the Child Support Agency.

You asked for updated information on maintenance assessed, scheduled for payment and collected via the Agency collection service. The available information on maintenance scheduled for payment and collected by the Agency is set out in the attached table, together with how much of the maintenance collected each month has offset benefit spending. During 1994–95, 65% of maintenance collected offset benefit spending, compared with 54% to date this year.

Additionally, between April and September 1995 £61.46 million arising from Agency assessments was paid direct between parents who do not use the Agency's collection service.

Information on the amount of revenue attributable to Type 'A' interim assessments is not available.

I hope this is helpful.

Maintenance arising from CSA arrangements

£ million

	Assessed and scheduled for payment via Agency collection service	*Paid via Agency collection service*	*Amount collected which offsets benefit spending*
Total 1993–94	107.54	12.57	5.70
1994			
April	27.82	3.70	1.78
May	30.43	4.04	1.82
June	32.33	4.66	2.36
July	43.31	4.80	3.08
August	42.64	5.75	3.43
September	47.41	6.10	3.75
October	44.81	6.47	3.53
November	45.95	7.03	4.30
December	53.98	7.09	3.87
January	43.56	7.85	4.52
February	43.48	7.66	5.85
March	49.05	9.09	9.65
Total 1994–95	504.77	74.24	47.94

Maintenance arising from CSA arrangements

£ million

	Assessed and scheduled for payment via Agency collection service	*Paid via Agency collection service*	*Amount collected which offsets benefit spending*
1995			
April	45.44	7.92	4.11
May	45.06	8.99	5.58
June	47.43	9.31	5.36
July	41.87	9.12	4.73
August	42.24	9.70	5.16
September	46.33	10.36	5.21
Year to date 1995–96	268.38	55.40	30.16

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what procedure exists for the payment of arrears to the Child Support Agency by instalments. [2387]

Mr. Mitchell: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the chief executive, Miss Ann Chant. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Miss Ann Chant to Mr. Jim Cunningham, dated 28 November 1995:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about payments of arrears by instalments to the Child Support Agency.

If an absent parent (AP) falls into arrears without contacting the Agency then every effort is made to get in touch with him to determine why payments have fallen behind. He will be asked to make up the missing payments, but if there is a problem, the Agency arranges an arrears agreement with the AP.

The arrears agreement negotiated is based on the amount of debt and the AP's ability to pay. It is made clear to the AP that he will not be expected to pay more than 33% of his net income in regular payment and arrears.

The welfare of any children involved is considered when deciding how much to enforce and officers are trained to negotiate the most reasonable level of payment in the interests of all parties.

Where arrears are in respect of the initial payment period, the possibility of deferring debt other than that appropriate to the most recent 26 weeks can be considered in certain circumstances, where the delay in making the assessment has been substantially due to the Agency. In these circumstances, the arrears agreement is based on that 26 weeks arrears total.

I hope this is helpful.

Mr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will say what the procedure is for collecting arrears of Child Support from a husband who pays directly to his wife. [2386]

Mr. Mitchell: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the chief executive, Miss Ann Chant. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Miss Ann Chant to Mr. Jim Cunningham, dated 28 November 1995:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about collection of arrears by the Child Support Agency.

Where child maintenance is paid directly to the parent with care (PWC) by the absent parent (AP), the Agency only becomes aware arrears when the PWC get in touch to advise us of the AP's failure to pay. If the PWC wishes the Agency to pursue the arrears she may do so by requesting the collection and enforcement service at any time. The current moratorium of fees means that no further fee will be levied for this service.

If we are asked to undertake collection and enforcement action, the Agency confirms the amount of unpaid maintenance with the AP and arranges an arrears agreement with him. Collection is then made via the Agency so that we can monitor the arrears agreement and take any necessary action to ensure regular payments of maintenance, including enforcement action if this becomes essential.

I hope this is helpful.

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the number of deduction of earning orders issued by the Child Support Agency since April 1994 *(a)* against type A interim assessments and *(b)* against full maintenance assessments. [2267]

Mr. Mitchell: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the chief executive, Miss Ann Chant. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Miss Ann Chant to Ms Liz Lynne, dated 28 November 1995:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about Child Support Agency assessments.

From April 1994 to September 1995, 54,093 deduction of earnings orders have been issued by the Agency. Of these 14,478 were issued on interim maintenance assessments and 39,615 on full maintenance assessments.

I hope this is helpful.

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will give a breakdown of the weekly maintenance being paid in cases where absent parents are paying child support maintenance by way of a deduction of earnings order. [1238]

Mr. Mitchell: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the chief executive, Miss Ann Chant. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Miss Ann Chant to Ms Liz Lynne, dated 28 November 1995:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about Child Support Agency deduction of earnings orders.

The latest information I am able to supply is that the Child Support Agency is currently collecting in excess of £996,000 maintenance per week from absent parents, by means of deductions of earnings orders.

I hope this is helpful.

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many Child Support Agency cases have arrangements to pay via the agency's collection service; and how many are *(a)* fully paid and *(b)* partially paid indicating the numbers of (i) type A interim maintenance assessments and (ii) full assessments. [1237]

Mr. Mitchell: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the chief executive, Miss Ann Chant. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Miss Ann Chant to Ms Liz Lynne, dated 28 November 1995:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about cases using the Child Support Agency collection service. The breakdown you requested is shown in the table.

	Number of cases involving type A interim maintenance assessments	*Number of cases involving full maintenance assessments*
Fully paid[1]	6,545	39,661
Partially paid[2]	15,979	73,789
Not paid	60,947	17,370
Total	83,471	130,820

[1] Full compliance—no payments outstanding.
[2] Partial compliance—at least one payment received in the last 13 weeks.

I hope this is helpful.

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what criteria have to be fulfilled for an absent parent to be classified as making regular maintenance payments. [1236]

Mr. Mitchell: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the chief executive, Miss Ann Chant. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Miss Ann Chant to Ms Liz Lynne, dated 28 November 1995:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about Child Support Agency assessments.

You asked what criteria have to be fulfilled for an absent parent to be classified as making regular maintenance payments. An absent parent is considered to be complying in full if all outstanding payments have been received; and partially if *at least* one payment has been received in the last 13 weeks.

I hope this is helpful.

War Widows' Pensions

Mr. Dover: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement about the level of resources allocated to the payment of war widows' pensions. [2832]

Mr. Heald: These are matters for Mr. John Sheppard, the acting chief executive of the War Pensions Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from John Sheppard to Mr. Den Dover, dated 28 November 1995:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about the level of resources allocated to the payment of War Widows Pensions.

As at 27 November, a total of 98 staff are employed on dealing with all aspects of war widows claims. Included in this figure are 45 members of staff dealing with the restoration of War Widows Pension under the Pensions Act, which came into effect on 19 July 1995. Agency expenditure in this financial year for all the above is expected to be £780,000.

I hope you find my reply helpful.

National Insurance Numbers

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people have been prosecuted in each year since 1987 for using bogus national insurance numbers. [1989]

Mr. Heald: There is no separately identifiable offence of using a bogus national insurance number. However, the use of a false NINO can form the basis of a prosecution under section 112 of the Social Security Administration Act 1992 or other legislation such as the Theft Act 1978. A person may be guilty of an offence if he supplies to the Department, for a purpose connected with social security legislation, information he knows to be false. The number of prosecutions involving false or misappropriated NINOs is not separately available.

Social Fund

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what amounts, in cash terms, have been spent on the administration of the social fund for each year since its inception; and what percentage of the total fund this represented in each year. [2082]

Mr. Roger Evans: Social fund administration costs are met separately from expenditure from the regulated and discretionary fund. The figures requested are set out in the table; 1993–94 is the latest year for which figures on administration costs are available.

Year	*Administration cost (£ million)*	*Percentage of gross expenditure*	*Percentage of total gross expenditure plus recoveries*
1988–89	61	30.3	24.5
1989–90	77	32.1	22.1
1990–91	132	48.5	33.3
1991–92	163	48.2	33.5
1992–93	208	51.9	35.3
1993–94	270	61.1	41.4

The table compares administration costs in each year since 1988–89 to the fund's gross expenditure—that is, the money paid out. However, the fund's business involves paying money out and recovering the amounts awarded as loans. A more accurate reflection of the work needed to operate the fund would therefore be a comparison between administration costs and gross expenditure plus recoveries, and this information is also given in the table.

In 1990–91 the basis of the calculation of administration costs changed, and so direct comparisons with previous years are not possible.

In both 1992–93 and 1993–94 the rise in administration costs is largely attributable to expenditure on the new social fund computer system, which was purchased and put in place during those years.

Local Government

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the Acts of Parliament including Consolidation Acts that affect local government that have been introduced by his Department since January 1994. [39]

Mr. Burt: The Jobseeker's Act 1995 section 18.

Residential Care and Nursing Homes

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was *(a)* DSS income support expenditure for residents in private and voluntary residential nursing homes and *(b)* the number of claimants in Scotland between 1979 and 1994. [1142]

Mr. Roger Evans: No data for Scotland are available prior to 1988. The available information is set out in the table:

Number of claimants and income support expenditure on residents in residential care and nursing homes in Scotland

Number of claimants

Year	*Residential care*	*Nursing homes*	*Residential allowance*	*Annualized Cost £ million*
1988	6,000	4,000	—	62
1989	6,000	4,000	—	65
1990	9,000	6,000	—	98
1991	9,000	9,000	—	145
1992	10,000	12,000	—	201
1993	10,000	11,000	—	219
1994	8,000	9,000	5,000	208

Notes:

1. Figures prior to 1994 are a "snap-shot" taken at a particular month each year. From 1988 the month of the inquiry was May.
2. Numbers have been rounded to the nearest thousand and expenditure to the nearest million.
3. Expenditure for 1994 has been calculated by adding together the estimated quarterly expenditure May 1993–February 1994 (number of cases multiplied by average Income Support multiplied by 13). Expenditure prior to 1994 has been calculated by multiplying the number of cases by the average weekly Income Support and multiplying by 52. For 1990 and 1991 average Income Support for Scotland is not known and the figure for Great Britain has been used.
4. Residential Allowance was introduced in April 1993. Figures for 1993 are negligible. For 1994 the figures shown are for preserved rights cases split by residential care and nursing homes and Residential Allowance for which no equivalent split is available.

Source:

Income Support Quarterly Statistical Inquiries—Residential Care and Nursing Home Inquiries May 1991–1994.

Income Support Quarterly Inquiries—Board and Lodging Inquiry 1988–1990.

Cold Weather Payments

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many pensioners received cold weather payments in each region over the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [1091]

Mr. Roger Evans: The information is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Benefits (Savings)

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his estimate of the financial savings that will be made by *(a)* the proposed changes to entitlements to social security benefits for asylum seekers, *(b)* other announced changes to entitlements to social security benefits and *(c)* other planned changes to entitlements to social security benefits; and if he will make a statement. [2349]

Mr. Roger Evans: The savings as a result of the proposed changes to social security benefits for asylum seekers are estimated to amount to £300 million a year by the year 2000–01.

As a result of measures announced today and in the previous two Budgets it is estimated that £5 billion a year in benefit expenditure will be saved by 2000–01.

Both these figures are in 1995–96 prices.

Disability Working Allowance

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the average length of time a claimant receives disability working allowance, including awards on renewal. [1836]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell *[holding answer 24 November 1995]:* As at 30 April 1995, the average length of time a claimant received disability working allowance, including awards on renewal, was 46 weeks[1].

[1] This figure relates to all awards, both completed and current at 30 April 1995.

Source: 100 per cent. scan of all DWA claims.

WALES

Staff (Town and Country Planning)

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many members of staff are employed in the town and country planning section of the Welsh Office at Cathays park; and if he will make a statement. [2804]

Mr. Hague: The number of staff employed by my Department who work on town and country planning matters is 50.8 full-time equivalents.

These include staff working in planning inspectorate in Wales.

Beef Special Premium Scheme

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when the beef annual premium was paid to farmers in Wales in *(a)* 1991, *(b)* 1992, *(c)* 1993, *(d)* 1994 and *(e)* 1995. [2803]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The Welsh Office assumed responsibility for the scheme in 1993. Payments were previously made, under the different scheme rules that were then in place, by the Intervention Board, as and when cattle were presented for slaughter or marketed with a view to slaughter.

Since the Welsh Office took over the scheme, payments began in the following months:

1993: December

1994: November

1995: November

Poverty

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what estimate he has made of the number of people in Wales living in poverty; what plans he has to reduce this figure; and if he will make a statement. [2731]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: No Government of any political persuasion have ever accepted that it is possible to define poverty in a meaningful way.

Statistics on patterns of household disposable income, for the United Kingdom as a whole, are provided in "Households Below Average Income 1979–1992/93", a copy of which is in the Library of the House. Information for Wales is not available separately.

Textile Industry

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many persons are currently employed in the textile and garment making industry in Wales. [2919]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The latest available figures are for 1993 when, according to the census of employment, the number of employees employed in the manufacture of textiles and wearing apparel in Wales was 12,300.

School Transport

Mr. Hanson: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what advice he has issued to local authorities with regard to escort provision on school transport services. [2928]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Welsh Office Circular 19/95 "Home to School Transport", which was issued on 10 May 1995, contains guidance about local education authorities' responsibilities in providing supervision on school transport.

A copy is available in the Library of the House.

Mr. Hanson: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what new initiatives he proposes to improve safety on school buses; [2929]

(2) if he will review the current advice given to local authorities with regard to the maximum numbers of pupils per seat on school transport. [2927]

Mr. Norris: I have been asked to reply.

I hope to lay two sets of regulations before the House later this autumn. The first will require seat belts to be fitted in minibuses and coaches used specifically for the transport of children. The second will remove the concession allowing three seated children, under 14 to count as two passengers, when travelling on public service vehicles fitted with seat belts.

Housing Expenditure

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the planned expenditure for housing in Wales for the year 1996–97; and if he will make a statement. [2925]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: My right hon. Friend will be announcing the details of his public expenditure decisions for 1996–97 in December.

Clinical Negligence Claims

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was *(a)* the number of cases reported alleging clinical negligence, *(b)* the total amount of money claimed in these cases, *(c)* the total amount of money advised by trust solicitors or otherwise resolved by trusts in settlement of such claims, and *(d)* the figures for *(c)* expressed as a percentage of turnover, for each health trust and for Wales as whole for each of the last two years for which information is available. [641]

Mr. Richards: I will write to the hon. Member and will place a copy of my reply in the Library of the House.

Council Tax

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) if he will list for each district council in constant 1995 prices the actual amount collected in council tax within each band and in average terms for each available year since its introduction, indicating also the corresponding amounts collected per household; [1850]

(2) if he will list for each unitary council and for Wales as a whole *(a)* the estimated council tax which would be collected based on the latest provisional assessments issued to councils by his office and *(b)* the actual council tax levied during 1995–96 for each band and in average terms, indicating also the corresponding amounts collected per household; and if he will make a statement. [1851]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The available information is given in the following tables. Table 1 gives the amounts of council tax budgeted to be collected by each authority at the beginning of each financial year. This information is not collected by band. The average per dwelling is based on the number of dwellings liable for the council tax in the relevant year.

Table 2 gives the available, equivalent information for unitary authorities.

The figures for the implied council tax levels in 1995–96 have been derived from the final disaggregated budget and indicative standard spending assessments issued on 27 October. These redistribute 1995–96 budgets and SSAs for the existing councils to the new authorities. Weighted band D taxes, based on the actual 1995–96 taxes set in each district area within the new unitary boundaries, are given together with estimates of the amount which would have been raised by that level of tax. Per dwelling averages are not available.

On 30 October, I announced that a scheme would be introduced to damp the increases in council tax arising from the disaggregation exercise.

Table 1: Amounts raised from the council tax, band D averages and per dwelling averages, 1993–94 to 1995–96 at constant 1995–96 prices

	Total amount of council tax budgeted to be collected (£ million)			*Average band D council tax (£)*			*Average council tax per dwelling (£)*		
	1993–94	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*
Alyn and Deeside	9.8	9.7	10.4	398	393	403	358	351	357
Colwyn	7.6	7.8	8.1	377	372	387	330	325	338
Delyn	9.1	9.1	9.8	397	377	401	358	340	360
Glyndwr	5.5	5.7	5.9	374	366	383	328	330	345
Rhuddlan	7.1	7.3	7.7	393	384	399	328	319	333
Wrexham Maelor	14.4	14.5	15.1	398	388	406	330	320	334
Carmarthen	7.4	8.2	9.0	363	390	439	326	355	397
Ceredigion	9.5	10.3	11.3	373	404	451	337	370	406
Dinefwr	5.0	5.3	6.0	364	394	445	313	339	379
Llanelli	9.5	10.3	11.5	414	447	495	317	341	378

Table 1: Amounts raised from the council tax, band D averages and per dwelling averages, 1993–94 to 1995–96 at constant 1995–96 prices

	Total amount of council tax budgeted to be collected (£ million)			Average band D council tax (£)			Average council tax per dwelling (£)		
	1993–94	1994–95	1995–96	1993–94	1994–95	1995–96	1993–94	1994–95	1995–96
Preseli Pembrokeshire	9.0	9.8	10.7	354	381	427	313	340	378
South Pembrokeshire	5.7	6.0	6.8	339	368	416	304	322	367
Blaenau Gwent	6.4	6.7	7.2	315	319	343	217	220	238
Islwyn	5.9	5.9	6.4	319	308	334	224	236	255
Monmouth	10.1	10.3	11.1	330	330	351	349	346	368
Newport	13.9	14.3	15.3	324	328	349	272	277	294
Torfaen	8.8	9.1	10.0	326	327	354	253	259	280
Aberconwy	7.2	7.2	8.4	345	361	400	307	323	359
Arfon	5.8	6.3	6.7	342	365	382	270	286	302
Dwyfor	3.9	4.2	4.7	327	347	384	288	307	340
Meirionnydd	4.7	4.7	5.2	359	356	391	295	291	318
Ynys Mon	9.1	9.3	10.0	353	370	399	304	323	349
Cynon Valley	5.2	6.3	7.0	299	356	390	208	249	274
Merthyr Tydfil	4.7	5.6	6.4	294	349	396	203	242	274
Ogwr	12.5	15.9	18.3	297	358	401	248	304	342
Rhondda	5.9	7.4	8.3	292	353	400	191	235	266
Rhymney Valley	8.7	10.5	11.9	299	357	402	227	271	305
Taff Ely	9.5	11.0	12.3	324	365	402	268	300	332
Brecknock	5.2	5.6	6.2	326	356	393	310	339	370
Montgomeryshire	6.2	6.8	7.6	312	341	377	284	311	343
Radnorshire	2.9	3.2	3.6	309	341	378	287	317	348
Cardiff	29.3	29.6	33.8	302	299	338	266	265	299
Vale of Glamorgan	13.1	13.3	15.4	310	313	353	308	310	348
Port Talbot	5.5	5.9	6.4	366	385	419	279	293	317
Lliw Valley	7.3	7.9	8.7	366	384	419	298	313	341
Neath	8.0	8.6	9.3	400	422	454	313	328	353
Swansea	22.3	24.7	26.6	376	397	435	317	339	366
Wales	321.6	344.4	379.1	341	358	392	287	303	330

Source:
Local authority returns.

Table 2: Band D council tax estimates for unitary authorities—estimates based on the latest budget and indicative SSAs compared with averages of actual taxes levied in component districts, 1995–96

	(a) Estimates based on latest unitary budget figures and indicative SSAs for 1995–96		(b) Estimates based on weighted averages of actual band D taxes set in component districts in 1995–96	
	Implied band D council tax (£)	Implied council tax to be collected (£ million)	Weighted band D council tax (£)	Implied council tax to be collected (£ million)
Anglesey	320	8.0	399	10.0
Caernarfonshire and Merionethshire	422	18.1	385	16.5
Aberconwy and Colwyn	292	12.0	394	16.2
Denbighshire	491	16.1	393	12.9
Flintshire	426	21.4	402	20.2
Wrexham	367	14.5	405	15.9
Powys	348	16.1	383	17.7
Cardigan	590	14.8	451	11.3
Pembrokeshire	372	15.4	423	17.5
Carmarthenshire	443	25.2	463	26.4
Swansea	348	26.1	432	32.5
Neath and Port Talbot	515	21.9	436	18.5
Bridgend	392	17.1	401	17.6
Vale of Glamorgan	346	15.8	355	16.2
Rhondda, Cynon, Taff	490	32.8	398	26.7
Merthyr Tydfil	435	7.1	396	6.4
Caerphilly	407	19.8	375	18.3
Blaenau Gwent	524	10.2	343	6.7
Torfaen	351	9.9	354	10.0
Monmouthshire	242	8.0	351	11.7
Newport	246	10.7	349	15.3
Cardiff	371	38.1	339	34.9
Wales	392	379.1	392	379.1

Source:
Local authority returns.

Students

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many students in Wales applied for student loans in each year since 1991; and if he will make a statement. [2338]

Mr. Hague: These are matters for the Student Loans Company. I have asked the acting chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many students in Wales applied for hardship funds in each year since 1991; and if he will make a statement. [2339]

Mr. Hague: Since the academic year 1990–91 institutions in Wales have received student access funds so that they may provide financial help to students in financial difficulties. Institutions may supplement these funds from their own resources.

The number of students in the former public sector further and higher education institutions in Wales applying for assistance from the access funds in the academic years 1990–91 to 1993–94 is as follows:

1990–91: 3,102

1991–92: 3,827

1992–93: 3,597

1993–94: 3,317.

Information on applications to the colleges of the university of Wales is not available prior to 1993–94. In that year, 3,260 students applied for assistance from the access funds. Information for academic year 1994–95 is not yet available.

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the average grant received by undergraduate students in Wales in each year since 1991; and if he will make a statement. [2340]

Mr. Hague: The average net maintenance grants, after means-testing, received by mandatory award holders in Wales in the academic years 1990–91 to 1993–94 are set out in the following table. Since 1990–91, eligible students have also had access to non-means-tested student loans.

Average net maintenance grants to holders of mandatory awards (£) Wales: 1990–91 to 1993–94

Academic year	*Average net maintenance grant paid by local education authorities*[1]
1990–91	1,590
1991–92	1,620
1992–93	1,690
1993–94	1,740

[1]To the nearest £10.

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what research has been undertaken in the last five years by his Department into the level of students suffering from stress and depression; and if he will make a statement. [2341]

Mr. Hague: None.

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what steps his Department has taken to improve the welfare and counselling services to students in the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [2342]

Mr. Hague: As autonomous bodies, it is for individual further and higher education institutions to ensure that such services are sufficient to enable students to take full advantage of the educational opportunities available to them.

Dental Services

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the average annual payment, for each of the last three years for which figures are available, for patients who paid for NHS dental treatment, per family health services authority; and if he will make a statement. [2763]

Mr. Hague: Information about patient charges is held on the basis of individual courses of treatment rather than per patient. The estimated average patient charge per course of treatment is given in the following table:

	Year ending March (£)		
Family health services authority	*1993* £	*1994* £	*1995* £
Clwyd	19.65	18.91	20.06
Dyfed	20.16	19.61	20.34
Gwent	20.47	19.45	20.34
Gwynedd	18.88	18.06	17.82
Mid Glamorgan	20.60	19.69	20.60
Powys	20.49	20.16	21.72
South Glamorgan	19.97	19.76	21.36
West Glamorgan	18.78	18.41	19.09

Source:
Dental Practice Board.

Exempt patients and patients receiving remission from charges are excluded. The year relates to the date on which payment for treatment was authorised by the Dental Practice Board.

Assisted Places Scheme

Sir Wyn Roberts: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to extend the assisted places schemes in Wales. [3685]

Mr. Hague: As I mentioned in the Welsh Grand Committee earlier today, I proposed to double the number of places available under the assisted places scheme in Wales over a period of time. Over 700 pupils in Wales are currently benefiting from the scheme which makes an important contribution to our policy of parental choice, diversity and excellence in education.

I propose to invite bids for additional places from schools already participating in the scheme and other schools which have reached an appropriate standard. Schools must be able to provide a broad and balanced curriculum and have a good record of performance in public examinations.

Bids will be invited for places at age 11 or 13, where there is currently a high demand, and at sixth form, bids will also be invited for places for children below age 11 years in junior departments which form an integral part of secondary schools.

Regional Selective Assistance

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the outturn figures for regional selective assistance *(a)* offers and *(b)* payments for 1994–95; and if he will indicate how these figures related to the original budgeted plans for that year. [2110]

Mr. Hague *[pursuant to his reply, 24 November 1995, c. 414]:* I regret that there was an error in my answer. The reference for the Industrial Development Act 1982 annual report should have been HC 723, not Cm 723 as quoted.

DEFENCE

Executive Agencies

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list for each of his executive agencies for the last financial year in respect of overseas travel by agency staff *(a)* the costs of the travel, *(b)* the countries visited and *(c)* the posts held by the staff concerned. [2288]

Mr. Arbbuthnot: This is a matter for the agencies concerned. I have asked the chief executives to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from N. R. Essenhigh to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 29 November 1995:

Your question to the Secretary of State asking about overseas travel in 1994/95 has been passed to me for reply as Chief Executive of the Hydrographic Office.

The overseas travel costs incurred by the Agency in 1994/95 were £123,252.11. A list of the countries visited is at Annex A; and the posts held by the staff concerned is at Annex B.

I hope this information is helpful.

COUNTRIES VISITED BY HYDROGRAPHIC OFFICE STAFF FY 1994/95

Argentina
Australia
Bahrain
Belgium
Canada
Cuba
Denmark
Falkland Islands
Finland
France
Germany
Greece
Gibraltar
Holland
Hong Kong
Iceland
Italy
Japan
Korea
Malaysia
Monaco
Norway
Oman
Portugal
Singapore
Spain
South America
South Africa
Sweden
USA

POSTS OF HYDROGRAPHIC OFFICE STAFF MAKING OVERSEAS VISITS FY 1994–95

Hydrographer
Deputy Chief Executive
Director Defence Requirements
Director Production and Marketing
Director Information Systems
Director Nautical Charts and Publications
Head of Product Development
Head of Bilateral Arrangements
Head of Maritime Safety Information
Head of Physical Oceanography
Head of Sales and Marketing
Head of Information Processing Project
Head of Finance
Head of Submarine Operations and Surveys
Head of Nautical Chart Branch 1
Head of Nautical Chart Branch 4
Head of Nautical Chart Branch 5
Head of MOD/RN Requirements and Co-ordination
Head of Tidal Branch
Head of International Liaison
Retired Officer 2-Maritime Safety Information
Staff Officer Survey Planning
Commercial Sales Manager
SMCO Information Processing Project Implementation
SMCO Submarine Operations and Surveys
SMCO Operational Charting and Mine Countermeasure Support

SMCO Physical Oceanography

Engineering Manager

Technical Officer Ship Equipment (HPTO)

SMCO Printing

SMCO Marketing

Assistant Maritime Safety Information (Defence)

Reviser Tidal Branch

HMCO Information Processing Project Implementation

HMCO Physical Oceanography

HMCO Submarine Operations and Surveys

SMCO MOD/RN Requirements and Co-ordination

HMCO Geodesy

HMCO Printing

HMCO Marketing

Technical Officer Print Equipment (PTO)

Technical Officer Ship Equipment (PTO)

ABBREVIATIONS

SMCO = Senior Mapping and Charting Officer

HMCO = Higher Mapping and Charting Officer

HPTO = Higher Professional and Technical Officer

PTO = Professional and Technical Officer

Letter from Alan Pollard to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 29 November 1995:

I have been asked by the Minister to reply to your parliamentary question on overseas travel by Defence Agency Staff during Financial Year 1994–95. LISA was formed on 21 November 1994 and the figures listed at the Annex to this letter are based on travel after that date and before 1 April 1995. The figures do not include my staff travelling on RAF flights in support of operations, since I do not hold such costs. If you require further details please do not hesitate to contact me.

Travel overseas by LISA personnel-Financial Year 1994–95

Country	*Post*	*Cost £*
Germany	HPTO	159.70
Germany	Captain	175.60
Germany	Major	159.70
Canada	Warrant Officer	1,678.46
Germany	HEO	282.26
Germany	Lieutenant Colonel	282.26
Germany	Captain	159.70
Germany	Captain	236.46
Germany	Contractor	236.46
Germany	Contractor	236.46
USA	AO	2,641.00
Germany	Colonel	159.70
Germany	RO2	159.70
Germany	Contractor	249.86
Canada	EO	2,507.40
Canada	PTO	2,291.06
Germany	Captain	321.70
Canada	Warrant Officer	2,507.40
Canada	EO	2,507.40
Germany	Captain	322.56
Germany	Captain	322.56
Germany	Captain	341.68

Letter from Captain W. S. Graham to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 29 November 1995:

1. In your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence, you asked for a list for each of his executive agencies for the last financial year in respect of overseas travel by agency staff:

(a) the costs of the travel

(b) the countries visited

and

(c) the posts held by the staff concerned

In response:

2. *RNAY Fleetlands*

(a) £8601 spent on Travel and Subsistence.

(b) Countries visited: Holland, Cyprus, Germany and Norway.

(c) Variety of Industrial and Non Industrial posts held consisting of:

Quality Assurance Manager

Engineering Manager

Dope Shop Supervisor

Safety Officer

Quality Inspectors

Technical Officer

Engineering Desk Officer

Aircraft Fitters (6)

3. *RNAW Almondbank*

(a) £3088 spent on Travel and Subsistence

(b) USA only country visited

(c) Engineering Services Manager

Engineering Desk Officer.

Letter from Philip Wildman to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 29 November 1995:

1. The Secretary of State has asked me to reply direct to your question seeking details of overseas travel undertaken by the staff of this Defence Agency in Financial Year 1994–95. I regret that the Chief Executive is unable to reply personally due to absence.

2. The answers you require are as follows:

(a) Cost of Travel—£578,000 excluding costs of centrally provided trooping services e.g. Washington and British Forces Germany.

(b) Countries Visited—see Annex A attached.

(c) Posts Held by Staff Concerned—

(1) Serial 1—Headquarters

Director General and supporting staff.

(2) Serial 2—Commitments

Commitments staff are responsible for MOD geographic policy and its related NATO and international aspects.

(3) Serial 3—Acquisition

Acquisition staff are responsible for the development and maintenance of highly cost-effective exchange agreements which enable Military Survey to obtain the geographic data essential for Defence needs world-wide.

(4) Serial 4—Production and Information Systems

Production staff travel is undertaken to manage the technical aspects of NATO and international coproduction and burden-sharing agreements. In addition, some travel by Information Systems staff is in support of standards and compatibility work to facilitate the international exchange of geographic data.

3. I hope you find this information useful.

Military Survey Defence Agency Overseas Travel Destination Financial Year 94–95

Serial	*Function*	*Countries Visited*
1	Headquarters (Director General and senior staff)	Germany, Belgium, Czech Republic,Greece, Australia, Bosnia, Norway, Romania, Turkey USA.
2	Commitments	Belgium, Germany, Bosnia, USA, Spain, Denmark, Canada, Cyprus, Honk Kong, Holland
3	Acquisition	USA, Czech Republic, Greece, dubai, Muscat, Austria, Bahrain, Saudia Arabia, Sweden South Africa, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Mozambique, Hungary.
4	Production and Information Systems	Germany, Belgium, USA, Finland, France, Canada,Denmark, Norway, Holland, Poland, Cyprus.

Letter from Jim Drew to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 29 November 1995:

I have been asked to reply, as Chief Executive of the Army Base Repair Organisation (ABRO), to your recent Parliamentary Question asking the Secretary of State if he will list for the FY 94/95 details in respect of overseas travel as follows:

a. costs of travel

b. countries visited

c. posts held by staff who visited those countries.

I detail below the information in respect of ABRO:

Grade		*Destination*	*Subsistence Cost (£)*
G7	Production	Canada	501
SPTO	Engineers	Paris, Sweden, Germany	884
HPTO		Paris, Sweden, Belgium, Germany, Luxembourg	2,388
RO1	Supply	Germany	119
EO	Managers	Germany	104
Med/Dent	Repair	Belize	465
Sen C/Hand	Technicians	Belgium	181
Total			4,642

The total commercial air costs were £4,783, which has proven difficult to break down in the time available and does not include air trooping flights for which we are not charged. The first 3 elements in the above table were directly related to repair support contracts in place with commercial companies based in these countries: the remainder were routine staffing meetings with our customers and suppliers.

Therefore, the total overseas travel costs were £9,425.

Letter from Michael Maycroft to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 29 November 1995:

I have been asked by the Secretary of State for Defence to reply to your Parliamentary Question about overseas travel by agency staff. As the Chief Executive of the Defence Clothing and Textiles Agency (DCTA) I can advise you of the following information in respect of this agency.

During the financial year 1994–95 the cost of overseas travel made by DCTA personnel was £42,503 and the countries visited were:

Australia
Belgium
Canada
Denmark
Finland
Germany
Gibraltar
Hong Kong
Hungary
Italy
Israel
Lithuania
Netherlands
Norway
Sweden
Switzerland
United Arab Emirates
United States of America
Yugoslavia

These journeys were undertaken by the following DCTA personnel:

Chief Executive
Scientific Staff (Scientific Officer to Grade 6)
Quality Assurance Staff (PTO to Grade 6)
Product Managers (Maj/Lt Col)
Research & Development Advisor (Grade 7)

Letter from Peter Trevelyan to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 29 November 1995:

You asked the Secretary of State for Defence for details of expenditure by Executive Agencies for the last Financial Year in respect of overseas travel by agency staff. I am replying on behalf of the Defence Accounts Agency.

(a) Cost of travel £14,037.23

(b) The countries visited and the posts held by the staff were as follows:

USA
2 Senior Executive Officers
2 Higher Executive Officers

Germany
2 Senior Executive Officers
2 Higher Executive Officers
1 Administrative Officer

United Arab Emirates
1 Higher Executive Officer
1 Executive Officer

France
1 Higher Executive Officer

Cyprus
1 Higher Executive Officer
1 Executive Officer
1 Administrative Officer

Holland
2 Executive Officers (Information Technology)

Malta

1 Grade 6

1 Senior Executive Officer

1 Higher Executive Officer

Letter from Richard Kyle to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 28 November 1995:

You asked the Secretary of State for Defence for details of overseas travel by agency staff. I have been asked to reply as the Chief Executive of the Royal Air Force Maintenance Group Defence Agency.

I regret that the information you request is not readily available in the form required. The vast majority of journeys carried out by the Royal Air Force Maintenance Group Defence Agency personnel involved the distribution of Service Freight and the maintenance of equipment located overseas. The cost of travel for the last financial year was £699,652. The countries visited during the period are listed as an attachment to this letter. Unfortunately, details of specific posts held by staff are not readily available.

I hope that this information is helpful to you.

LIST OF COUNTRIES VISITED BY STAFF IN THE MAINTENANCE GROUP DEFENCE AGENCIES DURING FINANCIAL YEAR 1994–95

Belgium

Canada

Cyprus

Denmark

Eire

Falkland Islands

France

Germany

Gibraltar

Hong Kong

Italy

Luxembourg

Netherlands

Norway

Portugal

S Africa

Turkey

USA.

Letter from Peter Ayee to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 29 November 1995:

I write as Chief Executive of the Royal Air Force Signals Engineering Establishment (RAFSEE) Defence Agency in response to your Parliamentary Question, No 9363 of 23 November 1995, to the Secretary of State for Defence.

The role of the Agency is to design, install and recover ground signals systems and selected airborne equipment for its operational customers in the UK and overseas. In carrying out these tasks, RAFSEE design and installation staff visited locations in Germany, Cyprus, USA, Belgium, Dubai and Gibraltar on a total of 52 occasions in the period between Agency launch on 22 November 1994 and the end of the Financial Year. The total cost was £54,253.

Letter from John Clarke to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 29 November 1995:

The Secretary of State for Defence has asked me to reply to your Parliamentary Question, about details of overseas travel by Agency staff during the last financial year, in my capacity as Chief Executive of the Naval Recruiting and Training Agency.

You will wish to be aware that the Naval Recruiting and Training Agency (NRTA) came into being on 1 April 1995 and, as such, was not an executive agency during the period of the last financial year.

Letter from Brian Raine to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 29 November 1995:

The Secretary of State for Defence has asked me to reply to your Parliamentary Question about overseas travel by Agency staff.

Our Bursar did travel to Halifax, Nova Scotia Canada in order to reconnoitre the situation at the International Tattoo in Halifax in preparation for our Pipe Band going there in June 1995. The cost of the trip was £609.20.

Letter from W. E. Spreadbury to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 29 November 1995:

In the absence of the Chief Executive on duty, I am replying to your enquiry concerning overseas travel by agency staff.

The details you requested are:-

(a) £2,185

(b) Germany, for Rhine Army Show

(c) Headmaster, Publicity Officer and four pupils.

Letter from J. M. Powell to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 29 November 1995:

1. I have been asked by the Secretary of State for Defence to reply to your Parliamentary Question.

2. The specific answers are as follows:

(a) The costs of travel during FY 1994/95 were £155,946.

(b) Travel in Europe related solely to training and the management of schools within SCS (NWE) in Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands and Italy. In addition one visit was made to service schools in Cyprus.

(c) The posts held by staff travelling were:

i. travel in Germany was by all staff of SCS (NWE).

ii. travel elsewhere was by the Chief Executive, three Assistant Chief Executives, the Budget manager, Finance manager, Personnel manager, Contracts manager, members of their staff, Headteachers and members of the Inspection Advisory Service.

3. However, it must be appreciated that the Service Children's Schools (North West Europe) Agency with its Headquarters in Rheindahlen Germany is concerned with the operation of service schools in North West Europe, where 80% of service families posted overseas are stationed. Therefore whilst all travel undertaken by Agency staff is "overseas" this represents no more than the normal discharge of duties; The only exception was a four day liaison visit to Cyprus by the Chief Executive.

4. If you require any further information or clarification please contact this Headquarters.

Letter from Paul Altobell to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 29 November 1995:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question about Next Steps Agencies and how this relates to my Agencies.

The responses to your questions in the order put to me are:

In the last financial year DASA spent £547 on overseas travel.

The country visited was France.

The trip was for one Grade 6.

Letter from Keith Ellender to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 29 November 1995:

I am replying on behalf of the Disposal Sales Agency to your question to the Secretary of State for Defence about overseas travel.

The information in respect of my Agency is as follows:

Costs: The overall costs amounted to £97,198.09.

Countries Visited: Austria, Brazil, Cyprus, Germany, Gibraltar, India, Lebanonn, Pakistan, Spain, Switzerland, USA.

Posts Held: Chief Executive

Assistant Director (Germany)

Assistant Director (Plans & Budget)

Disposal Sales (Health & Safety)

Disposal Sales (Marketing Agreements)

Assistant Director (Ships & Armaments)

Disposal Sales (Ships)

Disposal Sales (Armaments)

Royal Navy Liaison Officer

Royal Navy Liaison Officer—(Helicopters)

Letter from John May to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 29 November 1995:

Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence on overseas travel by the staff of executive agencies during the last financial year has nevertheless been passed to me to answer in respect of the Royal Air Force Training Group Defence Agency.

The breakdown of the information you ask for is not collected centrally within the Agency or by any other branch of the Royal Air Force. The cost of any trawl to determine the statistics you require would take extensive and un-resourced clerical effort, at a cost that would substantially outweigh any benefit arising from the answer. Nor have we any plans for our future financial and management accounting systems to access discrete data of this nature. It is a principle of good business management that authorization of and accounting for overseas travel should be delegated to the lowest proper level and accommodated within overall travel and subsistence budgets. I therefor regret that I am unable to help you further.

I am sending a copy of this letter to the Agency's owner, the Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief Personnel & Training Command.

Letter from I. A. Lumsden to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 29 November 1995:

The Secretary of State for Defence has asked the Chief Executive to reply to your Parliamentary Question regarding details of overseas travel in the year 1994–95. The Chief Executive is absent on leave and I am standing in for him.

During this period no official overseas travel was undertaken by any civilian members of the Defence Animal Centre. Service personnel travelled to normal service destinations as part of their duties. To obtain further detail on military travel would, however, be disproportionately costly if indeed it were possible.

Letter from John Chisholm to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 29 November 1995:

I have been asked to respond on behalf of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency (DERA) to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence about overseas travel by agency staff.

DERA does not hold centrally information about the overseas travel of our staff and I regret this could only be collected at disproportionate cost. I should explain that the Agency, which employs over 12,000 staff at over 50 sites in the UK, is organised into five operating divisions. These, in turn, consist of Business Sectors each of which has been delegated considerable managerial and financial freedoms to conduct their affairs in response to customer requirements. Overseas travel is one of the areas which has been delegated and our local managers have the authority to employ a variety of means to make cost effective travel arrangements. It would be disproportionately costly to seek details of all overseas travel by all DERA staff over the last year in these circumstances.

I am sorry that I could not be more helpful on this occasion.

Letter from Tweedie McBrown to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 29 November 1995:

Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence, PQ 2288, concerning overseas travel by Defence Agency staff has ben passed to me. As Head of the Defence Postal & Courier Services Agency (DPCSA), I have been asked to reply on behalf of the Secretary of State in respect of travel by staff from within my Agency.

The DPCSA exists to provide a postal and courier service to MoD/Service establishments in the UK and throughout the rest of the world. My Agency also undertakes work on behalf of other Government Departments, particularly the Foreign & Commonwealth Office. In fulfilling our role we therefore send significant number of staff abroad on a regular basis.

During FY 1994/95 the Agency spent £638k on civil airline and RAF transport costs. In addition, foreign accommodation and subsistence amounted to £79k.

The Courier Service operates scheduled delivery services for classified material to most countries in which HM Forces personnel are serving, and to HM Ships wherever they operates. We also provide non-scheduled special services when the need arises. The Postal Service operates a scheduled service for non-classified mail to HM Forces serving throughout the world, including HM Ships and UN Forces in locations such as Bosnia.

Almost all of the foreign travel & accommodation costs relate to Defence Couriers. These are civilian (ex military) staff employed for the sole purpose of providing the courier service. Military staff from the Agency were also sent abroad to support military operations, particularly in Bosnia. Overseas travel by senior Agency staff is limited to visiting British Forces Post Offices (BFPOs) and other military facilities and is infrequent.

I hope you find this information helpful. Should you require any further information please let me know.

Letter from J. C. R. Hunt to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 29 November 1995:

I have been asked to respond to your recent question to the Defence Secretary concerning overseas travel by executive agency staff.

In 1994–95 the cost of overseas civil air travel and subsistence for Meteorological Office staff is estimated to have been some £560,000. The costs were incurred in pursuit of the Meteorological Office's role as a member of the international meteorological community.

The countries visited were:

Africa

South America

Ascension

New Zealand

Belgium

Denmark

Norway

France

Switzerland

Holland

Italy

Spain

Poland

Middle East

North America

Canada

Australia

Austria

Cyprus

Finland

Sweden

Germany

Gibraltar

Ireland

Portugal

Hungary

Russia

Far East

Unfortunately information on the posts held by the staff concerned is not available.

I am sorry that I am unable to reply fully to your question but I hope the information I have given will be of help.

Correspondence

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he intends to write to the hon. Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak giving the information requested on the cost of ministeral transport in each of the past five years, on allowances paid to Ministers who use their own vehicles and on the cost in each of the past five years as undertaken on 3 November, *Official Report*, column *476*.

Mr. Arbuthnot: I wrote to the hon. Member yesterday.

Indonesian Armed Forces (Training)

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many members of the Indonesian armed forces have received training at United Kingdom armed forces institutions in each year since 1983. [3138]

Mr. Soames: The UK has provided training for Indonesian students during this period. Details of training, including the numbers involved, are, however, regarded as confidential between Governments.

Anti-tank Mines

Mr. Forman: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to enhance the Army's anti-tank mine capability; and if he will make a statement. [3609]

Mr. Arbuthnot: I have agreed to the procurement of 29 vehicle-launched scatterable mine systems from Alliant Techsystems of the United States, subject to the satisfactory conclusion of a contract. VLSMS will provide the Army with a key capability to lay anti-tank minefields at short notice in support of armoured formations. This decision will result in work equivalent to around half the value of the contract being undertaken by UK firms as part of the industrial participation arrangements of the programme, including work for Alvis, which makes the Stormer carrier vehicle.

Equipment Programmes

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what will be the effect on in-service dates for each major equipment programme listed in tables 3, 4 and 5 of the "Statement on the Defence Estimates 1995" of the Budget settlement for defence. [2271]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The settlement provides the resources necessary to maintain and enhance the front-line capabilities of the armed forces, and to provide the support they need to carry out their wide range of tasks.

Army Surgeons

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the number of regular Army surgeons employed by his Department in each of the last five years. [2054]

Mr. Soames *[holding answer 23 November 1995]:* The number of trained specialist, senior specialist and consultant regular Army surgeons, comprising the disciplines of general surgery, ophthalmics, burns and plastics, maxillo-facial, orthopaedics and ear-nose-throat—oto-rhino-laryngology— employed during each of the last four years is as follows:

1995: 54

1994: 61

1993: 63

1992: 61.

The grade of specialist is not deployable to meet the war commitment for surgeons. Figures are not available for 1991.

"Partnership for Peace"

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assistance is being given to Russian officers on the civic education in a democracy and human rights in the armed services under NATO's "Partnership for Peace" programme; and if he will make a statement. [2768]

Mr. Soames: I have been asked to reply.

One of the main objectives of "Partnership for Peace" is to ensure democratic control of the armed forces. Russia has indicated interest, through their individual partnership programme in the following related areas:

Civil democratic control over the armed forces.

Role and functions of the armed forces in a democratic society.

Legislation concerning the armed forces in a democratic society.

Relations between the military and civilians in a democratic society.

Implementation of Russia's IPP has not yet commenced.

The United Kingdom is, however, undertaking bilateral initiatives in this area. As part of our Outreach programme, a seminar, "Armed Forces and Society", is to be held in London from 12 to 14 December. Representatives from the Russian Ministry of Defence are expected to attend.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Transsexuals

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to introduce legislation to allow a change in the legal status of post-operative transsexuals; and if he will make a statement. [2351]

Mr. Kirkhope: None.

Ticket Touting

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his estimate of the value of the ticket touting market; and if he will make a statement. [2353]

Mr. Maclean: My Department has no such estimate.

Juries

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary for the Home Department what measures are in place to ensure that juries represent the social mix in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement. [2350]

Mr. Maclean: It is a fundamental principle of our jury system that juries should as far as possible represent a cross-section of society drawn at random from the community as a whole. Any person between the ages of 18 and 70 is eligible to serve on a jury, unless they are disqualified in one of a number of specified ways.

Passports

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what progress has been made on the introduction of machine-readable passports. [2917]

Mr. Kirkhope: The phased introduction of the machine-readable passport commenced in 1988 and was completed in 1991. Since then, all passports issued in the United Kingdom have been machine-readable.

Prisons

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the capacity of United Kingdom prisons, per category and in total, for each of the last five years for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement. [2343]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary director general of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Alan Walker to Mr. Alex Carlile, dated 29 November 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question about the capacity of United Kingdom prisons, by category and in total for each of the last five years for which figures are available.

Prisons in England and Wales are defined by operational function and an establishment will have, according to its particular function, accommodation designed for holding prisoners up to a particular security category.

Information on the security standard of accommodation available on 23 November 1995 at closed and open training prisons and local prisons in England and Wales is given in table one, attached.

The only information available for the previous five years (1990–95) is that published annually in "Prisons Statistics, England and Wales". This information is given in table two.

Table 1: Certified normal accommodation for use in prisons in England and Wales by Security Category and in total on 23 November 1995

	Security standard of accommodation	*Certified normal accommodation in use*
Closed Training Prisons (Dispersals)	Category A	3,698
Belmarsh Prison Category A unit	Category A	48
Other Closed Training Prisons	Category B	3,022
	Category C	14,414
Local Prisons and Remand Centres	Category B	18,606
Open Training Prisons	Category D	3,893
Closed Female Prisons	—	1,520
Open Female Prisons	—	593
Closed Young Offender Institutions	—	4,052
Open Young Offender Institutions	—	1,482
Total		51,328

Notes:

1. Some of the more secure local prisons also hold Category A prisoners as and when necessary. A formal maximum number of places for this purpose is not designated.
2. With the exception of those categorised A, convicted and sentenced female prisoners and young offenders are not normally categorised, but are allocated to open or closed conditions.
3. There are currently only three sentenced Category A female prisoners. All are held at Durham Prison.

Table 2: Certified normal accommodation in use on 30 June by Security Category, 1990–1994

	Security standard of accommodation	*Certified normal accommodation in use*				
		1990	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*
Closed Training Prisons (including Dispersal prisons)	Category A, B and C	17,073	18,602	19,487	19,210	19,206
Local Prisons and Remand Centres	Category B	13,593	13,823	15,565	16,206	18,103
Open Training Prisons	Category D	3,496	3,434	3,674	3,581	3,745
Female Prisons (Closed and Open)	—	1,773	1,776	1,765	1,782	1,863
All Young Offender Institutions	—	6,869	6,240	5,748	5,867	5,374
Total		42,804	43,875	46,239	46,646	48,291

1994 Statistics are due to be published in January 1996.

Mr. Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the latest figure for the population in custody, per category and in total; and if he will make a statement. [2344]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary director general of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Alex Carlile, dated 29 November 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the latest prison population figure by category of prisoner and in total.

The information requested is given in the attached table.

Number of prisoners held in England and Wales on 23 November 1995 by category and in total

	Number
Category A	826
Category B	7,969
Category C	17,529
Category D	2,926
Uncategorised or awaiting categorisation	23,161
Total	52,411

1. Female prisoners and young offenders are only given a security category when category A is applicable.
2. Unless category A is applicable, adult male prisoners are not given a security category until after conviction and sentence.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what is the average waiting time for a decision to be made on an application for asylum; and if he will make a statement; [2345]

(2) what is the average waiting time between an initial rejection of an application for asylum and the hearing of an appeal; and if he will make a statement. [2346]

Ms Janet Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the speed with which asylum applications are processed. [1676]

Mr. Kirkhope: I refer the hon. Members to the reply given to a question from the hon. Member for Newcastle Upon Tyne, North (Mr. Henderson) on 22 November, *Official Report*, column *219*, which gave the available information on the average times involved in deciding applications for asylum.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate he has made of the number of visitors and short-term students who have overstayed in the United Kingdom in each year since 1990 or asked for political asylum; and if he will name the country from which these people came. [2834]

Mr. Kirkhope: Information on the number of visitors and students who have overstayed in the United Kingdom is not available. The estimated proportion of asylum-seekers since 1990 who had entered the United Kingdom in another capacity before submitting their asylum application is given in the table. A nationality breakdown of these figures is not available.

Proportion of in-country[1] asylum applicants who had been granted leave in another capacity[2] before applying for asylum

Year	Number of in-country applications	Of which proportion submitted In-time Percentage	Out of time Percentage	Other[3] Percentage
1990	17,200	45	9	46
1991	35,815	32	5	63
1992	22,370	53	13	34
1993	15,050	43	18	39
1994	22,600	36	17	47

[1] Applications submitted after entry into the United Kingdom.
[2] Include those granted leave to enter or remain in other capacities as well as visitors and students.
[3] Includes illegal entrants and those whose status was unknown.

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the European countries which operate special asylum procedures to deal with cases where the applicant is a national of a country in which there is no serious risk of persecution. [550]

Mr. Kirkhope: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to him on 22 November, *Official Report*, column *220*.

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many asylum seekers are currently being held in detention in police stations; what is the length of time of their detention *(a)* in police stations *(b)* in total; and if he will present this information according to the nationality of the asylum seekers. [1524]

Mr. Kirkhope *[holding answer 23 November 1995]:* As at 21 November 1995, 14 people who had sought asylum were being detained in police cells. Of these, five are Nigerians and four are Algerians.

The longest period of time that any of these people have been detained in a police cell is seven nights. This is the maximum time that a person who has claimed asylum can be detained in police cells if removal directions have been set. If removal directions have not been set, a person can be detained for up to five nights.

Refugees

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make it his policy to ensure that his proposals for reform of asylum and immigration rules do not contradict commitments made under the 1951 United Nations refugee convention; and if he will make a statement. [2347]

Miss Widdecombe: As my right hon. and learned Friend made clear in his statement to the House on 20 November, all our proposals for further measures are consistent with our international obligations under the 1951 United Nations convention relating to the status of refugees.

Extradition

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has received extradition requests from the Italian Government in respect of Roberto Fiore and Massimo Morsello. [2550]

Mr. Kirkhope: It is not Government policy to confirm or deny the existence of extradition requests from foreign Governments, unless they are already made public, for example, following court proceedings. Italian requests for the extradition of Roberto Fiore and Massimo Morsello

failed in 1982 when the courts found an insufficiency of evidence under the prima facie case standard which then applied. Since 1991 a lesser standard under section 7 of the Extradition Act 1989 is required in respect of such requests.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment his Department has made of the prosecution of Bengt Bolin under Sweden's extra-territorial jurisdiction for child sex offences; and what plans he has to introduce equivalent extra-territorial laws in the United Kingdom. [2578]

Mr. Maclean: We have not yet received all the information we need from the Swedish authorities to make a full assessment of whether the evidence used in the Bolin case would have satisfied the normal requirements of a United Kingdom court.

However, if a British national had committed a similar offence abroad we, unlike the Swedes who do not extradite their nationals, would have been able to return him to stand trial in the place where he was alleged to have offended. We believe that extradition in these cases is a more appropriate response, and we have no current plans to extend our jurisdiction to enable us to deal in this country with offences committed abroad. We do, however, keep this matter under review.

Entry Clearances

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many applications to enter the United Kingdom for temporary purposes have been made in each year since 1992; how many have been refused; and if he will list the refusal rate for each year expressed as a percentage of the whole. [2835]

Mr. Kirkhope: The information requested is given in the following table.

Applications for entry clearance for temporary purposes, United Kingdom 1992–94

Numbers and percentages

	1992	*1993*	*1994*
New applications	903,020	955,440	1,086,940
Granted[1]	803,520	861,810	980,600
Initial refusals	67,830	60,100	64,420
Initial refusal rate[2]	7.8 per cent.	6.5 per cent.	6.2 per cent.

[1] Includes granted initially and granted on appeal.
[2] Calculated as the number of initial refusals as a proportion of total decisions.

Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the time taken for claims to be processed under the criminal injuries compensation scheme; and if he will make a statement. [3144]

Mr. Maclean: The Criminal Injuries Compensation Board does not record centrally fully comprehensive information about the time taken to process applications. However, some information about the time taken for the board to reach decisions on cases and the time taken to resolve hearings is given at paragraphs 3.12 and 4.14 of the board's 30th annual report (CM 2849), copies of which are held in the Library.

This shows that the board's performance in processing cases has been improving. But as we have made clear, we believe that a scheme which is based on common law damages is inherently incapable of providing the level of service which claimants are entitled to expect. That is why we plan to introduce, in April 1996, the new tariff-based scheme provided for in the Criminal Injuries Compensation Act 1995. The new scheme should be easier to understand, simpler to administer and claimants should get their money more quickly.

Channel Islands

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the matters discussed and decisions taken at the meeting held on 17 November with political representatives and officials of the Channel Islands states and what further plans exist for future meetings. [2733]

Mr. Kirkhope: The meeting on 17 November was one in a regular series held at the Home Office in which United Kingdom Government officials brief political representatives, Crown officers and officials of the Channel Islands and Isle of Man on international developments of particular interest to the islands' authorities.

The meeting discussed recent and prospective developments in the European Union, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, the World Trade Organisation, the International Labour Organisation, the Energy Charter Treaty, the external frontiers convention, identity cards and the transport and disposal of radioactive waste. At the islands' request, a further meeting, to provide additional briefing on the latter issue, is currently being arranged for early January.

Juvenile Offenders

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many juveniles *(a)* received a police caution and *(b)* have been prosecuted for a criminal offence by region for each year since 1979. [2499]

Mr. Maclean: Information for 1979, 1984, 1989, 1992, 1993 and 1994 is given in the tables. The provision of data for other years would involve disproportionate costs.

Table A: Number of persons aged 10 to under 18 years cautioned by type of offence[1] and region, 1979, 1984, 1989, 1992, 1993 and 1994

Region	*Offence*	*1979[2]*	*1984*	*1989*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*
North	Indictable	—	8,256	6,845	7,856	7,476	7,993
	Summary non motoring	—	1,466	2,744	2,691	2,670	2,992
	Total	—	9,722	9,589	10,547	10,146	10,985

Table A: Number of persons aged 10 to under 18 years cautioned by type of offence[1] and region, 1979, 1984, 1989, 1992, 1993 and 1994

Region	Offence	1979[2]	1984	1989	1992	1993	1994
North West	Indictable	—	15,237	11,516	15,802	12,915	13,159
	Summary non motoring	—	3,328	4,257	5,281	4,774	4,859
	Total	—	18,565	15,773	21,083	17,689	18,018
Yorkshire and Humberside	Indictable	—	11,365	11,538	12,893	10,054	10,512
	Summary non motoring	—	3,171	4,288	3,304	2,992	3,282
	Total	—	14,536	15,826	16,197	13,046	13,794
East Midlands	Indictable	—	8,758	7,026	8,409	7,731	7,814
	Summary non motoring	—	2,241	2,672	2,000	2,224	2,143
	Total	—	10,999	9,698	10,409	9,955	9,957
West Midlands	Indictable	—	12,874	10,928	11,968	10,900	11,470
	Summary non motoring	—	2,259	2,647	2,993	2,992	3,011
	Total	—	15,133	13,575	14,961	13,892	14,481
East Anglia	Indictable	—	3,837	2,985	4,550	3,605	3,956
	Summary non motoring	—	991	1,016	1,072	913	985
	Total	—	4,828	4,001	5,622	4,518	4,941
South East	Indictable	—	28,571	19,646	32,001	28,784	28,563
	Summary non motoring	—	6,320	7,516	7,845	7,970	8,618
	Total	—	34,891	27,162	39,846	36,754	37,181
South West	Indictable	—	7,830	4,937	6,369	6,865	7,201
	Summary non motoring	—	1,980	1,397	1,305	1,379	1,602
	Total	—	9,810	6,334	7,674	8,244	8,803
Wales	Indictable	—	5,280	4,940	5,775	5,733	4,819
	Summary non motoring	—	1,795	1,899	1,578	1,605	1,675
	Total	—	7,075	6,839	7,353	7,338	6,494
England and Wales	Indictable	—	102,008	80,361	105,623	94,063	95,487
	Summary non motoring	—	23,551	28,436	28,069	27,519	29,167
	Total		125,559	108,797	133,692	121,582	124,654

[1] A number of indictable offences were reclassified as summary on October 1988 following the Criminal Justice Act 1988.
[2] Not available.

Table B: Number of persons aged 10 to under 18 years prosecuted at magistrates' courts by type of offence[1] and region, 1979, 1984, 1989, 1992, 1993 and 1994

Region	Offence	1979	1984	1989	1992	1993	1994
North	Indictable	9,615	9,694	5,454	6,131	6,208	6,919
	Summary non motoring	3,782	2,999	3,249	2,578	2,500	2,730
	Total	13,397	12,693	8,703	8,709	8,708	9,649
North West	Indictable	23,105	20,803	11,260	10,170	8,620	10,340
	Summary non motoring	8,337	6,031	5,622	4,058	3,182	3,620
	Total	31,442	26,834	16,882	14,228	11,802	13,960

Table B: Number of persons aged 10 to under 18 years prosecuted at magistrates' courts by type of offence[1] and region, 1979, 1984, 1989, 1992, 1993 and 1994

Region	Offence	1979	1984	1989	1992	1993	1994
Yorkshire and Humberside	Indictable	15,715	15,508	8,026	8,311	8,156	8,152
	Summary non motoring	7,107	4,639	3,755	2,843	1,992	2,176
	Total	22,822	20,147	11,781	11,154	10,148	10,328
East Midlands	Indictable	8,750	8,448	5,438	5,826	5,288	6,018
	Summary non motoring	2,893	2,448	2,433	1,982	1,608	1,939
	Total	11,643	10,896	7,871	7,808	6,896	7,957
West Midlands	Indictable	11,253	13,030	7,649	7,856	7,347	8,262
	Summary non motoring	3,933	3,771	3,403	2,486	2,195	2,272
	Total	15,186	16,801	11,052	10,342	9,542	10,534
East Anglia	Indictable	3,219	3,595	1,814	1,547	1,577	1,681
	Summary non motoring	1,669	1,123	774	473	379	525
	Total	4,888	4,718	2,588	2,020	1,956	2,206
South East	Indictable	35,864	32,596	17,635	[2]14,247	[2]14,717	17,620
	Summary non motoring	10,962	8,963	8,233	[2]5,174	[2]4,512	5,763
	Total	46,826	41,559	25,868	[2]19,421	[2]19,229	23,383
South West	Indictable	7,182	7,463	4,150	3,521	3,315	4,169
	Summary non motoring	2,344	2,409	2,170	1,266	1,113	1,287
	Total	9,526	9,872	6,320	4,787	4,428	5,456
Wales	Indictable	7,933	7,672	4,667	4,551	4,564	[3]5,324
	Summary non motoring	3,137	2,405	2,574	1,979	1,475	[3]1,845
	Total	11,070	10,077	7,241	6,530	6,039	[3]7,169
England and Wales	Indictable	122,636	118,809	66,093	[2]62,160	[2]59,792	[3]68,485
	Summary non motoring	44,164	34,788	32,213	[2]22,839	[2]18,956	[3]22,157
	Total	166,800	153,597	98,306	[2]84,999	[2]78,748	[3]90,642

[1] A number of indictable offences were reclassified as summary on October 1988 following the Criminal Justice Act 1988.
[2] Improvements in the data collection methods used by the Metropolitan Police have lead to increases in the numbers proceeded against in 1992 and 1993.
[3] Missing data for South Wales lead to a small decrease in the number of summary offences recorded.

Community Policing

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on community policing in rural areas. [2649]

Mr. Maclean: Police operations in rural areas are a matter for individual chief officers of police. The Government encourage a partnership approach to policing, and we are aware of a number of successful local initiatives in rural areas, including the farm watch and horse watch schemes, which involve a close partnership between the police and rural communities. In addition, the Government have introduced the parish constable scheme which is being taken up in many rural areas.

Prisoners

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* sentenced and *(b)* remand prisoners were held at Doncaster prison on the 17th day of each of the last 12 months. [2397]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary director general of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 29 November 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about how many *(a)* sentenced and *(b)* remand prisoners were held at Doncaster prison on the 17th day of each of the last twelve months.

The information requested is given in the table.

Number of sentenced and remand prisoners held at Her Majesty's Prison Doncaster during the last 12 months

	Sentenced	*Remand*
17 December 1994	345	383
17 January 1995	386	388
17 February 1995	375	381
17 March 1995	363	394
17 April 1995	360	365
17 May 1995	416	340
17 June 1995	404	326
17 July 1995	417	332
17 August 1995	416	361
17 September 1995	386	362
17 October 1995	414	361
17 November 1995	444	333

Ms Janet Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his estimate of *(a)* the number of prison places that will be available by 1 January 1996 and *(b)* the number of convicted and remand prisoners being held by that date. [1681]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary director general of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Ms Janet Anderson, dated 29 November 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the number of prison places that will be available by 1 January 1996 and the estimated number of convicted and remand prisoners being held by that date.

The Certified Normal Accommodation available for use in prisons in England and Wales on 23 November 1995 was 51,328. Approximately 140 additional places are expected to be available, following modernisation and refurbishment, by 1 January 1996.

The latest short-term projection (produced in October) indicates that the prison population at the end of December 1995 will be around 50,000, due to the seasonal downturn at the end of the year. Remand prisoners are assumed to be just over 10,000, sentenced prisoners around 39,000 and non-criminal prisoners around 600.

Doncaster Prison

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make it his policy to ensure that Premier Prison Services Ltd. recognises trade unions in managing Doncaster prison; and if he will make a statement. [2396]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary director general of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 29 November 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about trade union recognition at Doncaster prison.

Whether or not a trade union is recognised at a contracted out prison is a matter for the contractor. The contractor at Doncaster prison, Premier Prison Services Ltd., has decided not to recognise a trade union to represent staff.

Doncaster prison has a fully constituted Works' Council which represents all the staff at the prison.

Prison Service

Ms Janet Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the management of the Prison Service. [1699]

Miss Widdecombe: My right hon. and learned Friend made a statement on 16 October 1995 about the report by General Sir John Learmont which made a number of recommendations about the management of the Prison Service. He has undertaken to come back to the House with a full response to those recommendations in due course. He will also take into account the results of consultation within the Prison Service on the recommendations of the senior management review.

Prison Costs

Ms Janet Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, (1) by what amount he expects the cost of prisons to exceed the amount budgeted for 1995–96; [1685]

(2) what is his current estimate of the total cost of holding prisoners for 1996–97, and what was his previous estimate. [1695]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for these matters has been delegated to the temporary director general of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Ms Janet Anderson, dated 29 November 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Questions asking by how much the cost of prison is expected to exceed the amount budgeted for 1995–96 and what is the current estimate of the total cost of holding prisoners for 1996–97, and what was the previous estimate.

The present provision for 1995–96 in Class VIII, Vote 2, Prisons, England and Wales is £1,660,160,000. While the financial requirements of the Prison Service are regularly monitored, it would be premature to estimate what the final requirement will be. A clearer picture of whether additional provision will be required will emerge in February 1996, at the time of the Spring Supplementary Estimates.

An announcement on the provision available for the Prison Service in 1996–97 will be made at the same time as the Chancellor of the Exchequer's Budget speech on 28 November.

Spending Plans

Ms Janet Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement about his Department's spending plans for 1995–96, 1996–97 and 1997–98. [1680]

Mr. Howard: Detailed information for 1995–96 is set out in the supply estimates 1995–96 (HC271-VIII), subsequently amended by the revised estimate (HC465-VIII) and the winter supplementary estimate (HC4-VIII). Copies of these are available in the Library. My right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced the Government's latest plans for the following years in his statement yesterday.

Sunday Dancing

Mr. Simon Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proposals he has to deregulate Sunday dancing. [54]

Mr. Kirkhope: We are considering how to proceed in the light of the reports of the Deregulation Committee and the House of Lords Delegated Powers Scrutiny Committee on our draft Deregulation (Sunday Dancing) Order.

Bull Bars

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will give instructions to remove bull bars from all police road cars and passenger transit vans. [2881]

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 28 November 1995]:* The equipment fitted to police vehicles is the responsibility of individual chief officers. The police are aware of the concerns about the use of bull bars and in June of this year the Association of Chief Police Officers' Traffic committee invited all chief officers to consider removing bull bars from their vehicles, where so equipped.

Illegal Immigrants

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many entrants to the United Kingdom have been found guilty of working illegally, how many were fined; how many were subject to a custodial sentence; how many were removed from the United Kingdom; and how many were found not guilty of any charge in each of the last five years. [2759]

Mr. Timothy Kirkhope *[holding answer 28 November 1995]:* Information is available for 1990–94 on criminal proceedings taken against persons under section 24(1)(b)(ii) of the Immigration Act 1971—failure to observe conditions of leave, excluding overstaying and failure to report to a medical officer—and is given in table 1. Only a small proportion of persons found working in breach of conditions of leave are proceeded against in this way. The vast majority are dealt with under enforcement powers of the act and information on persons removed from the United Kingdom under these powers is given in table 2.

Table 1: Persons prosecuted in magistrates' courts in England and Wales for offences[1] under Section 24(1)(b)(ii) of the Immigration Act 1971, 1990–94

	Prosecutions	Proceedings terminated early[2]	Committed for trial[3]	Found guilty			Found not guilty[4]
				Total	Of whom		
					Fined	Immediate custody	
1990	76	14	5	55	30	2	2
1991	41	10	—	28	17	2	3
1992	28	8	1	17	12	1	2
1993	13	7	—	6	4	1	—
1994	12	9	—	3	2	—	—

[1] Principal immigration offence.
[2] Including cases discontinued or "written off".
[3] At a Crown Court.
[4] Charge dismissed.

Table 2: Persons removed[1] from United Kingdom under enforcement powers

1990	4,280
1991	5,804
1992	6,214
1993	6,076
1994	5,077
1995 January to June[2]	2,345

[1] Including 'voluntary' departures after enforcement action was initiated.
[2] Provisional figure.

Illegal Employment

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many staff in his Department are dedicated to detecting illegal employment; where those staff are based; how those staff routinely operate; and to what extent those staff co-operate with the police. [2761]

Mr. Kirkhope *[holding answer 28 November 1995]:* No staff are dedicated specifically to detecting illegal employment. This task is part of the role performed principally by some 247 operational immigration staff employed at the main immigration service enforcement offices. These are located in London at the immigration service enforcement unit at Status park and at Becket house—with satellites at Stansted and Apex house, Gravesend; and at Gatwick, Manchester and Birmingham airports. Other immigration staff are engaged in enforcement work from time to time throughout the United Kingdom.

Immigration offenders are identified by following up information from a variety of sources. The normal practice is for the information to be checked through official records with a view to ensuring that a named offender is identified before any attempt to locate him or her is made. The only exception to this "named offender" policy is where visits may be made to places of work where there is apparently reliable information that immigration offenders will be found. In these circumstances particular account is taken of whether there is a history of the premises being used by offenders.

The immigration service works closely with the police and an immigration officer will normally be accompanied by a police officer where an arrest may be necessary. In addition, the police will seek the assistance of the immigration service where they identify a possible offender in the course of other police inquiries.

TRANSPORT

Fish Factory Inspections

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many foreign registered fish factory shops were inspected by officials of the Marine Safety Agency in each of the past four years; how many of these were judged to be inadequate; what action was taken against the masters and owners concerned; and if he will make a statement. [2041]

Mr. Norris: I have asked the chief executive of the Marine Safety Agency to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from R. M. Bradley to Dr. Norman A. Godman, dated 29 November 1995:

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your question about the inspection of foreign registered fish factory ships.

In the financial years 1993–94 and 1994–95, the Marine Safety Agency (MSA) carried out 86 and 189 inspections respectively of foreign registered factory ships. To date in 1995–96, the MSA has undertaken 87 inspections of such ships.

The inspections are carried out throughout the herring and mackerel seasons by a small team of surveyors. A report describing the defects found and the action required to be taken is left with the master. A copy is also sent to the ship's flag state for follow-up action by them. More than 50% of the fish factory ships inspected have deficiencies which would result in detention if the ships were alongside, but the majority of fish factory ships are inspected outside a port where, currently, our powers of detention do not extend. Where factory ships with serious deficiencies have entered ports in the UK, the ship has been detained until the deficiencies have been rectified. The MSA has detained 43 fish factory ships since April 1993.

MUL 16 Minelayer

Mr. Allason: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what assessment he has made of *(a)* the threat posed to the safety of shipping and *(b)* the insurance status of the former Swedish minelayer known as the MUL 16 currently in Poole Harbour; [2103]

(2) what steps have been taken to verify the registration and nationality of the MUL 16. [2101]

Mr. Norris: I have asked the chief executive of the Marine Safety Agency to write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from R. M. Bradley to Mr. Rupert Allason, dated 29 November 1995:

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your Questions about the former Swedish minelayer MUL 16.

The ship was detained by surveyors from the Marine Safety Agency on 18 August 1995 at Poole Harbour. It was detained because of inadequate lifesaving, navigational and radio equipment and insufficient manning. The ship will not be allowed to go to sea until the Agency is satisfied that it is safe to do so. A ship of this type and size is not required to carry insurance and we believe no insurance is carried.

You asked what steps have been taken to verify the registration and nationality of the "MUL 16". The MSA has attempted, unsuccessfully, to confirm registry so as to establish which maritime administration, if any, is responsible for the ship. The ship carried no document indicating registry and we believe it to be un-registered. The master claimed that application for UK registry had been made but in fact only a name has been registered and no formal application has been made.

QE II

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what remedial action has been taken following his assessment of the Marine Safety Agency's report on the QE II incident last December. [3608]

Mr. Norris: A report on the QE II incident has been completed by the director of operations and seafarers standards of the Marine Safety Agency. The director's report discloses serious deficiencies in the shore and ship management of the vessel by Cunard; it also identifies failings on the part of the Marine Safety Agency.

On the instructions of the agency's chief executive the following action is being taken with Cunard:

(a) the agency is holding discussions with Cunard's ship and shore management both to ensure that systems are in place to avoid any recurrence of the problems experienced last December and to work towards early certification under the international safety management code;

(b) for the time being agency surveyors will continue a programme of inspections of the QE II.

In addition, following the director's report, the agency's chief executive has instituted more stringent procedures governing the certification of passenger vessels; these will lead to much tighter control over the continuance in service of vessels on which refit work is in progress. The main changes are as follows:

(1) the agency's surveyors have been instructed not to issue a certificate which is subject to conditions until they are satisfied that adequate steps have been taken by the ship's management and crew to apply and to enforce the conditions for the period during which they apply;

(2) if a certificate is issued subject to special conditions, these conditions will be set down in writing and attached to the certificate, and they will be reinforced by written confirmation from the district chief surveyor to the owner or operator;

(3) any special conditions, or an appropriate summary of them, will be displayed alongside the passenger certificate in a public area of the ship;

(4) the agency's surveyors have been instructed that they should issue a full passenger certificate only after the completion of work needed to comply with the certificate, except in minor matters, where the surveyor may issue a certificate if he is satisfied that the work will be completed before the ship sails.

Appropriate action has been taken in respect of the agency officials involved.

The chief executive has also stressed to surveyors the importance of maintaining a close but objective working relationship with shipowners. All the agency's staff have been reminded of the agency rules on the acceptance of hospitality.

The full details of the incident are set out in the MSA director's report, which has been placed in the Library of the House.

Train Protection

Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what advice he has received from the Health and Safety Commission and Railtrack on train protection strategy; and if he will make a statement. [3607]

Sir George Young: The Health and Safety Commission has considered Railtrack's strategy for reducing the incidence of signals passed at danger, buffer stop collisions and overspeeding. Historically, such risks have accounted for less than one third of all casualties in collisions and derailments, and about 3 per cent. of total casualties on the railway, excluding trespassers and suicides.

The Health and Safety Executive is pursuing, as a matter of priority, discussions with Railtrack and British Rail, and others as required, about action to develop and implement the wide range of measures to which they are committed in the train protection strategy. Objectives for reducing the risks in question will again be included in the annual railway group safety plan.

Railtrack and BR are pursuing five initiatives to reduce the incidence of signals passed at danger.

First, nine tenders were received by Railtrack for the development and pilot installation of a new train protection and warning system, and tender evaluation is proceeding to plan. This system is potentially capable of reducing risks arising from signals passed at danger, overspeeding and buffer stop collisions. The TPWS would enhance the existing automatic warning system by adding functions which would, if necessary, apply the brakes automatically on the approach to, or at, certain signals, and which could not be overridden by the driver. Trials of the TPWS will take place in 1996, and the aim is to start wider installation in 1997. The pilot trials and initial operational use will demonstrate the extent to which it is practicable to install the TPWS.

Secondly, the current trial of a driver reminder appliance, to reduce the risk of starting against a red signal, is expected to be completed by the end of this year. Subject to the outcome of the trial, the intention is to assess the fitting of the device to all traction units operating on Railtrack's infrastructure, with a target for complete installation by the end of 1997.

Thirdly, the existing automatic train protection installations on the Great Western and Chiltern lines should be brought into full service next year. Meanwhile, those passenger trains with ATP fitted are being run with a supervisor in support of the driver.

Fourthly, measures to improve braking performance and driver and systems performance continue. The pilot trials of an emergency sanding device to improve rail adhesion are encouraging.

Finally, and in the longer term, the reduction of risk arising from signals passed at danger and overspeeding is expected to come from a new primary control system consisting of radio-based cab signalling. Railtrack has invited tenders for a development contract for such a system as part of the project to modernise the west coast main line.

Copies of the full advice from the HSC and Railtrack, and my response, have been placed in the Library of the House.

National Air Traffic Services

Mr. Mans: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has for the future of the national air traffic services. [3606]

Sir George Young: I have now given approval in principle to a proposal by the chairman and board of the Civil Aviation Authority that their air traffic control operation should be incorporated as a wholly owned subsidiary of the CAA. This would help to clarify accountability and responsibilities and would mean that the directors of the subsidiary board would have the legal duties inherent in Companies Act status. It would achieve a greater degree of separation within the CAA between service provision and regulation and would pave the way for future privatisation, which remains the Government's longer-term objective.

Detailed proposals for establishing the subsidiary by April 1996 are now being developed. In addition, the Civil Aviation Authority will be working with my officials and the Ministry of Defence to ensure that the integrated civil and military air traffic control service currently provided by NATS is fully safeguarded under the new arrangements.

M4

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the status of the M4 junction 4B-8/9 widening scheme under the revised national roads programme; and if he will make a statement. [3501]

Mr. Norris: The scheme is one of a number identified for review to establish whether smaller-scale proposals would meet the objectives. The proposals for new all-purpose trunk roads alongside the M4 put to public consultation will not be pursued. My right hon. Friend is asking the Highways Agency to consider a range of lower-level solutions, including traffic management, and to have early and extensive consultation with local authorities about options.

British Transport Police

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what provision is made for the budget of the British Transport police in the current financial year and in each of the next three financial years; and if he will make a statement. [2885]

Mr. Watts: The British Transport police's budget is determined by its police committee. In 1995–96, the BTP revenue budget is £101.2 million and the force will also undertake capital expenditure of some £2.4 million. The revenue budget for 1996–97 has been set at £101.2 million, and it is envisaged that the capital expenditure next year will be the same as this year. No decisions have yet been made on budgets for subsequent years.

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if his Department has had further discussions with the Home Office about the jurisdiction of the British Transport police; what was discussed; and what was the outcome. [2886]

Mr. Watts: Discussions are continuing between my Department and the Home Office about the jurisdiction of the British Transport police. The Department remains in close touch with the force's senior management over developments.

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the current manpower of the British Transport police by rank; what it is forecast to be in each of the next three years; and if he will make a statement. [2888]

Mr. Watts: The strength of the British Transport police was 2,180 officers as at 11 November 1995. Staffing levels by rank were as follows:

Rank	*Numbers*
Chief constable	1
Deputy chief constable	1
Assistant chief constable	3
Superintendents	21
Chief inspectors	30
Inspectors	127
Sergeants	303
Constables	1,694
Total	2,180

Manpower levels in future will reflect the resources available to the force. The force is currently rationalising the supervisory ranks and, where possible, increasing constable posts.

Great Western Rail Franchise

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the selection of Resurgence Railways as preferred bidder for the Great Western franchise. [2846]

Mr. Watts: No. The franchising director has not announced bidders. He expects to announce the award of the Great Western franchise in December.

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what discussions he has had with the Director of Passenger Rail Franchising on matters relating to the Great Western rail franchise; what information on the bidding franchise he receives from the Director of Passenger Rail Franchising; and if he will make a statement. [2845]

Mr. Watts: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is briefed regularly by the franchising director on franchising issues including the progress being made towards offering the Great Western franchise to private sector bidders.

"Safer Ships Cleaner Seas"

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if he will list the organisations and other interested parties which received and responded to the consultation paper referred to in the second paragraph on page 47 of "Safer Ships Cleaner Seas"; and if he will make a statement; [2043]

(2) what proposals he expects to bring forward in respect of recommendation 77 of the document "Safer Ships Cleaner Seas", Cm 2560, and if he will make a statement. [2042]

Mr. Norris: The consultation paper referred to has not yet been published. It is hoped that this will be possible by around the end of the year. Until the consultation exercise has been carried out, we cannot say what proposals we expect to bring forward.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the recommendations contained in the report "Safer Ships Cleaner Seas", Cm 2560, which *(a)* have been accepted, *(b)* have been implemented and *(c)* are awaiting implementation by his Department; and if he will make a statement. [2044]

Mr. Norris: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Stoke on Trent, North (Ms Walley) on 16 October, *Official Report*, column *85*.

Departmental Targets

Ms Armstrong: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the published recommended response times within which his Department is expected to reply to letters from the public. [3003]

Mr. Norris: The Department of Transport aims to respond to correspondence from the public within a 15-working day period. This target is published in a publicly available leaflet "Serving the Public".

A249

Sir Roger Moate: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement about progress with construction of the new dual carriageway for the A249 between the M2 and Kingsferry Bridge. [2438]

Mr. Watts: I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency to write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Sir Roger Moate, dated 29 November 1995:

As you know, the Minister for Railways and Roads, Mr John Watts, has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking the Secretary of State for Transport, if he will make a statement about progress with construction of the new dual carriageway for the A249 between the M2 and Kingsferry Bridge.

I am afraid that unforeseen ground conditions have meant delays to this scheme. Because of the delay to the contractors programme, laying of the concrete pavement which we had expected to be substantially completed by now has to be suspended over Winter, but work will re-start next Spring when the weather permits. But most of the diversion of statutory undertakers equipment is now complete and good progress is being made on the Key Street Underpass; the earthworks have also been completed. We expect the scheme to be completed later next year.

Rail Users' Consultative Committee

Mr. Chris Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many applications for the post of chairman of the Rail Users' Consultative Committee his Department has received; what are the criteria for selection; and when he will announce the appointment. [2125]

Mr. Watts: Some 147 applications for the post of chairman of the Rail Users' Consultative Committee were received in response to the advertisement published in March. An additional 235 applications were received in response to the further advertisement published in September. The advertisements made clear to applicants the criteria needed for the post. An example of the advertisements is held in the House Library. Shortlisted applicants will be interviewed shortly and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State expects to announce the appointment of the new chairman early in 1996.

Pleasure Craft

Mr. Dover: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to introduce safety regulations relating to leisure craft following the deaths in Lyme bay. [2291]

Mr. Norris *[holding answer 24 November 1995]:* The Government have no plans to introduce national legislation for the compulsory regulation or registration of pleasure craft. The national marine safety steering committee concluded that a satisfactory system would be prohibitively difficult to devise and enforce. However, on behalf of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, the Health and Safety Commission is currently consulting interested parties on proposed regulations to implement the Activity Centres (Young Persons' Safety) Act 1995. The proposals would introduce a licensing scheme for certain adventure activity providers, including those using canoes and most sailing craft.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

European Intergovernmental Conference

21. **Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the deliberations of the reflections group as part of the process leading up to the European intergovernmental conference in 1996. [875]

Mr. David Davis: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave in the House today to the hon. Member for Neath (Mr. Hain).

Ms Rachel Squire: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with the Foreign Ministers of the other European Union countries about the preparations for the 1996 intergovernmental conference. [863]

Mr. David Davis: I frequently meet my European counterparts to discuss a wide range of topics, including the intergovernmental conference.

BBC World Service

24. **Mr. Harris:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the future funding of the BBC World Service. [878]

Mr. Hanley: I refer the hon. Member to the answer my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary gave to the hon. Member for Swansea, East, Mr. Anderson in the House today.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to change the present three-year funding agreement with the BBC World Service. [2270]

Mr. Hanley: The triennium system for the World Service was instituted 10 years ago to bring it in line with the rest of the BBC. Since then there have been many changes in the management of public sector finances. We are exploring modifications to the system with the World Service. There can be no absolute guarantee of fixed funding for three years for any publicly funded organisation.

Mr. Dykes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the input of satellite technology deployment on the reception quality for the BBC World Service radio transmission funded by his Department; and if he will make a statement of future prospects. [475]

Mr. Hanley *[holding answer 28 November 1995]:* The world service uses satellites to distribute to its overseas relay stations. Satellites have improved reliability and technical quality. They have enabled World Service programmes to be broadcast by over 900 MW and FM radio stations. A new satellite distribution system, which is being introduced from 1 April 1996, will bring further significant improvements.

For the longer term, the World Service is investigating direct to home satellite transmission to replace shortwave transmissions. This will depend on the development of low-cost receivers and agreement on the co-ordination of frequencies in the broadcast satellite sound bands. It will probably take many years from the introduction of satellite broadcast before there are sufficient receivers in use to allow the ending of shortwave transmissions.

Nuclear Tests

25. **Mrs. Mahon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about Her Majesty's Government's policy on nuclear testing. [880]

Mr. David Davis: We have no plans to conduct any further nuclear weapon tests. We are actively negotiating for a comprehensive test ban treaty. But it would be wrong for us to criticise the French decision which they believe is necessary to ensure the safety and reliability of their deterrent, and which was taken on the basis of scientific advice.

Nigeria

26. **Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what sanctions the Government have imposed on the military regime in Nigeria. [882]

Mr. Hanley: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary earlier. We have noted calls for the severing of trade links and an oil embargo and continue to consider a range of options with our EU and other partners. Nothing is ruled out but we would wish as far as possible to avoid harming ordinary Nigerians.

28. **Mr. Chris Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he has met representatives of Shell since 10 November to discuss company policy towards Nigeria. [884]

Mr. Hanley: I have a broad-ranging discussion with the chairman of Shell UK, Mr. John Jennings, on 23 November during which Nigeria was discussed. My noble Friend Baroness Chalker of Wallasey also met Mr. Jennings on 16 November.

Kashmir Elections

27. **Mr. Heppell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reason he has been given by the Indian Government for the cancellation of elections in Kashmir. [883]

Mr. Hanley: My right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary discussed the situation in the State of Jammu and Kashmir with the Indian Foreign Minister on 21 November. Under the Indian constitution, responsibility for decisions relating to the conduct of elections rests with the independent Indian Election Commission.

India (Prisoners)

29. **Mr. Corbett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress has been made on the conclusions of an agreement with the Indian Government to enable convicted prisoners to apply for transfer to a prison in their home country. [886]

Mr. Hanley: I raised the prisoner transfer agreement with my opposite number when I visited India last month. Negotiations have now reached an advanced state and I hope that we will sign an agreement in the very near future.

Cyprus

30. **Lady Olga Maitland:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received with regard to the Greek Cypriot application to join the European Union. [887]

Mr. David Davis: This Department is in regular contact with the Government of the Republic of Cyprus and other interested parties on this issue.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when the British high commissioner or one of his officials will next visit the Karpas area of occupied northern Cyprus. [1778]

Mr. Davis: British high commission officials visit the Karpas every three to four months. The last such visit was on 22 November 1995.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to visit the Republic of Cyprus. [1779]

Mr. Davis: None.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what private discussions with members of the enclaved Greek Cypriot community and visits to their homes and properties take place when a British high commission official visits the Karpas area of the occupied northern Cyprus. [1780]

Mr. David Davis: The nature of such visits varies according to the availability and willingness of inhabitants to meet officials. The last time a British high commission official visited the Karpas he had extensive discussions with Greek Cypriots in Leonarisson, visited the home of a Greek Cypriot near Ayios Trias, and had a full exchange with a Greek Cypriot family in their home near Rizorkarpasso.

Syria

31. **Mr. Hicks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he next hopes to meet the Syrian Foreign Minister to discuss bilateral relations. [888]

Mr. Hanley: My right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary met Foreign Minister Shara'a in Damascus on 8 November and on 27 November in Barcelona, to discuss bilateral relations and the middle east peace process.

European Union Decisions

32. **Mrs. Dunwoody:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with his European counterparts about the need to reform the European Union's decision-making procedures. [889]

Mr. David Davis: I frequently meet my European counterparts to discuss a wide range of topics, including decision-making procedures.

Brazil

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with the Government of Brazil concerning the rights of the Makuxi people in Ruraima and the expenditure of Group of Seven money. [871]

Mr. David Davis: The Government of Brazil are aware of our concern that the rights of the Makuzi and the other indigenous people of Brazil should be observed and protected. Our embassy in Brasilia keeps in regular touch with the Brazilian authorities and monitors the situation closely. The ODA representative in Brasilia is in regular contact with the Brazilian authorities about the expenditure of G7 money.

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the authorities in Brazil about the trials for the murder of agricultural workers' leaders; and if he will make a statement. [881]

Mr. Davis: I believe that the hon. Member is referring to the murders of rural workers in Rio Maria in southern Para in 1991 and 1992. The embassy in Brasilia has remained in regular touch with the Brazilian authorities about these cases and has attended the resulting trials where possible. The sentences for those convicted have ranged from suspended sentence to 50 years imprisonment.

Rwanda

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress has been made towards bringing to trial those accused of genocide in Rwanda. [2567]

Mr. Hanley: The international criminal tribunal for Rwanda expects to bring its first indictments shortly. The United Kingdom has played a full part in efforts by the international community to rehabilitate the domestic judicial system in Rwanda.

GCHQ

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 17 November, *Official Report*, column *13*, what was the value of new equipment investment in GCHQ Culmehead in the financial years 1993–94, 1994–95 and 1995–96 to date; and if he will make it his policy that such new equipment will be effectively redeployed elsewhere when GCHQ Culmehead closes. [3128]

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 20 November, *Official Report*, column *13*, when equipment was last ordered for the GCHQ composite tracking station in Culmehead; what was the nature of this equipment; and what will happen to this equipment after the site is closed. [2699]

Mr. Rifkind: It is not Government policy to reveal details of the procurement of equipment used for intelligence purposes. So far as possible, equipment at the composite signals organisation station at Culmehead will be redeployed when the station closes.

Correspondence

Ms Armstrong: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the published recommended response times within which his Department is expected to reply to letters from the public. [2996]

Mr. Hanley: The target for both the diplomatic wing and the ODA is 20 working days.

Middle East

Mr. Hawkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assistance Her Majesty's Government are giving to the peace process in the middle east. [876]

Mr Hanley: On his recent visit, my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary encouraged the Palestinians and Israelis to maintain progress on the Palestinian track. He also urged Syria and the Israelis to press forward in their negotiations. He encouraged all the countries of the region to support the peace process. In addition, the United Kingdom provides over £83 million in assistance to the Palestinians, and is providing observers for the forthcoming Palestinian elections.

Lockerbie

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will discuss with the United Nations the request of the Libyan Government to hold a trial in the Hague, under a Scottish judge, operating Scottish rules of evidence, of the two Libyan suspects involved in the Lockerbie bombing. [1638]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: No.

Entry Clearance

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the cost of an application for entry clearance in pounds sterling in each of the entry clearance posts overseas. [2840]

Mr. Hanley: Entry clearance application fees are set in pound sterling, are the same worldwide and the equivalent is charged in the appropriate local currency. Details of the current fees are given in the consular fees order 1995 (SI 1995 No. 1617).

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list, for each entry clearance post, how many applications to visit the United Kingdom to *(a)* attend a funeral and *(b)* have medical treatment have been made in the last year for which information is available and how many of these applications were refused. [2842]

Mr. Hanley: The information requested is not available. A total of 1,086,940 applications for temporary admission were received in 1994 but separate records showing the purpose of each visit are not kept.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action has been taken to implement the recommendations set out in the report by the independent monitor in respect of the Asylum and Immigration Appeal Act 1993, published in December 1994. [2844]

Mr. Hanley: In her first report as the independent monitor into entry clearance refusals without a right of appeal, Dame Elizabeth Anson made four recommendations.

First, that all applications and re-applications should be accepted and applicants should be told that they have a right to proceed, even where warned of likely failure. Instructions have been issued to posts to implement this recommendation, including a suitable written notification for applicants.

Secondly, posts should be more consistent in their requirements for documentation before an entry clearance application is lodged or an applicant interviewed. We are encouraging greater consistency between posts and encouraging all posts to have a set list of documents required in advance.

Thirdly, the refusal notice should not refer to confidential matters such as political asylum applications by United Kingdom sponsors or others, given that the notice may become a public document with an applicant's consent. Instructions have been issued to posts reminding them of this requirement.

Finally, writing should be legible on all documents on an applicants file. We are encouraging posts to ensure this, particularly the typing of refusal notices. This process is being helped by the spread of word processing equipment at posts.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the average waiting time before an interview is granted at each entry clearance post overseas; and if he will make a statement on the training given to entry clearance officers on interviewing. [2839]

Mr. Hanley: Eighty-six per cent. of all applications are issued within 24 hours of being lodged either on the evidence of the papers or after a short interview. It is not possible to provide a calculation of average waiting times for longer interviews at each post except at disproportionate cost.

Prior to taking up appointment as an entry clearance officer, FCO personnel attend an intensive three-week course run by the immigration and nationality department unit.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much has been collected in application fees for entry clearance since the introduction of the Asylum and Immigration Appeal Act 1993; and how much of that total represents fees accepted for applications which were subsequently refused. [2841]

Mr. Hanley: Records of application fees are kept by financial year only. The value of fees collected for applications which were subsequently refused is not separately recorded. The hon. Member may find the following useful:

> Application fees collected for entry clearance applications in the financial year 1993–94 totalled £30.51 million.
>
> Application fees collected for entry clearance applications in the financial year 1994–95 totalled £32.35 million.
>
> The number of refusals made at all entry clearance posts overseas during 1993 and 1994 was 143,113.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many requests to reconsider refusals for entry clearances have been received from right hon. and hon. Members in each year since the introduction of the Asylum and Immigration Appeals Act 1993. [2843]

Mr. Hanley: This information is not available except at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the location of entry clearance posts overseas, detailing for each *(a)* the number of locally engaged staff, *(b)* the total number of staff employed, *(c)* the number of full-time entry clearance managers and *(d)* the number of interpreters. [2836]

Mr. Hanley: In view of the amount of detail needed to answer this question I will write to the hon. Member shortly.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the number of *(a)* applications to enter the United Kingdom for temporary purposes and *(b)* refusals made at each entry clearance post overseas from 26 July 1993 to the last available date for which information is available; and if he will express the number of refusals as a percentage of the whole. [2837]

Mr. Hanley: In the form requested, these figures could be compiled only at disproportionate cost. Details of entry clearance applications for temporary purposes, both granted and refused, are in table 2.1 in the "Control of Immigration Statistics" published by the Home Office for the years 1993 and 1994.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the time allowed for interviews at each designated entry clearance post overseas. [2838]

Mr. Hanley: As a guide, entry clearance posts are offered the following target times for interviews:

> 3 minutes: for straightforward applications, received at the counter, by post or from a travel agent, resulting in immediate issue.
>
> 10 minutes: for secondary examination of less straightforward applications.
>
> 30 minutes: for cases likely to result in refusal.
>
> 45 minutes: for settlement applications.

In practice, posts achieve timings close to these targets, but a list showing times taken in each post could be compiled only at disproportionate costs.

Invoices

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the amount owed to those businesses whose invoices were not paid within the agreed credit period or within 30 days in each of the last five years. [1123]

Mr. Hanley *[holding answer 22 November]:* The information available about the amount owed—expressed as a figure and as a percentage of payments as a whole—is set out in the following table:

£000

	1993–94	*1994–95*	*[1]1995–96*
FCO (DW)	—	210 (8 per cent.)	243 (8 per cent.)
ODA	26,242 (13 per cent.)	55,356 (13 per cent.)	20,580 (7 per cent.)
Wilton Park	—	1 (5 per cent.)	—
NRI	—	1,460 (4 per cent.)	1,340 (8 per cent.)

[1] To end of October. Most of these invoices have now been paid.

To obtain detailed information about amounts owed in earlier years would incur disproportionate cost.

Former Yugoslavia

Mr. Tredinnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the prospects for peace in the former Yugoslavia. [866]

23. **Mr. Simon Coombs:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the progress of talks aimed at a permanent settlement in Bosnia; [877]

Mr. Rifkind: I refer the hon. Members to the statement I made in the House on 22 November, *Official Report*, columns 659-61.

EC Commission Conduct

Mr. Richard Shepherd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what code governs the conduct of staff at the European Commission's office in London. [2793]

Mr. David Davis: The code of conduct is available from the European Commission office at:

No. 8 Storey's Gate

London

SWIP 3AT.

Foreign Assets

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if his Department has seized or frozen personal accounts and assets of members of foreign Governments; what was seized or frozen; and if he will make a statement. [2918]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: I have been asked to reply.

I refer the hon. Gentlemen to the answer given to his previous question on 27 November, *Official Report*, column *429*.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 30 November 1995

ENVIRONMENT

Building Research Establishment

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what considerations have led him to set out the timetable for consultants to complete their tasks set out in the privatisation options study outline requirements; and if he will make a statement. [2433]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The timetable for consultants to complete the study of privatisation options for the Building Research Establishment was set to be demanding but feasible for the completion of a wide-ranging and thorough project. It is in the interests of BRE's customers and staff for any uncertainty about the organisation's future to be kept to as short a period as practicable. All the consultants who were invited to submit tenders were able to comply with the maximum duration specified.

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what date he has specified for the return of bids by consultants on the Building Research Establishment privatisation options study. [2408]

Mr. Jones: The bids for the consultants invited to tender for the study of the options for transferring the Building Research Establishment to the private sector were returned by 20 November.

The Department is today appointing P. A. Consulting to carry out the study.

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whom he proposes to appoint to the advisory group to which consultants will be expected to report on options for the privatisation of the Building Research Establishment. [2402]

Mr. Jones: The advisory group for the study on the options for transferring the Building Research Establishment to the private sector will be chaired by the deputy secretary housing and construction. The members will include three senior industry representatives, an official representing the Treasury, the chief executive of BRE and the departmental team responsible for the consultancy project.

Executive Agencies (Overseas Travel)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list for each of his executive agencies for the last financial year in respect of overseas travel by agency staff *(a)* the costs of the travel, *(b)* the countries visited and *(c)* the posts held by the staff concerned. [2290]

Sir Paul Beresford: The information can be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Small Rural Businesses

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the timetable for proposals from his Department in respect of small rural businesses; and what joint initiative he proposes in conjunction with the Department of Trade and Industry. [2575]

Mr. Clappison: The White Paper "Rural England" published in October by my Department and the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food outlined a number of measures intended to help small businesses in rural areas.

We expect to publish before the end of this year a guide for local planning authorities to promote good practice in planning for rural diversification. In the new year, we will be consulting on proposals for a rural business use class and on a draft revision of planning policy guidance note 7, "The Countryside and the Rural Economy".

In my role as departmental Minister for small businesses, I will continue to work closely with colleagues in other Government Departments, including the Department of Trade and Industry, to ensure that our policies benefit all small firms, including those in rural areas.

Council House Sales (Durham)

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how much has been raised from the sales of council homes in the City of Durham constituency to date; and how much the City of Durham council has available in capital receipts from these sales. [2496]

Sir Paul Beresford: The total cash receipts from the sale of all council dwellings in the City of Durham between April 1980 and March 1995, as reported by the authority, is almost £37 million. In addition, authority loans of almost £1 million were issued to finance council house sales. At 31 March 1995, the authority had £0.3 million in accumulated usable capital receipts from all assets. The level of outstanding debt of the City of Durham at that date was £49 million.

Rural Homelessness

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the extent of rural homelessness and the measures he will be introducing to tackle it. [2647]

Mr. Clappison: The data which my Department collects from local authorities about households accepted as statutorily homeless do not differentiate between households from rural and non-rural areas.

The Housing Corporation's approved development programme funds new social housing in rural and non-rural areas. In 1995–96, some 6 per cent. of the corporation's new development programme is providing social housing in rural areas—defined as settlements with a population of 3,000 or less.

My Department has commissioned research into the nature of demand for housing in rural areas. The results are expected in 1996.

Parish Councils

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to devolve more power from local authorities to parish councils and to ensure accountability for parish councils. [2646]

Sir Paul Beresford: The rural White Paper states our intention to legislate for a formal consultative framework between principal and local councils. It also proposes that certain crime prevention powers which principal authorities have under existing legislation should be extended to parish and town councils, and that they should be given additional powers relating to community transport. We are currently consulting interested parties about those proposals.

A consultation paper has proposed regulations which strengthen accounting and audit requirements for the majority of parishes. Like other local authorities, parish and town councils are independent elected bodies, accountable to their electorate, their auditor and, where necessary, to the courts for the conduct of their business.

Rural Regeneration

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what recent discussions he has had with his counterparts across Europe to discuss strategy for a Europe-wide rural regeneration scheme. [2639]

Mr. Clappison: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State keeps in regular contact with his European counterparts to discuss matters of mutual interest.

Rural Areas (Essential Services)

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what guidelines his Department gives to local authorities in relation to safeguarding essential services in sparsely populated rural areas. [2648]

Mr. Clappison: The Department is acutely aware of the need to ensure adequate service provision in sparsely populated rural areas. The Department's standard spending assessment, which calculates the revenue support grant for local authorities, already allows for the additional cost of delivering some services in sparsely populated rural areas.

The rural White Paper "Rural England" recognises that local authorities have a significant impact on the quality of life in rural areas and therefore encourages them to prepare rural strategies that identify local rural needs and develop policies to meet. Guidance and advice is provided by the three countryside agencies sponsored by this Department.

The recently launched rural services checklist which was announced in the rural White Paper encourages service providers to take account of the particular needs of their customers. Prepared in consultation with service providers and circulated to local authorities, it helps service providers meet the various needs of their rural customers.

The Department provides guidance to local authorities on housing strategies, stressing the need for those local authorities with a significant rural population to develop specific rural housing policies as part of their housing programme. The Department also issues guidance to local authorities on the administration of the non domestic rates hardship relief scheme for village shops and post offices. This will be reviewed shortly and further guidance issued.

Environmental Technology Manufacturers

Mr. Thomason: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what account he will take of the cost to environmental technology manufacturers in terms of lost business and the international competitiveness of the four year revision of all chief inspectors guidance notes and process guidance notes. [3112]

Mr. Clappison: Manufacturers of environmental technology have benefited significantly from the introduction of the systems of integrated pollution control and air pollution control under part I of the Environmental Protection Act 1990.

The chief inspector's guidance notes and process guidance notes are produced as part of the process of following developments in technology and techniques for preventing or reducing pollution of the environment required by the Act. They are reviewed at least every four years. The Environmental Industries Commission is consulted as part of this review process.

Homelessness

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many people on housing benefit were *(a)* re-housed by local authorities following eviction by private landlords and *(b)* moved to a lower category of accommodation by local authorities because of rent arrears, in the last 12 months. [2868]

Mr. Clappison: The data provided by local authorities on homelessness acceptances include information on the main reason for the homeless households' loss of last settled home.

There were some 1,150 households for which local authorities in England accepted responsibility to secure accommodation, under the homelessness provisions of the 1985 Housing Act, as a result of private sector rent arrears, in the 12 months ending June 1995. It is not known how many of these households were in receipt of housing benefit.

Information is not available in the Department on the numbers of people on housing benefit who were moved to a lower category of accommodation by local authorities because of rent arrears.

Mr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to improve housing facilities for homeless people. [2869]

Mr. Clappison: The latest homelessness statistics collected by my Department from English local authorities show that the number of households in temporary accommodation has been declining since September 1992. The "Homelessness Code of Guidance for Local Authorities", to which authorities must by law have regard, makes clear that all temporary accommodation must meet acceptable standards.

Ribble Valley (Pollution)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution is taking following Ribble Valley council's recent vote in respect of the inspectorate. [2912]

Mr. Clappison: I regret the council's vote, but HMIP must complete its consultations on health issues before announcing a decision.

Cemfuel

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what are the implications for the use cemfuel of the distinction made by his Department between waste and fuel; and if he will make a statement. [2874]

Mr. Clappison: In so far as cemfuel constitutes waste, the provisions of the hazardous waste incineration directive (94/67/EC) will apply by 30 June 2000, which is the date specified in the directive. In the meantime, HMIP is applying equivalent controls to the use of wastes in cement kilns and waste incinerators.

Waste Regulation Service

Mr. Walden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what minimum standards will apply to ensure that the waste regulation service under the new Environment Agency will be delivered locally and to a standard not less than that achieved by the existing waste regulation authorities. [2891]

Mr. Clappison: The agency will have the same statutory responsibilities as the existing authorities for regulating the management of waste so as to prevent pollution of the environment or harm to human health. The Secretary of State will issue guidance to the agency on the discharge of these functions. It is for the Environment Agency to determine its geographical structure in line with its management statement, and reflecting the need for the efficient delivery of all its services. The management statement states that the agency should develop a close, responsive relationship with local communities.

Cement Industry Working Party

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will include in membership of the cement industry working party a person of independent standing to offer advice on pollution limits from industrial processes. [2913]

Mr. Clappison: Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution does not use working parties to draft guidance on pollution limits from industrial processes. Consultants are appointed to provide an independent international overview of up-to-date pollution control techniques. This forms the basis for HMIP guidance which is then subjected to wide consultation across a broad spectrum of consultees, many of which are independent of the industry concerned, before publication.

The guidance does not set statutory pollution limits, but provides benchmarks of current best practices within the industrial sector.

Local Government Finance

Sir Irvine Patnick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what meetings he proposes to hold with representatives of Sheffield city council following the local government settlement statement. [3202]

Mr. Curry: It is open to all authorities, including Sheffield, to request a meeting with Ministers during the consultation period which follows the provisional settlement announcement.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will set out the basis of his calculations of the distributable amount of non-domestic rates for 1996–97. [3698]

Mr. Curry: The distributable amount of non-domestic rates in England for 1996–97 will be £12,736 million. This is based on non-domestic rate multiplier of 0.449 and includes an allowance of £429 million for an Exchequer payment to the non-domestic rates pool, to compensate for the shortfall which would otherwise occur as a result of regulations to be made under section 58 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988 to further phase in the effects of the 1995 revaluation on rate bills.

The calculation for 1996–97, and the prior-year figures on which this is based, are set out in the table:

National non-domestic rates—calculation of distributable amount

	1993–94 *Final outturn* *£ million*	*1994–95* *Provisional outturn* *£ million*	*1995–96* *Provisional outturn* *£ million*	*1996–97* *Estimated in-year contribution* *£ million*
1. Income from Local Lists				
Multiplier (p)	41.6	42.3	43.2	44.9
Gross Rate Yield	12,423	12,269	12,763	13,355
(i) Reliefs				
(a) Net Transitional Relief	–540	–117	–460	–419
(b) Empty properties	–1,224	–1,172	–1,072	–1,145
(b) Charitable	–387	–413	–430	–478
(d) Discretionary	–21	–21	–24	–28
Net Yield after reliefs	10,251	10,547	10,777	11,285
(ii) Collection Costs/Reductions to Contributions				
(a) Costs of collection	–67	–69	–75	–77
(b) Losses on collection	–181	–186	–190	–205
(c) City of London offset	–25	–7	–7	–7

National non-domestic rates—calculation of distributable amount

	1993–94 *Final outturn* *£ million*	*1994–95* *Provisional outturn* *£ million*	*1995–96* *Provisional outturn* *£ million*	*1996–97* *Estimated in-year contribution* *£ million*
Total contribution in respect of year	9,979	10,285	10,506	10,996
(iii) Adjustments				
(a) Repayments/interest payments	–891	–1,635	–556	–154
(b) Revisions to contributions at outturn (95–96 only)			–86	
Total adjustments	–891	–1,635	–642	–154
Net Local Yield	9,088	8,649	9,864	10,842
2. Income from Central List				
Net Central List Yield	1,095	1,114	1,192	1,258
3. Income from Crown Contributions in Aid				
Net Crown Yield	445	548	541	525
Total NDR Yield	10,628	10,311	111,597	12,626
4. Exchequer Contributions				
(a) Local List Transition	591	425	600	419
(b) Central List/Crown	42	20	20	10
Total Exchequer contributions	633	445	620	429
Total NNDR Pool payments (1+2+3+4)	11,261	10,756	12,217	13,055
5. Adjustments				
Surplus brought forward	–954	–1,252	–1,182	–319
Combined total	10,307	9,503	11,035	12,736
Distributable amount	11,559	10,685	11,354	12,736
Surplus carried forward	–1,252	–1,182	–319	

Notes:

1. Item 1: The gross calculated rate yield represents the total value of non-domestic hereditaments on local rating lists times the multiplier. For the years to 1994–95 the yield is the amount recorded in the post-end year (NNDR3) returns. For 1995–96 it is the amount underlying authorities' provisional contributions to the non-domestic rating pool including the prescribed amount for Enterprise zones.
2. Item 1(i)(a): The transitional decrease adjustment includes the estimated amount of rates that will not be recouped locally due to the revised transitional arrangements under the provisions of the Non-Domestic Rating Acts 1992, 1993 and 1994.
3. Item 1(i)(b): The empty property relief adjustments include voids and partially occupied hereditaments. Figures up to 1995–96 are as reported by authorities. The 1996–97 figure includes an allowance for the increase in the gross rates yield.
4. Item 1(i)(c): Charitable rate relief. As for empty property relief.
5. Item 1 (I)(d): Discretionary relief granted to charities, non-profit making organisations and for other reasons. As for charitable rate relief, with a further adjustment to allow for increased relief following the move to take these reliefs outside capping.
6. Item 1(ii)(a) and (b): The allowances for the costs and losses incurred by local authorities in collecting non-domestic rates from ratepayers, including the latest estimates of additional billing an software costs arising from the Non-Domestic Rating Acts.
7. Item 1(ii)(c): City Offset—a preliminary estimate for 1996–97 (£6.5 million of the amount which the City of London will not be required to pay into the non-domestic rating pool on account of the local rate in the City. It is the amount which will be retained by the authority to meet its own expenditure.
8. Item 1(iii)(a): Net adjustment in respect of appeals an other amendments to the rating list affecting liability for previous years rates settled in that year.
9. Item 1(iii)(b): The revisions to contributions line applies only to estimated outturn revisions to the provisional contributions for 1995–96. For earlier years all figures are already based upon the outturn contributions.
10. Item 2: The rateable value of non-domestic hereditaments on the central rating list times the multiplier, and adjusted for appeals and other changes in respect of previous years. The 1996–97 figure is calculated as the estimated rateable value times the multiplier, less the effect of the transitional arrangements.
11. Item 3: The 1996–97 figure for crown properties includes an allowance for the effect of transition.
12. Item 4(a) and (b): The contribution from central government to offset the amount of the Secretary of State's estimate of income foregone arising from the provisions of the Non-Domestic Rating Acts 1992, 1993 and 1994.

Investors in People

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps his Department is taking to achieve investor in people status; when it started the process; when it expects to achieve investor in people status; and if he will make a statement. [2975]

Sir Paul Beresford: The Department committed itself to achieving investor in people status in 1992. The Department has recently concluded a wide-ranging review of its structure and ways of working, including a staff attitudes survey, and a target date for obtaining the investor in people award will be linked to progress on its implementation.

Bathing Water, Norfolk

Mr. Garrett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment which Norfolk beaches were tested in 1995 for enteroviruses under the EC bathing water directive. [2968]

Mr. Clappison: The National Rivers Authority sampled the following identified bathing waters in Norfolk for enteroviruses during the 1995 bathing season:

Cromer

Great Yarmouth Pier

Great Yarmouth South

Gorleston Beach

Urban Development Corporations

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the areas for which urban development corporations have been established since 1979, indicating in each case which are also covered by a unitary local authority. [3383]

Sir Paul Beresford: The urban development corporations and related unitary local authorities, where applicable, are listed in the table.

UDC	*Covered by unitary local authority*	
London Docklands	Yes	Newham, Southwark, Tower Hamlets
Merseyside	Yes	Liverpool, Sefton, Wirral
Black Country	Yes	Sandwell, Walsall, Wolverhampton
Teesside	No	—
Trafford Park	Yes	Trafford, Salford
Tyne and Wear	Yes	Newcastle upon Tyne, North Tyneside, South Tyneside, Sunderland
Bristol	No	—
Sheffield	Yes	Sheffield
Central Manchester	Yes	Manchester, Trafford
Leeds	Yes	Leeds
Birmingham Heartlands	Yes	Birmingham
Plymouth	No	—

Nitrate Vulnerable Zones

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment what progress has been made on the establishment of action programmes in respect of the proposed nitrate vulnerable zones; and if he will make a statement. [3907]

Mr. Gummer: My right hon. Friends the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, the Secretary of State for Wales and I issued today a consultation document giving details of the action programme to be established under the terms of the EC nitrate directive, and which will apply in nitrate vulnerable zones. It also gives details of the draft regulations which transpose the formal requirements of the nitrate directive into domestic law. This is the latest of several rounds of consultation about implementation of the directive. The document is being sent to farmers in parishes or communities affected by the proposed zones, farmers' representatives, environmental and consumer groups, and to the water industry.

The draft action programme contains measures on use of inorganic fertiliser and organic manure, and on storage of slurry in nitrate vulnerable zones, in accordance with the directive. The proposed measures are those described in the brief outline of the action programme included in the May 1994 consultation document on the boundaries of proposed zones. In developing the measures, we have made use of experience and knowledge gained from other Government initiatives to reduce agricultural nitrate pollution. The measures should bring about reductions in nitrate leaching in vulnerable zones.

I am placing copies of the consultation document in the Library.

DEFENCE

Nigeria (Arms Trade)

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what has been the value of the arms trade to Nigeria to the United Kingdom economy since 1993. [2877]

Mr. Arbuthnot *[holding answer 28 November 1995]:* It is not Government policy to reveal details of the value of defence exports by country. Information on the value of exports, by region, is contained in UK defence statistics—a copy of which is in the House Library.

In December 1993, European partners introduced a series of measures against the Nigerian military. All applications for new licences to export defence equipment to Nigeria were reviewed, on a case-by-case basis, with the presumption of denial. On 11 November 1995, the Prime Minister announced a full United Kingdom arms embargo against the Nigerian military and on 20 November, the European Union announced the adoption of a common position on the extension of measures in three areas; including an EU-wide embargo on arms supplies.

Investors in People

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps his Department is taking to achieve investor in people status; when it started the process; when it expects to achieve investor in people status; and if he will make a statement. [2973]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The principles of investors in people are strongly supported by the Ministry of Defence.

Given its size and complexity, the Ministry of Defence has taken a strategic decision to work towards the IIP standard through its management units rather than as a single entity. Over the last 18 months, the Department has put in place management systems which demonstrate its commitment to the good management and development of people and, in September, published its commitment to the principles of the investors in people standard in its personnel policy statement.

Activity in the Department towards the standard is increasing. Two units have achieved recognition as investors in people and a further nine have made a formal commitment to working towards it. We intend to increase the number of units making formal commitments.

Damages Claim (Tornado Aircraft)

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 23 November, *Official Report*, column 272, what is the amount of the claim presented to Bricom. [3353]

Mr. Arbuthnot: Details relating to the claim are confidential between my Department and Bricom.

Vessel Replacements

Mr. Hutton: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to award a contract for the construction of replacements for HMS Fearless and HMS Intrepid. [3448]

Mr. Arbuthnot: We are currently in negotiation with VSEL to replace HMS Fearless and HMS Intrepid. The timing of any order will be subject to the satisfactory outcome of these negotiations.

Departmental Property, Somerset

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many empty residential properties for service personnel his Department currently has in *(a)* Yeovil and its environs and *(b)* Somerset. [3345]

Mr. Soames: My Department currently owns 53 vacant service families quarters in Yeovil and its environs and an additional 25 elsewhere in Somerset. Of the vacant quarters, 24 at Ilchester are awaiting demolition as part of a larger plan for the redevelopment of the area. The remainder are either already allocated to service families due to move in shortly or form part of the management margin needed to ensure that accommodation is available to house entitled service personnel.

Dr. Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many residential properties for service personnel his Department is currently building in Yeovil; [3347]

(2) how many residential properties for service personnel his Department intends to build in Yeovil; [3348]

(3) what is the cost to his Department of the residential properties for service personnel currently being built in Yeovil. [3349]

Mr. Soames: My Department is not currently building any residential properties for service personnel in Yeovil. However, we intend to build 120 properties to accommodate service personnel moving from Portland in late 1997 and 1998. We also plan to demolish 72 substandard properties in Ilchester and replace them with 84 new houses. It is not our practice to give estimated costs as this could prejudice the tendering process which is due to take place early in 1996.

Army (Trained Strength)

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what will be the total trained strength of the British Army in April 1996. [3350]

Mr. Soames: The total trained strength of the Army will be some 104,000 at 1 April 1996, based on recent assessments of recruiting and retention rates. This includes Gurkhas, but excludes members of the Royal Irish Regiment (Home Service).

Reservists

Dr. David Clark: to ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many letters have been sent to reservists in the last two weeks advising them to be prepared for possible full-time deployment within Her Majesty's Forces. [3351]

Mr. Soames: Some 1,322 letters have been sent to members of the Army Reserve and the Regular Army Reserve of Officers inviting them to be called out for service with the implementation force in former Yugoslavia. Members of the Territorial Army have been trawled through the chain of command and those expressing an interest have then been handed a letter giving further information. There is no central record of the number of letters which have been distributed to members of the TA.

Service Housing

Mr. David Martin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what further steps he intends to take to improve the quality and management of service housing. [3423]

Mr. Portillo: Earlier this year, the Government created a specialist housing division within MoD, the Defence Housing Executive, to undertake the management and maintenance of the married quarters estate on behalf of all three services. That has provided the estate with a unified, professional housing management organisation which we intend should offer a more responsive and efficient housing service to our personnel and their families. There is a great deal to be done in this area, and the executive has some challenging targets to meet. Over 90 per cent. of its budget is already spent on buying maintenance and other services from the private sector. But further improvements in cost-effectiveness are both possible and necessary.

The DHE will continue in its current form, as a unit within MoD, for a guaranteed period of at least three years. That will enable it to focus on the management improvements we expect it to deliver. I pay tribute to the DHE and its chief executive for the progress already made.

Beyond that, the Government have been considering, with financial and other advisers, possibilities for transferring ownership of the married quarters estate to the private sector. I am satisfied that we should take this forward.

The main points of our proposal are that the MoD should transfer the ownership of the married quarters estate in England and Wales to the private sector on a series of very long leases, renting back the accommodation which is needed to meet service housing needs. To that end, we would enter into detailed agreements governing the maximum and minimum levels of MoD occupancy, allowing sufficient flexibility to cater for inevitable uncertainties about our long-term accommodation needs. Several thousand surplus properties would be transferred on a freehold basis immediately—and future surpluses would similarly be returned to the new landlord. Special arrangements would allow the MoD to share in the enhanced value where the subsequent disposal of such properties was particularly successful. The MoD would retain, through the Defence Housing Executive, responsibility for maintenance and the allocation of housing. It is intended to include the bulk of the official service residences in the sale, where it is possible and sensible to do so.

Our fundamental requirement is to be able to provide our services with the housing that they need and deserve. That requirement flows from operational circumstances which demand mobility of service families, and from the imperative to deal fairly with our personnel and their families, upon whose commitment, dedication and forbearance we so heavily rely.

Meeting that requirement, however, is not dependent upon retaining ownership of the married quarters estate. Indeed, it is inappropriate for Government to own a large estate of this kind if they can avoid doing so. As far as possible, I want to place the business of owning married quarters, and disposing of them when they are no longer required, in the private sector, where significant efficiencies can be expected. Accordingly, I have decided to take forward the transfer of the married quarters estate to the private sector.

I am confident that this proposition will meet the services' housing needs, in a manner consistent with operational and security requirements, and will safeguard the welfare and interests of our personnel and their families. We will also be able, if such a transfer is successfully achieved, to fund additional investment in upgrading the housing stock where necessary. Much of the married quarters estate is in good condition, but there are areas where improvements are overdue, and this sale offers the opportunity to put this right more quickly. It also offers the prospect of real progress in dealing with the current empty homes problem. At present some 20 per cent. of our housing stock is unoccupied; even allowing for the unique requirements of service housing, and the particular difficulties associated with the changes and redeployments of recent years, that is unsatisfactory. By involving the dynamism and expertise of the private sector in dealing with surplus properties, I believe we can help to put that right and improve the supply of housing to the public.

I therefore intend to test the market. If a good price is available, the Government will transfer the stock. Such a transfer would depend upon reaching agreement on terms which satisfy the interests of the Services and on a price which properly reflects the public interest.

The Government will in due course publish a preliminary information memorandum, which will set out the proposals in greater detail, and invite interested parties to prequalify for the opportunity to tender for the estate.

Morocco (RAF Deployments)

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the dates, numbers and types of aircraft involved, numbers of sorties flown and minimum permitted altitudes, for Royal Air Force deployments to Morocco during *(a)* 1994 and *(b)* 1995. [1280]

Mr. Soames: There were no deployments to Morocco in 1994. Between 21 and 28 April 1995, six Tornado GR1 aircraft flew 32 sorties. The minimum permitted altitude was 300 ft above ground level.

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what agreements have been reached with the Moroccan Government for low flying training facilities in that country. [1281]

Mr. Soames: In September 1993 the United Kingdom signed an accord on military co-operation with the Kingdom of Morocco. In July 1994 we completed technical arrangements to facilitate bilateral exercises, including exercises involving RAF low flying training in Morocco.

Tornado Training Establishment

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he has had with the German and Italian authorities concerning the future of the Tornado tri-national training establishment; and what plans he has to move RAF Tornado training from Cottesmore. [1288]

Mr. Soames: The RAF has regular meetings with its German and Italian counterparts on all issues relating to the Tornado tri-national training establishment.

Former Yugoslavia

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement concerning the further deployment of British troops to the former Yugoslavia as part of the international peace plan. [2446]

Mr. Portillo *[pursuant to his reply, 27 November 1995, c. 482–83]:* On Monday, 4 December, some 380 British personnel should begin deployment to the former Yugoslavia as our contribution to pre-positioned troops for a NATO peace implementation force. These will include communications, logistics and engineer units together with advance headquarters elements. Their job will be to help prepare for the arrival of the main forces who will follow as soon as possible after the final signature of a peace agreement, the necessary UN Security Council resolution and an agreed balance of forces committed to the implementation force.

SCOTLAND

Agricultural Allowance Schemes

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) when the beef annual premium was paid to farmers in Scotland in *(a)* 1993, *(b)* 1994 and *(c)* 1995; [2805]

(2) when the sheep annual premium was paid to farmers in Scotland in *(a)* 1993, *(b)* 1994 and *(c)* 1995; [2808]

(3) when the hill livestock compensatory allowance was paid to farmers in Scotland in *(a)* 1993, *(b)* 1994 and *(c)* 1995. [2809]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: Payments under the sheep annual premium scheme, the suckler cow premium scheme, the beef special premium scheme, and the hill livestock compensatory allowances scheme are made over a considerable period of time, depending on the kind of payment and when eligibility for payment is established. Payments for the scheme years commenced in the months shown in the table.

Scheme	1993	1994	1995
SHPS	October 1992	October 1994	August 1995
SCPS	November 1992	November 1994	October 1995
BSPS	November 1992	December 1994	—
HLCA	February 1993	February 1995	March 1995

Sheep Quota Allocations

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what action he proposes in respect of the position of those sheep producers refused sheep quota allocations from the developer category of the 1993

national reserve following the decision not to appeal against Mr. Justice McPherson's ruling; and if he will make a statement. [3164]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: Sheep producers in the less-favoured area ring fences who had their applications to the developer category of the 1993 national reserve rejected together with those who were deterred from applying will be offered a chance to apply again for assessment under new guidelines. The Scottish Office Agriculture, Environment and Fisheries Department will write to producers to let them know what action they need to take. The Department is maintaining close consultation with industry representatives in drawing up the revised guidelines.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

National Lottery

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what plans she has to extend lottery funding to grant aid individual sporting competitors. [2500]

Mr. Sproat: I am keeping the national lottery distribution arrangements under review.

"Raising the Game"

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what is the value of the extra resources that the Government are planning to commit to fulfil the pledges contained within "Raising the Game"; and on which vote the cost will fall. [1555]

Mr. Sproat: The Sports Council will be making available an extra £1 million to enable trainee and serving teachers to obtain coaching qualifications and setting up a £2 million challenge fund to promote formal links between clubs and schools. These additional funds will be made available as a result of savings on administration following the restructuring of the Sports Council. Sportsmatch will also be earmarking £1 million of its funding for schools projects. Most significantly, the national lottery provides sport with an unprecedented opportunity to expand its stock of facilities and equipment and provides the means of fulfilling the Government's aim that, by 2000, all young people will have access to quality facilities, including playing fields.

Departmental Targets

Ms Armstrong: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what is the published recommended response time within which her Department is expected to reply to letters from the public. [3008]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: My Department has set a target of 10 working days to reply to letters from the public.

New Palace Yard (Archaeology)

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will make a statement on the archaeology being carried out during the current digging within the confines of New Palace Yard. [3106]

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 28 November 1995]:* An archaeological excavation in New Palace Yard was completed in 1994 as part of those being undertaken in the vicinity of the Houses of Parliament by the Museum of London archaeology service on behalf of London Underground Ltd.'s Jubilee line extension project. The current Jubilee line extension work in New Palace Yard comprises engineering operations only.

Investors in People

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what steps her Department is taking to achieve investor in people status; when it started the process; when it expects to achieve investor in people status; and if she will make a statement. [2988]

Mr. Sproat: The Department of National Heritage is currently developing a human resource development strategy based on the four key principles required for investors in people accreditation. A staff development adviser was appointed in August this year and she is working closely with the Central London training and enterprise council and a diagnostic study will be carried out to assess the exact requirements to achieve IIP status. As soon as that diagnostic study has been completed, I will be able to give a target date for achievement of the award.

Under-age Gambling

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what research her Department has undertaken into the problems of under-age gambling; and if she will make a statement. [1968]

Mr. Sproat: My Department has not undertaken any research into under-age gambling. I welcome yesterday's announcement by the Director General of the National Lottery about tough new action designed to stamp out under-age lottery sales. As part of this action, Oflot and the lottery operator will also commission research on UK and overseas experience in relation to ticket sales to children.

Royal Palaces

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what grace and favour accommodation in which occupied royal palace is allocated to *(a)* the private secretary to Her Majesty the Queen, *(b)* the Keeper of the Privy Purse, *(c)* the Master of the Household, *(d)* the Comptroller, the Lord Chamberlain's Office, *(e)* the Crown Equerry and *(f)* the Director of the Royal Collection. [2481]

Mr. Sproat: This information is provided on page 33 of the Committee of Public Accounts minutes of evidence for 24 April 1995, which is available in the Library of the House. Some of these officials occupy accommodation on a grace and favour basis as all have statements in their salaries in recognition of their occupying official accommodation.

Undertakings to Indemnify and Contingent Liabilities

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what was *(a)* the number of undertakings given by her under section 16 of the

National Heritage Act 1980 during the six-month period ended 30 September 1995 and *(b)* the amount of value, expressed in sterling, of any contingent liabilities as at the end of that period in respect of such undertakings given by her under that section at any time as remain outstanding at the end of that period. [3910]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The information my hon. Friend requests is as follows:

In the six-month period ended 30 September 1995 the following undertakings to indemnify were given by the relevant Departments for items on loan to national and non-national institutions.

	Number
Department of National Heritage	470
Scottish Office Education Department	78
Welsh Office Education Department	37
Department of Education for Northern Ireland	16

The value of contingent liabilities in respect of such undertakings given at any time and outstanding at 30 September 1995 are:

	£
Department of National Heritage	1,975,720,233
Scottish Office Education Department	137,926,172
Welsh Office Education Department	35,201,147
Department of Education for Northern Ireland	4,333,303

Tourism

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will set out the forecast Exchequer grant for the promotion and support of tourism for 1996–97 and 1997–98, at 1979 prices and expressed per head of population, for England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. [2166]

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 29 November 1995]:* The planned Government grant to the English tourist board and the British Tourist Authority for 1996–97 and 1997–98, expressed in 1979 prices, and per head of population for the countries covered by the boards, is set out in the following table. It is not possible to give figures for other parts of the United Kingdom as I understand that my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Wales and for Scotland and my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland have still to announce the allocation of the overall settlements for their Departments announced by my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer on 28 November.

	British tourist authority		*English tourist board*	
	£m £ million (1979 prices)	*£ Per head population*	*£m £ million (1979 prices)*	*£ Per head population*
1996–97	13.4	0.25	3.8	0.08
1997–98	13.1	0.25	3.7	0.08

Source:
Population Estimates Unit (OPCS) 1979–1994, Government Actuaries Department 1995 (1992—based projection).

The British Tourist Authority is responsible for marketing Great Britain overseas. The grant per capita for BTA has therefore been calculated using the total population of England, Wales and Scotland.

Greenwich Park

Mr. Deva: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will make a statement on the recommendations made by the Royal Parks review group in its report on Greenwich park. [3909]

Mr. Sproat: I have now considered the group's report in detail. As with the two previous reviews—on Hyde park and Kensington gardens, and on St. James's, Green and Regent's parks—the review group, chaired by Dame Jennifer Jenkins, examined a wide range of issues relating to the role and management of the park, consulting widely with individuals and interested organisations. The conclusions were discussed at a one-day conference, and were well received. The conference delegates supported the majority of the recommendations, but made a few alternative suggestions.

The group's recommendations focus on the opportunities to provide for changing demands and pressures without losing sight of the park's prime function of providing a green open space, close to the heart of the city, where local residents and tourists alike can enjoy themselves in the open air, amidst examples of London's finest built heritage. We have been looking positively at the group's proposals, and I confirm that I can accept them in principle. I set out the action we have taken, and my proposals for taking matters forward, including the necessary consultations which will have to be carried out before some recommendations can be implemented. The availability of financial resources will of course determine the timing of some.

The principle recommendations of the group are to nominate a world heritage site at Greenwich, and to open up the great axis, leading from the Isle of Dogs across the Thames to the Royal Naval college and the Queen's house, up the park's escarpment to the Wolfe monument, and on to the spire of All Saints church in Blackheath.

I endorse the world heritage site proposal. I have sought preliminary advice from English Heritage, and my Department is pursuing discussions with the London borough of Greenwich, and other interested parties. If all goes well, I hope to put Greenwich forward by the end of this year for inclusion in the United Kingdom's tentative list of world heritage sites, with a view to making a formal nomination by July 1996.

I endorse the proposal to open up the great axis, and my Department will be taking this forward in respect of the Royal Naval college site, in consultation with the relevant parties. The document, inviting expressions of interest in the future use of the Royal Naval college buildings, confirms the Government's wish to see greater public access to this site. The proposal concerning the axis, as it unfolds through the area leading from the Queen's house, up through the park, and as to how a less divisive boundary between the National Maritime museum and park can be achieved, will be the subject of detailed discussion between the two organisations. The Royal Parks agency will commission its landscape architects, in co-operation with the museum, to look at the

landscaping issues in detail, including the escarpment, and will put forward recommendations. Consultations will then take place with all concerned.

As in earlier reports, the Jenkins group considered that there was a need to curb traffic and parking, to improve the safety of pedestrians and the atmosphere of the park. They recommended that this could be achieved by banning through traffic, and closing St. Mary's gate, at the north end of the park, and redesigning the layout of Blackheath avenue to create more space for pedestrians. The closure of St. Mary's gate will require discussion with the London borough of Greenwich, the Minister for Transport in London, the Traffic Director for London, and local interested groups. Discussions are in hand, and subject to the outcome, we are thinking of introducing a six month trial ban next year. The Royal Parks Agency will also commission a design study of Blackheath avenue in due course as funds permit.

On the group's recommendations to bring into the park additional areas, from which the public are now excluded, the agency has begun discussions with the London borough of Greenwich about the Old Orchard, and with Thames Water about the reservoir. The agency has commissioned a feasibility study of how best to use the former nursery site, with a view to retaining two glasshouses and the contractor's yard, and incorporating the remainder into the deer enclosure. Any programme of works resulting from the study would not begin until full consultations had taken place. The works would be phased over a number of years, and would be dependant on available financial resources.

The group made a number of other recommendations to improve the ambience of the park, including improvements in planting and pruning, banning dogs from sports areas, and continuing with the current sports provision. These have already been implemented. Work is about to begin on improving surfaces in the children's playground, and costs will be met from existing budgets. The costs of other recommendations, to improve paths and upgrade benches, will be met from current and future maintenance budgets of the Royal Parks Agency. For proposals such as the provision of shelters and cycle tracks, the agency will be seeking sponsorship and private finance.

The report also refers to the prime meridian in the context of the millennium. I accept the recommendation that there should be no new millennium building in the park, but welcome the suggestion of marking the meridian line in some way. The Royal Parks Agency will be inviting proposals of how this might be achieved.

The full cost of implementing the recommendations is not yet known, as further studies are required in many instances. It will also be necessary to consider the royal parks requirements alongside other demands on my Department's budget.

I am most grateful for the contribution and time Dame Jennifer and her group have given to the review, and for their comprehensive report and constructive recommendations. I look forward to their final report on the remaining royal parks—Richmond and Bushy.

Television Licence Fees

Mr. Coe: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will announce the television licence fees which will take effect from 1 April 1996. [3911]

Mr. Sproat: The Government announced on 4 November 1993, *Official Report*, columns *309–10*, that they had decided to link increases in the television licence fee to the retail prices index for the remaining three years of the BBC's current royal charter.

Licence fee increases are based on the annual RPI figure as at the previous September, in the same way as pensions and other state benefits. Application of the RPI figure of 3.9 per cent. for the year September 1995 to the current unrounded licence fees produces new rounded totals of £90.00 for a colour licence and £30.00 for a black and white licence. The necessary regulations to bring these fees into force will be laid before the House in due course.

Scratchcards

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will estimate the number of national lottery outlets selling scratchcards to under 16-year-olds. [1970]

Mr. Sproat: My Department cannot estimate the number of national lottery outlets selling scratchcards to under 16-year-olds. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has, under section 11 of the National Lottery etc. Act 1993, issued a direction to the Director General of the National Lottery, that no licence should be granted which authorises the promotion of any lottery, which does not allow for sufficient controls to prevent persons who have not attained the age of 16 from participating. I have therefore asked the director general to write to the hon. Member, placing copies of his response in the Libraries of the House.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

BBC World Service

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the performance of the BBC World Service against its remit to explain, inform and educate those outside the United Kingdom of the affairs and nature of the United Kingdom. [3169]

Mr. Hanley: We have regular discussions with the World Service about its performance. The World Service is aware that informing overseas listeners about the United Kingdom is an important aspect of its remit. The content of programmes is a matter for the World Service.

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make it his policy to require the BBC World Service to broadcast the "Today", "The World at One", "PM" and "The World Tonight" programmes. [3170]

Mr. Hanley: It is for the BBC World Service to decide which domestic BBC programmes are suitable for international broadcasting.

Mr. Faulds: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he plans to meet the managing director of the BBC World Service to discuss funding proposals for the next triennium. [3163]

Mr. Hanley: Detailed discussions on the next triennium will begin early next year.

Investors in People

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps his Department is taking to achieve investor in people status; when it started the process; when it expects to achieve investor in people status; and if he will make a statement. [2976]

Mr. Hanley: The personnel and security command of the diplomatic wing is committed to seeking investor in people recognition and expects to be able to do so in April 1996. We regard this as a pilot project which, if successful, might lead to investor in people status later being sought by other commands and divisions of the diplomatic wing.

The aid wing is committed to achieving investor in people status, has completed initial diagnostic work and engaged an adviser.

Indonesia

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the pro-democracy groups in Indonesia which have been funded in the last five years; and how much each group received. [3145]

Mr. Hanley: We provide no funding to any Indonesian political group, but we maintain contact with a range of groups in Indonesia through our embassy in Jakarta and have invited on occasion representatives to visit the UK under our sponsored visit scheme.

Angola

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the peace process in Angola. [1494]

Mr. Hanley *[holding answer 29 November 1995]:* We are encouraged that, a year after the signing of the Lusaka protocol, the ceasefire in Angola continues to hold and that the quartering of UNITA troops has now begun. However, there is still much to be achieved before the Lusaka protocol is implemented in full. We urge both parties to fulfil their obligations.

Nigeria

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 21 November, *Official Report*, column *71*, on what dates in 1995 Ahmed Abdullahi, a senior member of the Nigerian Provisional Ruling Council, was in Britain.

Mr. Hanley *[holding answer 29 November 1995]:* General Abdullahi made two visits to the UK in 1995. In February, he was given, exceptionally, a visa on compassionate grounds to receive urgent medical attention. He made a further private visit in September, having acquired a visa through misrepresentation. Procedures at the visa section of our high commission in Lagos have been reviewed.

World Conference on Women

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which aspects of the Beijing programme of action he is prioritising. [2911]

Mrs. Gillan: I have been asked to reply.

The Government attach a great deal of importance to the world conference on women, and we are fully committed to implementation of the "Platform for Action", its outcome document.

I have outlined a plan for implementation which includes a short, accessible public report of the conference, which will be available shortly; an invitation to non-governmental organisations to submit their views on priorities for implementation by 1 February 1996; and a report on progress on implementation one year after the conference. We await the outcome of the consultation exercise before setting any specific priorities for implementation.

Rwanda

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action has been taken by the international community and the Rwanda Government to improve conditions at Kigali prison. [2556]

Mr. Hanley: The international community provides food and medical treatment for prisoners in Kigali and other prisons in Rwanda. Over 500 women and children have already been transferred from Kigali prison to new facilities or to a new wing within the Kigali prison, built with international funding and the co-operation of the Rwandan Government. Adolescent prisoners and 1,500 adult prisoners are to be transferred to new facilities shortly.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Land Registration

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what is the estimated cost to public funds of moving to mandatory land registration within five years. [2246]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The question concerns a specific matter on which the chief executive of HM Land Registry Executive Agency is best placed to provide the answer. I have accordingly asked the chief executive to reply direct.

Letter from John Manthorpe to Mr. Gordon Prentice, dated 30 November 1995:

I have been asked by the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, to reply to your recent question concerning the estimated cost to public funds of moving to mandatory land registration within five years.

Land Registration is compulsory on sale throughout England and Wales for all conveyances and transfers of freehold land and all leases for a term of more than 21 years. Over 15.7 million titles are already registered and it is estimated that, under existing legislative provisions, approximately 18 million titles will be registered by the year 2000.

If the remaining unregistered titles were to be brought onto the public land register within five years by new, mandatory, compulsory registration provisions there would be no direct cost to public funds as the Land Registry is required to cover all its expenditures from fees paid by those who use its services. However, under existing legislation, public authorities, in their capacity as landowners, would be required to pay fees for registering their titles.

In September, a joint report by the Law Commission and the Land Registry (Law Com No 235; Cm 2950) was published which proposes extending the circumstances in which a disposition of unregistered land must be completed by registration, thereby bringing forward the time when all land in England and Wales would be brought onto the public land register. The report also recommends the introduction of a new fee structure to enable reduced fees to be charged to encourage voluntary registration. A draft Bill to give effect to these (and other) recommendations is included in the report and a suitable opportunity is being sought to bring this forward for consideration by Parliament.

Mr. Prentice: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department which countries in the European Union limit the acreage of land to which any one owner may have title. [2245]

Mr. Evans: The question concerns a specific matter on which the chief executive of HM Land Registry Executive Agency is best placed to provide the answer. I have accordingly asked the chief executive to reply direct.

Letter from John Manthorpe to Mr. Gordon Prentice, dated 30 November 1995:

I have been asked by the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, to reply to your recent question concerning which countries in the European Union place limitations on the acreage of land that may be held by any one owner. In England and Wales registration of title is the responsibility of Her Majesty's Land Registry. The Land Registration Acts place no such limitation on ownership. Since the repeal by the Charities Act 1960 of the old Mortmain and Charitable Uses Acts, the general law of England and Wales has imposed no such limitation on ownership. I am not aware of any restriction elsewhere in the European Union.

Mental Incapacity

Mr. Khabra: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when he expects to publish a response to the Law Commission's report on mental incapacity. [2138]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The Government set up an interdepartmental working group, chaired by the Lord Chancellor's Department, to consider the Law Commission report on mental incapacity. The group was asked to produce an initial report for consideration by Ministers by 1 September 1995, and has met this timetable. Ministers are now considering the report of the working group together with that of the Law Commission. The Government will make an announcement of their initial view on the Law Commission's report once Ministers have had the opportunity to consider the implications of the proposals.

State Papers

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will list those countries of the European Union that do not release state papers until a specified period has elapsed; and if he will give the period in each case. [2720]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The definition of "state papers" differs throughout the European Union, as do the periods for which such papers are withheld. The different provisions in the 12 then member states are set out in chapter 4 of the 1994 report of the group of experts on the co-ordination of archives, "*Archives in the European Union*". Copies of the report are available in the Libraries of both Houses.

Executive Agencies (Overseas Travel)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will list for each of his executive agencies for the last financial year in respect of overseas travel by agency staff *(a)* the costs of the travel, *(b)* the countries visited and *(c)* the posts held by the staff concerned. [2285]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The Court Service became an executive agency on 3 April 1995. Hence, for the financial year in question, the Lord Chancellor was responsible for three executive agencies—the Public Trust Office, Her Majesty Land Registry and the Public Record Office. The

question concerns a specific matter on which the chief executives of those agencies are best placed to provide the answer and I have accordingly asked them to reply direct.

Letter from John Manthorpe to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 30 November 1995:

I have been asked by the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, to reply to your recent question requesting details in respect of overseas travel within the last financial year. I can provide the following information:

(a) In the year 1994/95 the total expenditure on overseas travel by Land Registry staff was £8,084.

(b) The countries visited were Switzerland, France, Belgium and South Africa.

(c) The posts held by the six staff concerned were: Chief Land Registrar (Switzerland), Solicitor to HM Land Registry (France), Director of Information Technology and Head of Services, Computer Services (Belgium), Director of Corporate Services and Head of Development & Support, Computer Services (South Africa)

I do hope that this answers the points raised with the Parliamentary Secretary but please contact me if I can be of any further assistance.

Letter from Julia C. Lomas to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 30 November 1995:

The Parliamentary Secretary has asked me to reply to you as part of the Lord Chancellor's Department's response to your Parliamentary Question, listed on 22 November 1995, regarding the cost of overseas travel made by agency staff in the last financial year, including the posts held by the staff concerned and the countries visited.

There was no overseas travel on official business by any member of the Public Trust Office during 1994/95.

Letter from Sarah Tyacke to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 30 November 1995:

I have been asked by the Lord Chancellor's Parliamentary Secretary to reply for the Public Record Office to your question about (a) the costs of travel, (b) the countries visited, and (c) the posts held by the staff concerned, in respect of overseas travel by agency staff for the last financial year.

The answers are:

(a) £7708.

(b) Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, The Netherlands, Portugal, Russia, and the United States of America.

(c) The Keeper of Public Records; the Director of Corporate Services; the Manager of the NewPRO programme and two of his staff; the Head of Preservation Services; a Government Services Inspection and Documentation Officer; the Publications Manager; a Reader Services Department Team Leader and the Head of Map Section.

Investors in People

Mr. Byers: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what steps his Department is taking to achieve investor in people status; when it started the process; when it expects to achieve investor in people status; and if he will make a statement. [2979]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The constituent parts of my Department are approaching the investor in people initiative separately.

The Court Service, established as an agency in April this year, is committed in principle to achieving the investor in people standard within the lifetime of the current corporate plan, that is by April 1998. A scoping study, begun earlier this year, will shortly recommend to the chief executive when the process should begin and what the time scale should be for the action plan and assessment phase. The chief executive will make a public announcement once these decisions have been taken.

The Public Trust Office began to work towards investor in people in April this year and has completed the diagnostic stage to determine the readiness of the office for assessment against the standard; surveys and interviews of staff have been carried out and the findings were recently presented to the management board. A decision has been taken to pursue a commitment to achieve accreditation for the PTO by April 1997 and the action plan is being drawn up.

The headquarters of my Department began active consideration of the investor in people initiative in the summer and is currently examining the options for completing the diagnostic stage of the process, with a provisional target date of April next year. Decisions on a target date for committing to IIP and on timing of an action plan will follow thereafter.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Mr. Byers: To ask the Attorney-General what steps his Department is taking to achieve investor in people status; when it started the process; when it expects to achieve investor in people status; and if he will make a statement. [2980]

The Attorney-General: The Law Officers' departments are committed to the principles of the investor in people initiative. The Crown Prosecution Service and the Serious Fraud Office are actively considering the options for the implementation of IIP. The CPS is pursuing with a training and enterprise council the possibility of a pilot exercise in one of its offices. The Treasury Solicitor's department envisages taking a decision to work towards the IIP standard after 1 April 1996, once it has assumed agency status. The Government Property Lawyers has already decided to seek IIP accreditation: much of the groundwork has been carried out and the agency is in contact with a TEC with a view to making progress in the near future. The legal secretariat to the Law Officers is a small office, the staff of which are almost all on loan from other Departments, and thus there are no immediate plans to implement IIP in its case.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Onshore Oil Licensing

Mr. Ainger: to ask the President of the Board of Trade what advice he received from the Joint Nature Conservation Committee and the Countryside Council for Wales before inviting applications from oil companies for blocks in watery areas in the latest onshore oil licensing round. [2854]

Mr. Page: Previous practice regarding onshore licensing has been to offer all unlicensed onshore areas, including watery areas, in each licensing round. Watery areas have attracted very few applications, none in the last two rounds, and environmental and other bodies interested in these areas were consulted only after applications had

been received and on a case-by-case basis. It was felt that to consult over areas that were—on the basis of previous experience—unlikely to be the subject of applications would place an unnecessary burden on the organisations consulted. For this reason, neither the Joint Nature Conservation Committee nor the Countryside Council for Wales was asked to advise on the watery areas before the invitation to apply for licences in the seventh round of onshore licensing was announced.

After the announcement, it became clear that a number of companies were interested in exploring in the watery areas and the views of the JNCC, and CCW were therefore sought. Consultation with these bodies over blocks on offer in the seventh round continues.

Mr. Ainger: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the organisations that have communicated their objection or concern about the latest onshore oil licensing round covering watery areas. [2851]

Mr. Page: The DTI consulted over 90 organisations following the offer of watery areas in the seventh onshore oil and gas licensing round. Those on the following list have either objected or expressed varying degrees of concern. Applications were received for three of the areas, the Solway firth, the Minches and the Ribble estuary, and 12 of the organisations listed have expressed an interest in these.

Organisations that have communicated their objections or concern about the latest onshore licensing round covering watery areas.

Argyll and Bute Council
Carmarthen Bay Forum
Cefn Sidan Community Council
Countryside Council for Wales
Cumbria County Council
Cumbria Wildlife Trust
Dumfries and Galloway Regional Council
Dyfed County Council
Dyfed Wildlife Trust
Eastern Sea Fisheries Joint Committee
Essex County Council
Essex Wildlife Trust
Friends of Cardigan Bay
Friends of the Earth Cymru
Fylde Borough Council
Gwent Wildlife Trust
Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust
Highland Regional Council
Humberside County Council
Isle of Wight Council
Joint Countryside Advisory Service
Kent Trust for Nature Conservation
Lancashire County Council
Lancashire Wildlife Trust
Lincolnshire County Council
Llanelli Borough Council
Lothian Regional Council
Merseyside Development Corporation
Metropolitan Borough of Sefton
Metropolitan Borough of Wirral
Norfolk Wildlife Trust
Pembroke, Carmarthen and West Glamorgan Green Parties
Port of London Authority
Royal Society for Nature Conservation (The Wildlife Trusts)
Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
Shetlands Islands Council
South Pembrokeshire District Council
South Wales Sea Fisheries Committee
Strathclyde Regional Council
The Clyde Fishermen's Association
The Fishermen's Association Limited
The Lincolnshire Trust for Nature Conservation
The National Trust (Whiteford Burrows Advisory Committee)
The Scottish Fishermen's Federation
The Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust
Yorkshire Wildlife Trusts

Departmental Targets

Ms Armstrong: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the published recommended response times within which his Department is expected to reply to letters from the public. [3004]

Mr. Lang: The published targets for letters for ministerial reply are as follows:

Substantive reply sent within 10 working days: 77 per cent.

Substantive reply sent within one calendar month: 98 per cent.

For other letters, individual management units and agencies within the Department are free to set their own targets and performance measures as part of the MINIS process. There is no recommended standard, but all performance measures and targets are monitored and reviewed annually in MINIS to ensure that they are challenging and will lead to continued improvements in output and performance.

More detailed information about individual management units, performance measures, including timeliness targets for responding to correspondence from the public are published annually in the Department's MINIS documents. Copies of MINIS 94 and MINIS 95 are available in the Library of the House. Agencies' targets are also published in their annual reports.

Investors in People

Mr. Byers: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what steps his Department is taking to achieve investor in people status; when it started the process; when it expects to achieve investor in people status; and if he will make a statement. [2984]

Mr. Lang: The Department announced its formal commitment to working towards investor in people accreditation in May 1994. This was followed by a full diagnosis of the relevant procedures and attitudes within the Department. A draft action plan was produced which is now being extended to cover staff who joined the DTI from the Cabinet Office and the former Employment Department in the latest machinery of Government changes. The revised plan will be submitted to Central London training and enterprise council for approval within the next few weeks, although the key changes in procedures are already being put in place. A trial IIP

assessment is planned for the summer of 1996. The timing of the final assessment will be decided in the light of the results of the trial.

"Realising our Potential" Awards

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many applications were received for responsive mode (non-ROPAS) grants by the *(a)* the Medical Research Council, *(b)* the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council, *(c)* the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council, *(d)* the Particle Physics and Astronomy Research Council and *(e)* the Economic and Social Research Council in 1994–95; how many were turned down because of ineligibility; how many were x-rated; and how many were (i) accepted and (ii) rejected. [2991]

Mr. Ian Taylor: The information requested is set out in the following tables. Because of the differing ways the research councils organise their grant schemes it is not possible to provide all the information precisely as requested.

Particular attention should be paid to the explanatory notes.

1994 responsive mode[1] (non-ROPA) grants
Analysis of applications and awards by Research Council

Research Council	Number of applications	Number x- rated	Number of awards	Number of ineligible	Number rejected
BBSRC	1,107	775	313	—	794
EPSRC[1]	—	—	—	—	—
ESRC	925	562	178	47	747
MRC	—	—	—	—	—
NERC	486	275	115	—	371
PPARC[1]	412	353	294	0	118

1995 responsive mode[1] (non-ROPA) grants
Analysis of applications and awards by Research Council

Research Council	Number of applications	Number x-rated	Number of awards	Number of ineligible	Number rejected
BBSRC	1,121	879	253	—	868
EPSRC[1]	1,036	—	417	—	619
ESRC	834	522	225	18	609
MRC	987	790	217	—	770
NERC	524	346	101	—	423
PPARC[1]	259	221	181	0	78

[1]For EPSRC and PPARC readily available grants data does not distinguish responsive and non-responsive proposals. The figures shown are therefore for all non-ROPA grants.

BBSRC: the council does not record the number of ineligible applications received.

ESRC: 'ineligible' applications include those rejected by the office as unsuitable for processing on technical grounds (outside Council's remit or insufficiently specified). Also includes applications withdrawn by candidates, the ESRC have supplied two sets of figures for the 'rejected' category;

the figures shown are for all applications not funded which includes unfunded alphas;

the alternative figures are 363 (1994) and 312 (1995) for all non-alpha applications not funded which is the category which ESRC regards as 'reject'.

EPSRC: the new EPSRC grants system began on 1 January 1995. The period 1 April 1994 to September 1994 was spent dealing with applications made to SERC and Phase 1 ROPAs. This was followed by what was essentially an inter-regnum during which responsive applications received and grants awarded were insignificant and mainly related to maintaining support for existing groups;

the EPSRC does not have closing dates for its grant scheme;

readily available grants data does not distinguish responsive and non-responsive proposals;

the data relates to responsive mode proposals (excluding ROPAs) received and fully considered between 1 January and 31 July 1995.

MRC: the figures relate to the 1 August 1994–31 July 1995 grant round;

MRC do not keep statistics on ineligible applications.

NERC: figures are for academic years 1993–94 and 1994–95; ineligible applications are sifted out at an early stage and are therefore not sent for peer review or considered by the Research Grants Training and Awards Committee. As a consequence no applications fall into the ineligible category.

PPARC: PPARC have been unable to identify responsive and non-responsive grants separately; figures therefore reflect the whole of the grants portfolio;

it is not yet possible to provide a full picture for '1995' because PPARC is part way through a grants round.

Royal Cornish Consols United Tin Mines Cost Book Co.

Mr. Harris: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on factors leading to the Department of Trade and Industry discharging the receiver appointed to investigate the activities of the Royal Cornish Consols United Tin Mines Cost Book Co.; and if he will publish the receiver's report. [2580]

Mr. John M. Taylor: The receiver was appointed by the High Court as part of injunctive proceedings designed principally to bring an end to a misconceived tax avoidance scheme. That receiver has obtained his release from the court, and has not produced any report for this Department.

Steel

Mr. Hardy: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what action has been taken during the last six months to reduce state aid for steel production within the EC. [2962]

Mr. Eggar: The Commission ordered the repayment of illegal state aid to a steel producer in Germany. Formerly, state-aided companies in Spain, Portugal and Italy have been privatised. At the November 1995 Industry Council, the Commission, while proposing an exceptional derogation for Irish steel, reaffirmed its commitment to avoid putting forward any future requests for derogation from the steel aid rules. The UK Steel Subsidies Monitoring Committee has played a part in maintaining the pressure to end steel subsidies in Europe.

Mr. Hardy: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the current order book of the British steel industry; and what it was in each of the last three years. [2964]

Mr. Eggar: Information on orders outstanding is not available. Figures of total orders booked in each of the last four years are in the table.

UK steel industry products

	Total orders booked
12 months ending September	*Million tonnes*
1992[1]	13.8
1993	14.0
1994	14.9
1995	14.5

Note:
[1]53 week period.
Source:
ISSB Ltd.

Life Funds

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what approaches have been received from Australian Mutual Providence regarding the proposed release of surplus moneys from the life funds; and what reasons have been given for such a proposal. [3354]

Mr. John M. Taylor: The Department does not comment on its contacts with individual companies.

The Department's view on the balance between policyholders' and shareholders' interests in the long-term funds of life insurance companies was set out by my predecessor my hon. Friend the Member for Brecon and Radnor (Mr. Evans) in his reply to the hon. Member for Shoreham (Mr. Stephen) on 24 February 1995, *Official Report*, columns *362–63*.

Gas Measurement Branch

Mr. Steen: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the annual income of the Gas Engineering Meters and Quality Laboratory arising from *(a)* fees, *(b)* charges and *(c)* fines; what was total number of staff employed (i) part time and (ii) full time; and what contribution his Department made towards the annual running costs in the past three years. [3255]

Mr. Eggar: I assume that this question refers to the work of the gas measurement branch of the oil and gas division of my Department. The income from fees and charges for Gas Act 1986 work in the three financial years, 1 April 1992 to 31 March 1995 is as follows:

Financial year	*Fees* £	*Charges* £
1992–93	2,292,549	1,001,715
1993–94	1,718,997	912,304
1994–95	1,518,188	967,804

There was no income from fines. Any fines would be paid into the magistrates court in respect of any criminal proceedings.

The number of staff in post in April of the relevant years carrying out Gas Act work is also as follows:

Staff in post	*Part time*	*Full time*
1992	4	62
1993	3	61
1994	2	58
1995	4	46

Apart from total expenditure over the three years of about £6,000 for Gas Act statutory work for which there was no power to make a charge, all of the gas measurement branch's annual running costs were recovered by relevant fees and charges.

Medicine Sales

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) what information he has as the basis of the investigation currently being undertaken by the Office of Fair Trading into the resale price maintenance of medicines; and if he will make a statement; [3013]

(2) what estimate he has made as to the likely savings to the National Health Service from the abolition of the resale price maintenance scheme for medicines; [3015]

(3) if he will support the abolition of the retail price maintenance of medicines. [3019]

Mr. John M. Taylor *[holding answer 28 November 1995]:* In 1970, the restrictive practices court exempted medicaments from the general prohibition on resale price maintenance. The exemption can only be ended by the court. The Director General of Fair Trading has a duty to monitor and regularly review existing goods exempted from the prohibition. The Office of Fair Trading's current review is to establish whether there is a prima facie evidence of material change in the relevant circumstances since the exemption was granted. If the DGFT concluded that there was a material change of circumstances he could apply to the court to seek leave for review of the exemption. It would be premature to speculate about the DGFT's conclusions.

Asbestosis

Mr. Clapham: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many coal miners and former coal miners diagnosed to be suffering from asbestosis since 1983 have received a payment under the 1974 pneumoconiosis compensation scheme. [2726]

Mr. Page *[holding answer 28 November 1995]:* This is a matter for the British Coal Corporation. I am asking the chairman to write to the hon. Member.

Business Links (Rural Areas)

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many business links in rural areas will be operating by the end of 1995; and if he will indicate their location by county. [2643]

Mr. Page: Most business links have within their boundaries a variety of locations—urban, suburban and rural. It is not possible therefore to enumerate business links operating only in rural areas. By the end of 1995 business link services will be available to around 85 per cent. of all VAT-registered companies in England.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 30 November. [1653]

Sir Peter Tapsell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 30 November. [1654]

The Prime Minister: This morning, I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Investors in People

Mr. Byers: To ask the Prime Minister what steps his office is taking to achieve investor in people status; when it started the process; when it expects to achieve investor in people status; and if he will make a statement. [2972]

The Prime Minister: For this purpose, my Office is part of the Cabinet Office. In February 1993, the Cabinet Office registered commitment to achieve investor in people status. The formal commitment relates only to the Office of Public Service part of the Cabinet Office and the establishment officer's group. However, the whole Department is participating in the process of change and will share in the benefits. An action plan for the Department was produced following consultation with staff and was formally accepted by the Central London training and enterprise council in July 1995. Work is in hand to take forward the action required to bring the Department to the necessary standard. The Department is seeking to achieve accreditation by the end of 1996.

Crown Act 1707

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make it his policy to bring forward legislation to amend the Succession to the Crown Act 1707. [3378]

The Prime Minister: No.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Charter Mark

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many firms have withdrawn from the charter mark award scheme; and if he will make a statement. [2908]

Mr. Willetts: Only one. British Gas withdrew from the charter mark scheme earlier this month when its charter mark was under review.

Executive Agencies (Overseas Travel)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will list for each of his executive agencies for the last financial year in respect of overseas travel by agency staff *(a)* the costs of the travel, *(b)* the countries visited and *(c)* the posts held by the staff concerned. [2284]

Mr. Willetts: As this concerns a purely operational matter, I have asked the chief executives of the agencies concerned to write direct to the hon. Member.

Letter from R. N. Edwards to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 22 November 1995:

There has been no overseas travel on behalf of the Chessington Computer Centre by any of its staff during the last financial year.

Letter from Craig Muir to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 29 November 1995:

"To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will list for each of his executive agencies for the last financial year in respect of overseas travel by agency staff *(a)* the costs of the travel, *(b)* the countries visited and *(c)* the posts held by the staff concerned."

(a) £579.34

(b) United States of America

(c) Director of Business Development.

Letter from Mike Devereau to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 27 November 1995:

I have been asked to reply, in respect of the Central Office of Information, to your question to the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster about overseas travel.

COI staff of all grades make many visits in the course of providing services to other departments from whom costs are recovered. For example radio technicians support overseas visits by senior ministers, film marketing specialists attend sales conferences and managers travel with touring exhibitions.

The cost in 1994–95 was £65,078. The countries visited were:

Albania

Azerbaijan

Austria

Bangladesh

Belgium

Bosnia

Brazil
Croatia
Czech Republic
Denmark
Egypt
France
Germany
Greece (Corfu)
Holland
Hong Kong
India
Italy
Japan
Luxembourg
Norway
Oman
Poland
Russia
Saudi Arabia
Serbia
Singapore
South Africa
Sweden
Switzerland
Taiwan
Turkey
Ukraine
United Arab Emirates
USA

Letter from Mike Lynn to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 27 November 1995:

I have been asked to reply, in respect of HMSO, to your question to the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster about overseas visits. I should explain that HMSO is a trading organisation which buys and sells outside the UK, and participates in international conferences and exhibitions associated with our goods and services. The details requested are as follows:

(a) The recorded cost of overseas travel during the last financial year was £66,000.

(b) *Countries visited*

Turkey
Luxembourg
Norway
Sweden
Thailand
Malaysia
Philippines
Italy
Belgium
Poland
Cyprus
Sri Lanka
Singapore
Spain
USA
Germany
Austria
India
Holland
Japan
France

(c) *Staff concerned*

Chief Executive
Deputy Chief Executive
Export Sales Manager
Export Sales Executive
European Liaison Manager
Translator
International Security Print Executive
Press Manager
Technical Director
Research Analysts
Sales Executives
Senior Buyer
Designer
Director Purchasing
Head of Paper Purchasing
Paper Negotiator Manager
Distribution Director
Research Manager

Letter from S. H. F. Hickey to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 27 November 1995:

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster has asked me to reply for the Civil Service College to your Question about overseas travel by Agency staff.

The cost of overseas travel and subsistence in the 1994/95 financial year was £92,078. The countries visited are listed in the annex to this letter. The staff concerned were myself, Business Group Directors and teaching and consultancy staff.

There was some travel to international conferences, often to present papers, but the large majority of the expenditure was in connection with fee-earning business, primarily in the area of promulgating the UK experience of public sector reform. For example, we have had major contracts for supporting public sector reform in Southern Africa and Eastern Europe.

Countries visited by CSC Staff in 1994/95
Belgium
Canada
Cyprus
Eire
Finland
France
Germany
Holland
Hungary
Italy
Lebanon
Luxembourg
Namibia
Norway
Oman
Poland
Rumania
South Africa
Spain
The Czech Republic
USA
Zimbabwe

Letter from E. C. McCloy to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 24 November 1995:

Your written question to the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster has been referred for me to reply on behalf of this Agency.

During 1994/95 there was no expenditure on travel overseas by any member of Agency staff.

Civil Servants (Contact with the Opposition)

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list the guidelines and timings for meetings of permanent secretaries with Opposition Front Bench Members, and for the undertaking of contingency work by civil servants in preparation for a change of Government; and if he will make a statement. [3268]

Mr. Heseltine: The convention has been that, by authority of the Prime Minister, towards the end of a Parliament or when a general election has been called, Opposition parties may arrange, with the authority of their party leaders and through the head of the civil service, contacts with senior civil servants. These arrangements are designed to allow briefing on factual questions on departmental organisational changes which Opposition parties have in mind or which may result from Opposition party policies. Any exchanges would be confidential. Following the last general election, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister told the leader of the Opposition that he would be content to authorise confidential exchanges between senior civil servants and Opposition spokesmen from January 1996.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

Nigeria

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what has been the involvement of the Crown Agents in the export of military, security or police equipment to Nigeria since June 1993; and if he will make a statement. [2074]

Mr. Hanley: Crown Agents has had no involvement in procurement of military equipment for Nigeria. Under contractual arrangements entered into before 1993, a Crown Agents subsidiary company acted as shipping agent for one company exporting military equipment under licences granted before EU measures were imposed in December 1993. This involvement ceased in January 1995.

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if the police training for Nigerian police officers in the United Kingdom and Nigeria since 1990 has involved *(a)* instruction in crowd control techniques and *(b)* the use of firearms. [2479]

Mr. Hanley: Training has not included instruction in either crowd techniques or the use of firearms.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which towns or cities in Nigeria United Kingdom personnel have visited to provide training to Nigerian police forces in each year since 1990. [2480]

Mr. Hanley: United Kingdom personnel provided training in Jos between 1991 and 1993, and in Enugu between 1993 and 1995.

Children

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will obtain reports from Her Majesty's ambassadors stationed in countries currently or recently suffering from war and armed conflict on the degree to which children have been pressed into direct military action; and what is Her Majesty's Government's policy on aid or expedient support for Governments permitting children to be trained for military service. [2734]

Mr. Hanley: We receive regular reports from our representatives overseas. As part of our good governance policy, we always take account of a Government's level and use of military expenditure when deciding our allocations of bilateral aid.

We take every opportunity to urge those countries which have ratified the UN convention on the rights of the child to comply fully with the relevant sections of article 38 of the convention, which deals with children in armed conflict.

Mr. Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what programmes or projects are currently supported by the overseas aid budget to establish post-conflict trauma aftercare for children in developing countries which have suffered from civil war or other armed conflict. [2736]

Mr. Hanley: The most effective interventions to assist children who have been affected by conflict are those which seek to provide a normal, stable environment for child development. We adopt a holistic approach to post-conflict situations through normal economic and social rehabilitation activities, supplemented by more targeted programmes, such as child tracing or family reunification. For this purpose, we have supported Save the Children programmes in Gaza and the west bank, Liberia, Rwanda, Tanzania and Zaire, Serbia and Montenegro, Red Cross services in Angola and UNICEF programmes in Burundi and the former Yugoslavia.

Sri Lanka

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has received about the delivery of humanitarian aid to Tamil refugees in Sri Lanka; and if he will make a statement. [2515]

Mr. Hanley: Food and non-food relief is reaching the displaced people in the north, including the Jaffna peninsula. The main requirement is for shelter materials, household goods and the provision of safe drinking water. We continue to channel our relief and rehabilitation support through the non-governmental organisation CARE, Oxfam and Save the Children, and through the International Committee of the Red Cross. All these organisations operate in co-ordination with the Government of Sri Lanka.

TREASURY

Investors in People

Mr. Buyers: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps his Department is taking to achieve investor in people status; when it started the process; when it expects to achieve investor in people status; and if he will make a statement. [2986]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The Treasury made a formal commitment to work towards achieving the investor in people standard in April 19[illegible], when it agreed a departmental action plan with the Central London training and enterprise council. A mid-term assessment of the Department's progress is planned for early 1996, the outcome of which will determine the target date for accreditation.

Public Interest Immunity Certificates

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list all those in his Department who have authority to issue public interest immunity certificates; how many such certificates have been issued in each of the last five years; and what were the main reasons for them. [1427]

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: A claim to public interest immunity relating to departmental records or information is normally made by the appropriate Minister, or in the case of the Inland Revenue and HM Customs and Excise by the chairman. No PII certificates have been signed by Treasury Ministers during the last five years.

In order to protect in proceedings confidential information provided by taxpayers about their personal affairs or the identity of informers, the chairman of the Inland Revenue may swear affidavits, rather than sign PII certificates, claiming on public interest grounds that disclosure of documents should not be made. As far as can be ascertained, one such affidavit has been signed in the last five years—in 1991—and was for use in civil proceedings.

The chairman of Customs and Excise also claims PII by affidavit and not by certificate. There have been three affidavits in the last five years—one each in 1992, 1994 and 1995. Each was used in civil proceedings in order to protect informant and intelligence information.

Value Added Tax (Blood Products)

Mr. Heppell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what consultations his Department held with the Department of Health in respect of the imposition of value added tax on the recombinant factor VIII product Kogenate; [3130]

(2) on how many occasions he has considered the imposition of value added tax on the recombinant factor VIII product, Kogenate; what was his decision in each case; and if he will make a statement. [3129]

Mr. Heatcoat-Amory: Customs and Excise advised Bayer in September 1994 that Kogenate could be relieved from VAT as it appeared to fall within the exemption for human blood or products derived from human blood. Customs subsequently discovered that other supplies were treating recombinant products as outside this exemption and to ensure equity reviewed the position. On the basis of scientific advice from the Department of Health, Customs ruled that since these products were not derived from human blood, they were taxable at the standard rate of VAT. Bayer was advised of the new ruling on 25 September 1995.

This ruling brings the VAT liability of these products into line both with that applied in other member states under the EC sixth VAT directive and with that of other drugs and therapeutic products. Plasma-derived human factor VIII remains exempt from VAT.

Departmental Targets

Ms Armstrong: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the published recommended response times within which his Department is expected to reply to letters from the public. [3002]

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The recommended response time within which the Department is expected to reply to letters from the public is between 10 to 15 working days.

Low-risk Ports of Entry

Mr. Cann: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list those ports of entry into the United Kingdom which are regarded as low risk by the Customs and Excise. [3186]

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: All ports of entry into the United Kingdom are subject to Customs controls. It would not be in the public interest to disclose the Customs assessments of risk arising at individual ports.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many officials with responsibility for the private finance initiative formerly within his Department have been transferred to *(a)* the Department of Health or *(b)* the NHS Executive. [3093]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 28 November 1995]:* No permanent officials have been transferred from Her Majesty's Treasury to the Department of Health or NHS Executive to work on PFI matters; however one member of staff seconded to Her Majesty's Treasury is working on private finance matters within the NHS executive.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Cold Weather Payments

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will give a breakdown of the numbers of pensioners refused cold weather payments by region over the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [1092]

Mr. Roger Evans: The administration of the social fund is a matter for Mr. Peter Mathison, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency and he will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Ms Liz Lynne, dated 29 November 1995:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking for a breakdown of the number of pensioners refused cold weather payments by region over the past five years.

Cold Weather Payments are paid to people receiving Income Support whose benefit includes a disability or pensioner premium or who have a child under aged 5 in their family. Payments are made automatically to those eligible without the need for a claim form to be completed.

I hope you find this helpful.

Incapacity Benefit

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many claimants of invalidity benefit were (a) medically examined and found (i) capable of work, (ii) capable of alternative work and (iii) capable of undertaking their usual occupation in each of the quarters ending December 1994 and March 1995 and (b) without examination were found (i) capable of work, (ii) capable of alternative work and (iii) capable of undertaking their usual occupation in each of the quarters ending December 1994 and March 1995. [1748]

Mr. Burt *[holding answer Friday 24 November]:* The administration of incapacity benefits is a matter for Peter Mathison, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. Keith Bradley, dated 29 November 1995:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about how many claimants of invalidity benefit were (a) medically examined and found (i) capable of work, (ii) capable of alternative work and (iii) capable of undertaking their usual occupation in each of the quarters ending December 1994 and March 1995 and (b) without examination were found (i) capable of work, (ii) capable of alternative work and (iii) capable of undertaking their usual occupation in each of the quarters ending December 1994 and March 1995.

Information is not available in the format requested. The figures below are for the number of medical opinions given, following examination, that a customer is capable of work. Such opinions are not given without a medical examination. Decisions as to whether or not a person is found capable of work for benefit purposes is made by independent adjudication officers.

Number of opinions given following examination

Number of opinions given following examination	*December 1994*	*March 1995*
Capable of work		
Alternative work	26,534	26,150
Usual occupation	4,269	4,096
Total	30,803	30,246

Incapacity Benefit replaced Invalidity Benefit from April 1995. For Incapacity Benefit purposes, the examining doctor does not give any opinion on a person's capacity to work, rather an assessment is carried out of the individual's functional limitations and restrictions which is then scored by the adjudication officer, along with the customer's own assessment, in order to reach a decision on capacity for work.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Child Support Agency

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what percentage of the Child Support Agency's assessed case load was not paying regular maintenance immediately prior to take on by the agency. [2066]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell *[holding answer Monday 27 November 1995]:* The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the chief executive, Miss Ann Chant. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Ann Chant to Ms Liz Lynne, dated 29 November 1995:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about the Child Support Agency assessed caseload.

In the first year of the Agency it was estimated that just under 60 per cent. of all the cases where we were not already receiving maintenance. This proportion has increased to an estimated 77 per cent since April 1994.

I hope this is helpful.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many absentee fathers the Child Support Agency has traced since its introduction. [2217]

Mr. Mitchell: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the chief executive, Miss Ann Chant. She will write to the hon. Member. [2217]

Letter from Ann Chant to Mr. Jim Cunningham, dated 29 November 1995:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security on how many absentee fathers the Child Support Agency has traced since its introduction.

The number of absent parents traced by the Child Support Agency from its launch until 30 September 1995 is as follows:

1993/94: 28,240

1994/95: 49,632

1995/96: 25,164

Total to date: 103,036

You may wish to know that this information is already available in the Child Support Agency's statistical information which is placed monthly in the Library.

Mr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how much money has been recovered as a result of intervention by the Child Support Agency. [2220]

Mr. Mitchell: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the chief executive, Miss Ann Chant. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Ann Chant to Mr. Jim Cunningham, dated 29 November 1995:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about money recovered by the Child Support Agency.

Between April 1993 and September 1995 the Agency has been involved in the payment of new maintenance arising from child support assessments of over £330 million.

I hope this is helpful.

Mr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what were the running costs of the Child Support Agency during each year since 1992–93. [2218]

Mr. Mitchell: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the chief executive, Miss Ann Chant. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Ann Chant to Mr. Jim Cunningham, dated 29 November 1995:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about the running costs of the Child Support Agency during each year since 1992/93.

From launch on 5 April 1993, the Agency's net cost of operations during 1993/94 was £139 million as published in the annual accounts on 28 November 1994. The net cost of operations during 1994/95 was £192 million as published in the annual accounts on 18 July 1995. Expenditure statements in both annual reports are prepared on an accruals basis. I hope this is helpful.

Chronic Bronchitis and Emphysema

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many claims have been made in each region for industrial injuries disablement benefit for chronic bronchitis and emphysema up to 31 October; how many were *(a)* successful and *(b)* unsuccessful; and on what grounds. [3023]

Mr. Roger Evans: The information is not available in the format requested. The available information is set out in the tables.

Claims in respect of chronic bronchitis and emphysema (PD D12) between 13 September 1993 and 31 October 1995 analysed by Benefits Agency Area Directorate

Area	Claims received	Successful claims[1]	Claims disallowed
Southern England			
AD1 Anglia	27	3	19
AD2 Chilterns	22	4	13
AD3 South London and West Sussex	0	0	0
AD4 West Country	155	6	76
AD5 East London and Essex	43	1	4
AD6 South East	499	33	451
AD7 Wessex	1	0	0
South East total	747	47	583
Wales and Central England			
AD1 East Midlands	10,093	718	5,136
AD2 Midlands South West	699	56	597
AD3 West Mercia	3,834	407	3,314
AD4 Wales	10,113	1,481	7,915
AD5 Merseyside	531	49	476
AD6 Greater Manchester	349	32	303
AD7 Lancashire and Cumbria	2,346	160	1,988
Wales and Central England total	23,935	2,903	19,729
Scotland and Northern England			
AD1 Tyne Tees	7,454	634	6,579
AD2 South Yorkshire and Humberside	6,891	844	5,827
AD3 North and West Yorkshire	2,909	446	2,277
AD4 Glasgow and Paisley	249	8	165
AD5 North, Central and West Scotland	1,939	64	1,801
AD6 East Scotland	2,465	104	2,186
Scotland and Northern England total	21,907	2,100	18,835
Grand total	46,589	5,050	39,127

[1] Successful in this context means claims that have resulted in payment of benefit.
Not all claims will have been decided by 31 October 1995.

Analysis of claims disallowed between 13 September 1993 and 31 October 1995 and reason for disallowance by Benefits Agency Area Directorate

Area	Failed 20 year rule	Reg 22 (Up to 2 Oct 1994)[1,2]	Disablement assessed at less than 14 per cent.	PD-D12 not diagnosed(Up to 2 Oct 1994)[2]	Failed FEV1 test(From 3 Oct 1994)[3]	Failed x-ray test(From 3 Oct 1994)[3]
Southern England						
AD1	7	1	0	9	0	2
AD2	6	0	0	6	0	1
AD3	0	0	0	0	0	0
AD4	12	0	0	55	5	4
AD5	3	0	0	0	1	0
AD6	42	0	0	380	20	9
AD7	0	0	0	0	0	0
Southern England total	70	1	0	450	26	16
Wales and central England						
AD1	161	17	2	4,572	206	178
AD2	33	0	0	555	3	6
AD3	236	3	3	2,941	72	59
AD4	696	9	34	6,409	452	315
AD5	37	1	0	412	13	13
AD6	19	1	0	279	3	1
AD7	163	0	4	1,741	48	32
Wales and Central England totals	1,345	31	43	16,909	797	604

Analysis of claims disallowed between 13 September 1993 and 31 October 1995 and reason for disallowance by Benefits Agency Area Directorate

Area	Failed 20 year rule	Reg 22 (Up to 2 Oct 1994)[1]	Disablement assessed at less than 14 per cent.	PD-D12 not diagnosed (Up to 2 Oct 1994)[2]	Failed FEV1 test (From 3 Oct 1994)[2]	Failed x-ray test (From 3 Oct 1994)[2]
Scotland and Northern England						
AD1	159	7	4	9,147	145	119
AD2	192	3	4	5,218	218	200
AD3	104	10	3	2,091	99	53
AD4	21	0	0	122	9	13
AD5	102	0	0	1,654	31	14
AD6	90	2	0	2,025	25	44
Scotland and Northern England totals	668	22	11	17,178	515	441
Grand total	2,083	54	54	34,537	[3]1,338	[3]1,061

Notes:
[1] Where chronic bronchitis and emphysema is already covered in assessment for pneumoconiosis (Regulation 22).
[2] Cases failing on FEV1 test or x-ray test up to 2 October 1994.
[3] Figures not collected by Area Directorate prior to 3 October 1994.
Source:
Benefits Agency BREM system and Central Data Unit, 100 per cent. count and subject to amendment.

Investors in People

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what steps his Department is taking to achieve investor in people status; when it started the process; when it expects to achieve investor in people status; and if he will make a statement. [2983]

Mr. Burt: The Department is committed to the principles of investor in people and uses the IIP standards to underpin all personnel policies throughout the Department. Individual business units are, however, free to approach the achievement of the standard in ways which best meet their business needs. The Benefits Agency began the process of IIP accreditation as early as 1992 and 20 business units have subsequently received accreditation with a further 113 units at different stages of achievement. The Contributions Agency, War Pensions Agency and Information Technology Services Agency are at various stages of the process with a view to obtaining accreditation during 1996 and 1997. DSS headquarters aim to audit their personnel management practices against the IIP standard during 1996 and the Child Support Agency will encourage individual units to seek accreditation.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

School Budgets

Mr. Jopling: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list the percentage of each shire county's education budget which is held back for central administration together with the amount of money this represents per school pupil. [2570]

Mr. Robin Squire: The following table shows the percentage of each county's general schools budget reserved centrally in 1995–96 for management and administration, and the amount of money per pupil which this represents.

Local education authority	Management and administration Per cent.	Amount per pupil £
Avon	2.51	63
Bedfordshire	1.62	39
Berkshire	1.59	37
Buckinghamshire	3.17	77
Cambridgeshire	1.41	33
Cheshire	1.33	29
Cleveland	2.33	54
Cornwall	1.23	29
Cumbria	1.18	27
Derbyshire	1.12	25
Devon	1.41	33
Dorset	2.22	48
Durham	1.73	39
East Sussex	1.03	26
Essex	1.74	40
Gloucestershire	2.23	49
Hampshire	2.03	47
Hereford and Worcester	1.35	30
Hertfordshire	0.72	17
Humberside	2.43	57
Isle of Wight	1.33	32
Isles of Scilly	2.22	95
Kent	3.48	81
Lancashire	1.50	35
Leicestershire	1.86	42
Lincolnshire	1.63	39
Norfolk	0.76	18
North Yorkshire	1.67	37
Northampstonshire	1.26	28
Northumberland	1.80	41
Nottinghamshire	2.01	43
Oxfordshire	1.11	28
Shropshire	1.59	37
Somerset	0.84	18
Staffordshire	0.95	20
Suffolk	1.17	27
Surrey	2.02	51
Warwickshire	1.76	43
West Sussex	1.83	42
Wiltshire	1.39	31

Notes:
1. The figures have been derived from budget statements published by local education authorities under section 42 of the Education Reform Act 1988 in respect of the financial year 1995–96.
2. Amounts per pupil have been rounded to the nearest pound.

Nursery Voucher Scheme

Sir Thomas Arnold: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if the cost of vouchers under the nursery scheme will be deducted from local authority standard spending assessments. [3375]

Ms Hodge: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if the local education authorities which are piloting the nursery voucher scheme will be subject to the standard spending assessment clawback during the period of the pilot. [3447]

Mr. Robin Squire: In both phase 1 and full implementation of the nursery education voucher scheme, vouchers will be funded through a combination of new money and deduction from participating local authorities' standard spending assessments. The deduction will be based on the number of four-year-olds in nursery education places in the maintained sector in a base year, taking into account termly variations in attendance.

Local Education Authority SSASs

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is the education component of standard spending assessments per pupil *(a)* between five and 10 years, and *(b)* between 11 and 15 years, expressed in cash and constant prices, in (i) 1995–96 and (ii) 1996–97, in each local education authority and on average; and what was the percentage change in each local education authority and on average between 1992–93 and the latest year for which figures are available. [3111]

Mr. Robin Squire: The following tables set out the information requested. Some care is needed in drawing conclusions about the percentage change in funding between 1992–93 and 1996–97, since the figures take no account of local education authorities' loss of responsibility for certain functions, notably the careers service and school inspections.

The figures for the secondary sector are also affected by the use from 1995–96 of September in place of January as the date on which pupils are counted for SSA purposes, and above all, by the relative shift in LEA expenditure from the secondary to the primary and nursery sectors, which is subsequently reflected in the SSA distribution.

Table 1: Primary

	SSA per pupil (5–10)			
LEA name	*1995–96 cash amount £*	*1995–96 (in 1996–97 prices) £*	*1996–97 £*	*Percentage change between 1992–93 and 1996–97 (cash)*
City of London	2,901	2,981	2,736	20.9
Camden	2,900	2,980	2,841	12.6
Greenwich	2,711	2,785	2,716	14.3
Hackney	3,076	3,161	2,991	2.5
Hammersmith and Fulham	2,904	2,984	2,808	8.3
Islington	2,888	2,968	2,865	6.1
Kensington and Chelsea	2,852	2,930	2,628	0.7
Lambeth	3,066	3,151	3,024	2.5
Lewisham	2,777	2,853	2,803	10.5
Southwark	2,947	3,028	2,926	8.6
Tower Hamlets	3,035	3,118	3,052	2.2
Wandsworth	2,683	2,757	2,654	3.6
Westminster	2,750	2,826	2,667	2.9
Barking and Dagenham	2,231	2,293	2,273	9.6
Barnet	2,197	2,257	2,205	6.5
Bexley	2,064	2,121	2,124	11.3
Brent	2,500	2,568	2,554	3.9
Bromley	2,013	2,068	2,074	10.1
Croydon	2,243	2,305	2,278	8.6
Ealing	2,350	2,414	2,378	3.7
Enfield	2,234	2,296	2,289	9.7
Haringey	2,589	2,660	2,632	2.2
Harrow	2,147	2,206	2,194	10.0
Havering	2,023	2,079	2,104	15.1
Hillingdon	2,133	2,192	2,195	14.1
Hounslow	2,260	2,322	2,341	9.7
Kingston upon Thames	2,064	2,121	2,108	10.0
Merton	2,184	2,244	2,216	7.8
Newham	2,581	2,652	2,620	3.6
Redbridge	2,164	2,224	2,241	11.6
Richmond upon Thames	2,015	2,071	2,041	5.6
Sutton	2,093	2,150	2,162	13.7
Waltham Forest	2,434	2,501	2,484	7.3
Birmingham	2,083	2,140	2,173	4.8
Coventry	1,984	2,038	2,049	8.3
Dudley	1,813	1,863	1,896	11.5
Sandwell	1,986	2,040	2,051	7.3
Solihull	1,798	1,847	1,872	8.8

Table 1: Primary

LEA name	SSA per pupil (5–10) 1995–96 cash amount £	1995–96 (in 1996–97 prices) £	1996–97 £	Percentage change between 1992–93 and 1996–97 (cash)
Walsall	1,894	1,946	1,992	9.8
Wolverhampton	1,995	2,049	2,081	3.9
Knowsley	2,186	2,246	2,231	8.8
Liverpool	2,110	2,168	2,203	6.9
St. Helens	1,845	1,895	1,945	12.5
Sefton	1,875	1,926	1,955	10.6
Wirral	1,948	2,002	2,024	8.3
Bolton	1,866	1,918	1,959	7.9
Bury	1,813	1,863	1,909	13.5
Manchester	2,258	2,320	2,320	7.9
Oldham	1,919	1,972	2,008	7.0
Rochdale	1,932	1,986	2,017	11.8
Salford	1,975	2,029	2,047	10.5
Stockport	1,775	1,824	1,863	11.7
Tameside	1,831	1,881	1,908	7.2
Trafford	1,830	1,881	1,905	9.2
Wigan	1,809	1,859	1,905	12.9
Barnsley	1,869	1,921	1,955	10.8
Doncaster	1,934	1,987	2,039	9.6
Rotherham	1,871	1,923	1,978	10.1
Sheffield	1,922	1,974	1,996	10.0
Bradford	1,986	2,041	2,070	5.0
Calderdale	1,896	1,948	1,986	9.8
Kirklees	1,900	1,953	1,972	6.4
Leeds	1,864	1,915	1,947	7.4
Wakefield	1,825	1,876	1,910	8.4
Gateshead	1,937	1,990	2,006	9.7
Newcastle upon Tyne	2,045	2,102	2,104	10.3
North Tyneside	1,845	1,896	1,946	8.3
South Tyneside	1,932	1,985	2,012	9.6
Sunderland	1,919	1,971	2,001	10.9
Isles of Scilly	3,347	3,439	3,574	13.3
Avon	1,838	1,888	n/a	n/a
Bedfordshire	1,995	2,050	2,057	8.5
Berkshire	1,988	2,043	2,047	10.3
Buckinghamshire	1,966	2,020	2,021	10.7
Cambridgeshire	1,876	1,928	1,962	11.2
Cheshire	1,817	1,867	1,903	11.8
Cleveland	1,940	1,993	n/a	n/a
Cornwall	1,893	1,946	1,984	10.3
Cumbria	1,856	1,907	1,957	11.0
Derbyshire	1,812	1,862	1,911	12.1
Devon	1,879	1,931	1,958	11.1
Dorset	1,833	1,883	1,910	11.4
Durham	1,884	1,936	1,983	11.0
East Sussex	2,000	2,055	2,043	11.9
Essex	1,989	2,043	2,055	13.2
Gloucestershire	1,836	1,887	1,912	10.4
Hampshire	1,930	1,983	1,989	11.2
Hereford and Worcester	1,827	1,877	1,914	11.8
Hertfordshire	2,010	2,065	2,074	12.6
Humberside	1,891	1,943	n/a	n/a
Isle of Wight Council	2,016	2,072	2,070	10.4
Kent	1,968	2,023	2,032	12.5
Lancashire	1,877	1,929	1,964	8.8
Leicestershire	1,864	1,915	1,954	9.5
Lincolnshire	1,873	1,924	1,969	8.8
Norfolk	1,881	1,932	1,971	10.2
North Yorkshire 1	1,827	1,878	n/a	n/a
Northamptonshire	1,836	1,887	1,927	9.5
Northumberland	1,825	1,875	1,935	11.1
Nottinghamshire	1,883	1,934	1,973	8.3
Oxfordshire	1,933	1,987	1,985	10.4
Shropshire	1,862	1,914	1,952	10.1
Somerset	1,846	1,897	1,933	10.8
Staffordshire	1,805	1,855	1,894	11.1
Suffolk	1,820	1,870	1,901	10.1
Surrey	1,998	2,053	2,040	11.6

Table 1: Primary

LEA name	SSA per pupil (5–10) 1995–96 cash amount £	1995–96 (in 1996–97 prices) £	1996–97 £	Percentage change between 1992–93 and 1996–97 (cash)
Warwickshire	1,822	1,872	1,906	10.6
West Sussex	1,932	1,985	1,987	12.5
Wiltshire	1,835	1,885	1,921	9.8
Bath and North-east Somerset	n/a	n/a	1,881	n/a
City of Bristol	n/a	n/a	2,011	n/a
North Somerset	n/a	n/a	1,863	n/a
South Gloucestershire	n/a	n/a	1,834	n/a
Hartlepool	n/a	n/a	2,010	n/a
Middlesbrough	n/a	n/a	2,109	n/a
Redcar and Cleveland	n/a	n/a	2,042	n/a
Stockton on Tees	n/a	n/a	1,981	n/a
City of Kingston upon Hull	n/a	n/a	2,080	n/a
East Riding of Yorkshire	n/a	n/a	1,890	n/a
North-east Lincolnshire	n/a	n/a	1,982	n/a
North Lincolnshire	n/a	n/a	1,965	n/a
North Yorkshire 2	n/a	n/a	1,940	n/a
York	n/a	n/a	1,888	n/a
England	1,981	2,036	2,053	9.7

Notes:
1. The LEA that ceases to exist on 1 April 1996 as a result of Local Government Reorganisation.
2. The LEA that will exist on 1 April 1996 as a result of Local Government Reorganisation.

Table 2: Secondary

LEA name	SSA per pupil (11–15) 1995–96 cash amount £	1995–96 (in 1996–97 prices) £	1996–97 £	Percentage change between 1992–93 and 1996–97 (cash)
City of London	9,055	9,304	8,717	163.7
Camden	3,648	3,748	3,599	–2.6
Greenwich	3,589	3,688	3,623	4.1
Hackney	4,359	4,479	4,210	–1.7
Hammersmith and Fulham	3,777	3,881	3,703	–2.6
Islington	3,963	4,072	3,891	–1.8
Kensington and Chelsea	4,071	4,183	3,608	–5.7
Lambeth	4,463	4,585	4,433	2.4
Lewisham	3,778	3,882	3,771	1.4
Southwark	4,090	4,203	3,945	–0.2
Tower Hamlets	4,034	4,145	4,053	–7.6
Wandsworth	3,617	3,716	3,554	–5.4
Westminster	3,637	3,737	3,473	–8.7
Barking and Dagenham	2,951	3,032	3,059	0.8
Barnet	2,883	2,962	2,900	–4.2
Bexley	2,734	2,810	2,832	1.6
Brent	3,448	3,543	3,511	–2.6
Bromley	2,678	2,752	2,746	–0.2
Croydon	3,050	3,134	3,092	0.8
Ealing	3,224	3,313	3,249	–3.3
Enfield	2,941	3,021	3,036	–0.6
Haringey	3,583	3,681	3,603	–4.6
Harrow	2,898	2,978	2,953	1.3
Havering	2,686	2,760	2,818	5.6
Hillingdon	2,838	2,916	2,931	4.3
Hounslow	2,959	3,041	3,074	–1.5
Kingston upon Thames	2,720	2,794	2,789	–0.4
Merton	2,904	2,984	2,950	–1.9
Newham	3,439	3,533	3,492	–5.9
Redbridge	2,884	2,963	2,972	1.2
Richmond upon Thames	2,635	2,707	2,662	–5.7
Sutton	2,722	2,797	2,831	1.9
Waltham Forest	3,261	3,350	3,350	–1.3
Birmingham	2,794	2,871	2,909	–4.2
Coventry	2,648	2,721	2,733	–1.3
Dudley	2,408	2,474	2,527	1.7

Table 2: Secondary

LEA name	SSA per pupil (11–15) 1995–96 cash amount £	1995–96 (in 1996–97 prices) £	1996–97 £	Percentage change between 1992–93 and 1996–97 (cash)
Sandwell	2,642	2,714	2,736	–2.2
Solihull	2,376	2,442	2,470	–1.8
Walsall	2,501	2,570	2,636	–0.6
Wolverhampton	2,691	2,765	2,809	–4.2
Knowsley	2,986	3,068	3,058	1.8
Liverpool	2,821	2,898	2,926	–3.1
St. Helens	2,467	2,534	2,610	3.3
Sefton	2,492	2,560	2,592	0.3
Wirral	2,606	2,678	2,692	–1.6
Bolton	2,488	2,556	2,605	–1.9
Bury	2,405	2,471	2,518	2.5
Manchester	3,072	3,156	3,143	–0.3
Oldham	2,530	2,600	2,648	–3.6
Rochdale	2,608	2,688	2,713	2.8
Salford	2,652	2,725	2,749	1.4
Stockport	2,374	2,439	2,484	1.9
Tameside	2,428	2,495	2,532	–2.7
Trafford	2,420	2,487	2,519	–1.2
Wigan	2,391	2,457	2,525	2.5
Barnsley	2,489	2,557	2,619	1.5
Doncaster	2,572	2,643	2,721	0.0
Rotherham	2,462	2,529	2,610	–0.6
Sheffield	2,565	2,636	2,681	1.0
Bradford	2,679	2,752	2,779	–3.7
Calderdale	2,527	2,597	2,651	0.3
Kirklees	2,539	2,609	2,639	–2.6
Leeds	2,480	2,548	2,599	–2.0
Wakefield	2,421	2,487	2,537	–1.4
Gateshead	2,601	2,673	2,692	0.7
Newcastle upon Tyne	2,717	2,792	2,794	0.1
North Tyneside	2,483	2,551	2,622	–0.3
South Tyneside	2,562	2,633	2,682	–0.1
Sunderland	2,549	2,620	2,675	1.3
Isles of Scilly	4,381	4,502	4,796	4.2
Avon	2,460	2,528	n/a	n/a
Bedfordshire	2,664	2,737	2,751	–0.7
Berkshire	2,664	2,737	2,735	–0.9
Buckinghamshire	2,630	2,702	2,716	1.9
Cambridgeshire	2,508	2,577	2,616	1.6
Cheshire	2,408	2,475	2,530	1.7
Cleveland	2,589	2,660	n/a	n/a
Cornwall	2,522	2,591	2,646	0.7
Cumbria	2,470	2,538	2,600	1.0
Derbyshire	2,415	2,481	2,557	2.7
Devon	2,506	2,575	2,611	1.5
Dorset	2,440	2,507	2,538	1.4
Durham	2,512	2,581	2,651	1.5
East Sussex	2,672	2,746	2,730	2.4
Essex	2,647	2,720	2,751	3.8
Gloucestershire	2,435	2,502	2,544	0.6
Hampshire	2,575	2,645	2,659	1.8
Herefordshire and Worcester	2,439	2,506	2,558	2.3
Hertfordshire	2,663	2,736	2,756	2.5
Humberside	2,509	2,577	n/a	n/a
Isle of Wight Council	2,696	2,770	2,757	0.7
Kent	2,620	2,692	2,715	2.9
Lancashire	2,502	2,570	2,617	–0.8
Leicestershire	2,483	2,551	2,605	–0.1
Lincolnshire	2,483	2,551	2,632	–0.4
Norfolk	2,508	2,577	2,631	0.8
North Yorkshire 1	2,422	2,489	n/a	n/a
Northamptonshire	2,448	2,515	2,570	0.0
Northumberland	2,421	2,488	2,583	1.5
Nottinghamshire	2,506	2,575	2,632	–1.1
Oxfordshire	2,575	2,645	2,627	0.1
Shropshire	2,479	2,547	2,598	0.3
Somerset	2,489	2,558	2,582	1.4
Staffordshire	2,398	2,463	2,522	1.3

Table 2: Secondary

LEA name	SSA per pupil (11–15) 1995–96 cash amount £	1995–96 (in 1996–97 prices) £	1996–97 £	Percentage change between 1992–93 and 1996–97 (cash)
Suffolk	2,422	2,488	2,540	0.8
Surrey	2,679	2,753	2,724	2.1
Warwickshire	2,433	2,500	2,545	1.1
West Sussex	2,571	2,641	2,649	2.7
Wiltshire	2,451	2,519	2,563	0.3
Bath and North-east Somerset	n/a	n/a	2,464	n/a
City of Bristol	n/a	n/a	2,759	n/a
North Somerset	n/a	n/a	2,464	n/a
South Gloucestershire	n/a	n/a	2,445	n/a
Hartlepool	n/a	n/a	2,675	n/a
Middlesbrough	n/a	n/a	2,860	n/a
Redcar and Cleveland	n/a	n/a	2,700	n/a
Stockton on Tees	n/a	n/a	2,624	n/a
City of Kingston upon Hull	n/a	n/a	2,791	n/a
East Riding of Yorkshire	n/a	n/a	2,518	n/a
North-east Lincolnshire	n/a	n/a	2,640	n/a
North Lincolnshire	n/a	n/a	2,597	n/a
North Yorkshire 2	n/a	n/a	2,562	n/a
York	n/a	n/a	2,534	n/a
England	2,630	2,702	2,729	0.2

Notes:
1. The LEA that ceases to exist on 1 April 1996 as a result of Local Government Reorganisation.
2. The LEA that will exist on 1 April 1996 as a result of Local Government Reorganisation.

Investors in People

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what steps her Department is taking to achieve investor in people status; when it started the process; when it expects to achieve investor in people status; and if she will make a statement. [2974]

Mr. Paice: The former Department of Employment and the former Department of Education were committed to becoming investors in people. The Department for Education and Employment is determined to achieve that status. An action plan is in preparation building on the work undertaken by the former Departments. No target date has yet been set.

Training

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what amount was spent on training by her Department per unemployed person for each year since 1989–90 in *(a)* cash terms and *(b)* real terms. [2969]

Mr. Paice: The information requested is as follows:

Year	Amount £	Real Terms[1] £
1985–86	140	220
1986–87	180	280
1987–88	220	320
1988–89	480	660
1989–90	980	1,260
1990–91	950	1,130
1991–92	560	630
1992–93	430	460
1993–94	500	520
1994–95	610	630

[1] 1995–96 prices.

Mr. John Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what changes will be made to the funding system for youth training and modern apprenticeships in 1996–97; and what plans she has to publish the results of the recent consultation on future funding arrangements. [3908]

Mr. Paice: No major changes are planned to the funding system for youth training and modern apprenticeships in 1996–97. A summary of the responses to the consultation document on future funding arrangements for youth training and modern apprenticeships was published on 24 November. Copies have been placed in the Library today.

Assisted Places Scheme

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, pursuant to her answer of 27 November, *Official Report*, column *445*, if she will list for, respectively *(a)* Manchester grammar school *(b)* Manchester high school for girls and *(c)* William Hulme's grammar school, Manchester, how much has been spent by the Government on the assisted places scheme in total, (i) up to but not including the latest year and (ii) in the latest available year; and what additional money will be made available in the planned expansion of the scheme. [3269]

Mrs. Gillan: Information is readily available only for the last five years. The amounts spent on assisted places at each of the three Manchester schools cited for the academic years 1990–91 to 1994–95, and estimates for the latest academic year 1995–96, are given in the following table. Provision for the academic year 1996–97, when the scheme's expansion is planned to begin, and for succeeding years will be announced in due course.

Assisted Places Scheme

Academic year	*Manchester Grammar School £000s*	*Manchester High School £000s*	*William Hulme's Grammar School £000s*
1990–91 to 1994–95	3,459	2,173	3,059
1995–96[1]	816	566	746

[1] Estimated.

WALES

Student Hardship Funds

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many students made applications for hardship funds in *(a)* 1993 and *(b)* 1994; and if he will make a statement. [2658]

Mr. Richards: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile) on 29 November 1995, *Official Report*, column *755*.

Small Firms

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his policy concerning small firms; and if he will make a statement. [2665]

Mr. Richards: The second competitiveness White Paper called "Forging Ahead", published in May 1995, outlined a programme of measures to assist the growth and competitiveness of the small firms sector.

The Welsh Office works with local authorities, training and enterprise councils, the development agencies and local enterprise agencies in providing a range of services for small businesses in Wales. We have established eight business development consortia—business connect—to streamline the assistance available and to make it easily accessible through a single low-cost, all-Wales telephone number. This service will be operational from 15 January 1996.

Non-departmental Public Bodies

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the powers transferred from non-departmental public bodies to local government in each of the last three years. [2916]

Mr. Hague: In October 1994, the responsibility for operating mid-Wales development grant; development of rural initiative, venture and enterprise (DRIVE) grant; rural (buildings) conversion grant and community enterprise grant was transferred to local authorities. In addition, from 1 April 1995 local authorities were given direct control of funds for social and economic development, previously provided in the form of grant assistance by the Development Board for Rural Wales under section 4.1. (d)(i) and (ii) of the Development of Rural Wales Act 1976.

Surplus Explosives (Disposal)

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what records his Department holds regarding surplus stocks of conventional explosives brought from RAF Great Orton to Royal Ordnance establishments in Wales for disposal between 1946 to 1948; what current environmental monitoring is conducted by his Department on these disposal sites; and if he will list the locations of all land and off-shore sites in and around Wales used for such disposal. [3100]

Mr. Hague: The Welsh Office has no records or responsibilities in this area.

New Dwellings

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list for each district council area the number of houses built *(a)* by district councils, *(b)* by housing associations, *(c)* by other public bodies and *(d)* in total for each of the last three available years. [1852]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The available information is given in the following table. Only one dwelling classified as "other public bodies" was built in the period: this has been included with the local authority number for Rhondda for 1992.

New dwellings completed

Numbers

	1992			*1993*			*1994*		
	Local authority	*Housing association*	*All tenures*[1]	*Local authority*	*Housing association*	*All tenures*[1]	*Local authority*	*Housing association*	*All tenures*[1]
Aberconwy	0	43	226	0	82	182	20	72	304
Alyn and Deeside	22	104	283	0	50	148	16	23	167
Arfon	20	13	108	0	74	214	0	79	143
Blaenau Gwent	0	104	237	0	0	67	0	25	101
Brecknock	0	43	121	0	21	80	0	71	139
Cardiff	6	496	1,188	0	420	934	0	385	1,258
Carmarthen	0	37	207	0	45	265	0	24	234
Ceredigion	0	0	277	0	0	315	0	12	230
Colwyn	0	93	337	0	12	161	0	36	308
Cynon Valley	0	66	198	0	66	237	0	36	177
Delyn	0	127	389	0	131	298	0	46	235
Dinefwr	0	60	267	6	107	227	0	7	105
Dwyfor	0	39	73	3	49	84	0	17	63
Glyndwr	0	30	168	0	22	148	0	25	78
Islwyn	0	50	110	0	54	94	0	0	51
Llanelli	0	0	117	31	0	197	45	6	232
Lliw Valley	0	97	144	0	22	94	0	72	120

New dwellings completed

Numbers

	1992			1993			1994		
	Local authority	*Housing association*	*All tenures*[1]	*Local authority*	*Housing association*	*All tenures*[1]	*Local authority*	*Housing association*	*All tenures*[1]
Meirionnydd	0	21	79	0	27	59	0	32	115
Merthyr Tydfil	0	40	157	0	30	116	0	51	142
Monmouth	0	105	354	0	124	543	0	39	456
Montgomeryshire[2]	0	49	273	0	130	291	0	203	328
Neath	0	82	298	5	0	177	0	71	214
Newport	0	59	289	6	67	269	108	10	320
Ogwr	13	60	476	0	268	513	0	234	706
Port Talbot	0	72	179	0	43	193	0	60	132
Preseli Pembrokeshire	8	0	175	14	66	163	12	72	266
Radnor	28	10	111	0	63	175	6	38	157
Rhondda[3]	1	106	185	0	58	159	0	79	139
Rhuddlan	20	16	118	25	24	110	0	108	204
Rhymney Valley	0	1	304	0	87	198	0	38	120
South Pembrokeshire	0	14	280	0	22	153	0	95	347
Swansea	0	76	326	58	347	709	20	369	678
Taff-Ely	0	100	388	0	31	401	0	82	499
Torfaen	0	56	230	0	222	439	0	105	263
Vale of Glamorgan	16	94	395	24	32	420	0	41	358
Wrexham Maelor	0	97	479	0	56	399	0	200	524
Ynys Môn	0	0	103	0	1	58	0	0	56

Source:
Local Authority Returns.
Notes:
[1] Includes completions in the Private sector.
[2] Montgomeryshire includes new town completions.
[3] The local authority figure for 1992 includes one Government Department completion.

Investors in People

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what steps his Department is taking to achieve investor in people status; when it started the process; when it expects to achieve investor in people status; and if he will make a statement. [2987]

Mr. Hague: The Welsh Office has been working towards the investor in people standard since December 1992. Following a period of assessment and planning, an action plan was submitted to investors in people UK in April 1995. The Department will seek accreditation when the action plan has been implemented.

Inspector Days (Allocation)

Mr. Hain: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many inspector days allotted to Welsh primary schools in the academic year 1994–95 involved *(a)* inspectors who had teaching experience in primary schools and *(b)* inspectors who had teaching experience in secondary schools; and what was the total number of inspector days allotted. [3110]

Mr. Richards: Operational issues relating to school inspections are a matter for Her Majesty's chief inspector of schools in Wales. I have passed this inquiry to him: he will respond to the hon. Member in due course.

Urban Development Programmes

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales on what dates urban development programmes prepared by the Welsh Development Agency were submitted to *(a)* the European Commission and *(b)* the single programme document monitoring committees for industrial south Wales and rural Wales. [3385]

Mr. Hague: The Welsh Development Agency's urban development programmes are not submitted to either the European Commission or the single programme document monitoring committees for industrial south Wales and rural Wales.

Freight Terminals

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he has had with the chairman of the Welsh Development Agency in respect of the European freight multi-modal development for south Wales; when he anticipates approving the scheme; and if he will make a statement. [3387]

Mr. Hague: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Vale of Glamorgan (Mr. Sweeney) on 8 November, *Official Report*, columns *923–24*.

Police Authority Funding

Mr. Sweeney: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what are his proposals for police authority revenue spending in 1996–97. [3912]

Mr. Hague: I propose to make £331.4 million available from total standard spending in Wales to fund police services in 1996–97. This sum comprises £165.2 million in cash-limited police grant to be paid by the Home Secretary and £166.3 million in standard spending

assessments. It represents an overall increase of £15.7 million, or 5 per cent. on 1995–96. The sums for each police authority are set out in the following table:

£ million

	Police grant	*Standard spending assessment*	*Total*
Dyfed Powys	24.2	24.3	48.5
Gwent	31.3	31.4	62.7
North Wales	34.6	34.7	69.3
South Wales	75.1	75.8	150.9

These figures include a transfer of around £10.5 million for the transfer of responsibility for policing the Rhymney valley area from south Wales to Gwent police authority.

The Welsh Office is today writing to each of the police authorities in Wales to consult them on their provisional standard spending assessments for 1996–97. This figure may alter slightly if the balance of the police funding formula as between English and Welsh police authorities changes as a result of consultation.

It is essential that police authorities budget wisely and do not impose an unreasonable burden on council taxpayers. I therefore propose provisional capping principles to inform their budget decisions. Police authorities would not be capped if their budget requirements for 1996–97 were:

less than 12.5 per cent above the sum of the authority's standard spending assessment and police grant; and

did not exceed their 1995–96 base budget by more than the greater of the sum of the increases in their standard spending assessment and police grant of 3.5 per cent.

I will make my final decisions on capping principles in the light of budgets set by police authorities.

I am still considering my capping proposals for the new unitary authorities in Wales. I propose to announce provisional capping principles and standard spending assessments for these authorities in mid-December.

Copies of the consultation letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Sweeney: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what level of support for Welsh local authority revenue spending he proposes to provide through aggregate external finance for 1996–97. [3913]

Mr. Hague: On 28 November, *Official Report*, column *600*, I announced that I propose to set total standard spending in Wales for 1996–97 at £2,867.3 million; and central Government support for that level of spending through aggregate external fiance at £2,517.4 million.

Within aggregate external finance, I propose to make available £1,792 million in revenue support grant; £459 million in distributable non-domestic rates; £237.4 million in specific grants; and £29 million to damp council tax increases arising from the disaggregation of the county and district councils' 1995–96 standard spending assessments and budgets to unitary authorities. The threshold for damping will be set at 0 per cent.

My Department has today written to the Welsh local authority associations to consult them on my proposals for revenue support grant in 1996–97.

Copies of the consultation letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Prisoner Transfers

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many persons convicted of crimes connected with *(a)* republican and *(b)* loyalist violence have been transferred to prisons in Northern Ireland from (i) Great Britain and (ii) the Republic of Ireland; how many have been transferred from prisons in Northern Ireland to prisons in (i) Great Britain and (ii) the Republic of Ireland since 1 September 1994; and on what dates the transfers took place. [2373]

Sir John Wheeler: Responsibility for this subject has been delegated to the Northern Ireland Prison Service under its chief executive, Mr. Alan Shannon. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. D. Shannon to Mr. William Ross, dated 30 November 1995:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to this Parliamentary Question.

Since 1 September 1994 14 persons convicted of crimes connected with Republican violence have been transferred to prisons in Northern Ireland from Great Britain. In 9 cases the transfer was permanent and in 5 cases it was temporary. No person convicted of crimes connected with Loyalist violence has requested transfer. No persons convicted of Republican or Loyalist violence have been transferred from Northern Ireland to Great Britain or the Republic of Ireland.

Drug Misuse

Mr. Rathbone: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he intends to publish the policy statement produced by the Northern Ireland committee on drug misuse; and what proposals are planned based on that policy. [2137]

Sir John Wheeler: Arrangements are in hand for publication of the policy statement of the Northern Ireland committee on drug misuse before Christmas. I have established a new top level central co-ordinating group for action against drugs, of which I am chairman. The group comprises senior representatives from Northern Ireland Government Departments, the medical profession and the Royal Ulster Constabulary. It will ensure that each Government Department in Northern Ireland is playing its full part to combat the drugs problem and that their action plans are driven forward in a co-ordinated manner and build the recommendations of the policy statement.

Prisoners (Early Release)

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on how many occasions since 1 September 1994 representations have been made to Her Majesty's Government for the early release of convicts serving sentences in *(a)* Northern Ireland and *(b)* Great Britain for crimes related to (i) republican violence and (ii) loyalist violence (1) by Ministers of the Government

of the Irish Republic directly, (2) via the Maryfield secretariat, (3) by the SDLP or (4) by Sinn Fein; and what representations have been made by Her Majesty's Government regarding the early release of loyalist convicts held in prisons in the Irish Republic for such crimes. [2371]

Sir John Wheeler: It is not possible to provide an answer in the form requested and I can answer only for representations received by or on behalf of the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. Prison issues have been discussed at each meeting of the inter-governmental conference, of which there have been five since 1 September 1994. No representations have been received from the Irish side of the Anglo-Irish secretariat. Representations have been made on three occasions by members of the SDLP with regard to particular cases concerning those convicted of crimes of republican and loyalist violence. No representations have been made by Sinn Fein.
Her Majesty's Government have made no representations to the Irish Government on the subject of the early release of prisoners.

Mr. Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many persons convicted of crimes connected with *(a)* republican and *(b)* loyalist violence have been given early release or have had their remission extended in the period from 1 September 1994 to the latest available date. [2374]

Sir John Wheeler: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Northern Ireland Prison Service under its chief executive, Mr. Alan Shannon. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. D. Shannon to Mr. William Ross dated 28 November 1995:

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has asked me to reply to your Parliamentary Question regarding the number of persons convicted of crimes connected with Republican and Loyalist violence who have been given early release or had their remission extended.

Since 17 November 85 releases have taken place under the terms of the Northern Ireland (Remission of Sentences) Act 1995. However, although the Northern Ireland Prison Service holds information regarding the parliamentary affiliation of individual offenders, the nature of the original offence could only be identified at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many people convicted of crimes related to *(a)* republican and *(b)* loyalist violence have been given early release from prisons in the Republic of Ireland since 1 September 1994; and how many persons convicted of each such category of crimes are still serving sentences in the Irish Republic. [2372]

Sir John Wheeler: As this is a matter for the Government of the Republic of Ireland I am unable to supply the answer.

Executive Agencies (Overseas Travel)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list for each of his executive agencies for the last financial year in respect of overseas travel by staff of the agency *(a)* the cost, *(b)* the countries visited and *(c)* the posts held by the staff involved. [2361]

Sir John Wheeler: Overseas travel by staff in executive agencies during 1994–95 was as follows:

1994–95 Overseas travel

Agency	*(a) Cost £*	*(b) Countries visited*	*(c) Posts held by staff involved*
Ordnance Survey of Northern Ireland	15,000	Austria, Belgium, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Turkey, USA, Netherlands	Chief Executive, Deputy Director, Head of Computer System, Senior Mapping and Charting Officer, Computer Systems
Valuation and Lands Agency	1,483	Netherlands	Senior Valuation Assistant, 5 Valuation Assistants
Social Security Agency	5,503	Germany and USA	Director of Local Operations, Director of Central Operations, Unit Manager of Paid Order Unit
Training and Employment Agency	46,537	Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Singapore and USA	Chief Executive, 2 Senior Instructional Officers, 2 Higher Instructional Officers, 3 Instructional Officers, Training Services Manager, 3 Grade 5s, 4 Grade 7s, 3 Deputy Principals, Staff Officer, Development Manager

Pigs

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many pigs were slaughtered in each pig factory in Northern Ireland; for each factory how many were imported in each week from the period beginning 3 September until the latest available date; and what were the equivalent figures for the same period last year. [2370]

Mr. Ancram: I am unable to provide the information requested as it is not appropriate to disclose information on the performance of individual pig slaughterhouses.

Investors in People

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps his Department is taking to achieve investor in people status; when they started the process, when they expect to achieve investor in people status; and if he will make a statement. [2981]

Sir John Wheeler: The Northern Ireland civil service has been committed to the achievement of IIP status since 1992.

Individual Departments and agencies in the Northern Ireland civil service have developed their own strategies and timetables for pushing this initiative forward and plans are at an advanced stage to make formal commitments to achieving the IIP standard. To date, the

Training and Employment Agency and the internal audit group of the Department of Health and Social Services have achieved investor in people status.

Social Fund

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he plans to make a further allocation of funds to the discretionary social fund budget in the current financial year. [3773]

Mr. Moss: I am very pleased to announce that the Northern Ireland social fund discretionary budget for 1995–96 will be increased by a total of £1.5 million as a result of better than expected loan recoveries by the Social Security Agency. This will increase the original allocation to a total of £33.34 million.

This increase in the social fund budget will ensure that more people receive help and that the fund continues to play an important role in targeting resources on those most in need.

Details of the revised budget have been placed in the Library.

Chief Electoral Officer (Report)

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will publish the report of the Chief Electoral Officer for Northern Ireland for 1994–95. [3774]

Sir Patrick Mayhew: The Chief Electoral Officer's report was laid before the House yesterday. Copies are available from the Library.

HEALTH

Medical Devices

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health with what frequency the premises of manufacturers of medical devices are visited and inspected by the Medical Services Agency. [2392]

Mr. Horam: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Medical Devices Agency under its chief executive Mr. Alan Kent. I have asked him to reply to the hon. Member.

Letter from Alan Kent to Mr. Gordon Prentice, dated 30 November 1995:

I am writing to you in response to your Parliamentary Question about the frequency at which the premises of manufacturers of medical devices are visited and inspected by the Medical Devices Agency.

Manufacturers of medical devices applying for inclusion in the Register of Approved Manufacturers are assessed before registration. The aim is to carry out further assessments every 3 years when the company seeks re-registration. Additional special audits or visits may be conducted when there is reason to suspect that the company no longer satisfies the registration requirements.

New Statutory requirements, harmonised within the European Union through Directives, are replacing progressively the voluntary Manufacturer Registration Scheme (MRS). Since 1 January 1995 some manufacturers have chosen to use independent certification bodies, that is Notified Bodies, to assess their quality assurance systems and confirm they are complying with the requirement of the Directives. Through mutual recognition agreements, MDA has been able to use Notified Body assessments as a basis of registration to the MRS. The Manufacturer Registration Scheme will be discontinued in mid-1998 when the regulations supporting the Directives are fully implemented.

I hope the above is helpful.

Prescription List

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will put the Smith and Nephew four layer bandage for leg ulcers on the prescription list. [2682]

Mr. Malone: No. This method of treatment may already be provided cost effectively to patients in clinics and at home through the community health services.

Anabolic Steroids

Mr. Tom Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimates he has as to the number of fatalities caused by the abuse of anabolic steroids and other performance-enhancing drugs. [2503]

Mr. Bowis: The number of deaths involving anabolic steroids and stimulants was 22 in 1992, the latest year for which figures are available.

NHS Administrative Costs

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what were the administrative costs of NHS as a percentage of the total NHS budget in each year since 1989. [3120]

Mr. Malone: The information is shown in the table. Changes over the roles and responsibilities of family practitioner committees, family health services authorities, district health authorities, and regional health authorities, and the transfer of functions to national health service trusts, mean that the figures are not strictly comparable.

Adminstration costs as a percentage of total revenue expenditure for the NHS in England

	Administration expenditure £000	*Total revenue expenditure £000*	*Percentage of revenue expenditure on administration*
1989–90	730,500	18,275,603	4.0
1990–91	929,947	20,161,643	4.6
1991–92	846,467	23,292,462	3.6
1992–93	962,862	27,468,802	3.5
1993–94	1,136,415	28,927,234	3.9
1994–95	1,180,479	29,457,618	4.0

Sources:

1. The annual accounts of district and regional health authorities and the special health authorities of the London postgraduate teaching hospitals.
2. The annual accounts of family practitioner committees, 1989–90.
3. The annual accoun of family health services authorities, 1990–91 to 1994–95.
4. The annual accounts of the Prescription Pricing Authority.
5. The annual accounts of the Dental Practice Board.

Notes:

1. The figures for 1994–95 are provisional.
2. RHA and DHA costs are those reported in the accounts as "Authority administration and purchasing expenses". This includes capital charges after 1991–92. FPC/FHSA administration costs are those reported in the annual accounts as revenue administration costs and represent that part of total expenditure which is not medical, dental, ophthalmic or pharmaceutical.

Norplant

Mr. Heppell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if Hoechst Roussel Ltd. sought to make it a condition of its licence to supply Norplant in the United Kingdom that its use be restricted to specially trained and experienced doctors. [3127]

Mr. Malone: Applications from companies for licences are confidential under section 18 of the Medicines Act.

Training of doctors in the use of a device such as a Norplant implant is a matter for the professional bodies, in this case the Royal Colleges of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists and of General Practitioners.

The Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists has recently introduced a scheme for recognition of training in the insertion and removal of Norplant and this includes the company training scheme. The product information is therefore being changed to add to the recommendation that Norplant is inserted and removed by a trained health professional.

Mr. Heppell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to revoke the licence granted to Hoechst Roussel Ltd. to supply Norplant in the United Kingdom. [3126]

Mr. Malone: The licensing authority has no such plans. Like all hormonal contraceptives, Norplant has hormone-related side effects, which may lead to a need to discontinue this method of contraception. The product literature informs doctors and patients of these known side effects.

Factor 8

Mr. Heppell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will provide extra funds to all hospital trusts to cover the extra cost of recombinant factor 8 products, incurred as a result of the imposition of value added tax on these products. [3134]

(2) what measure he is taking to ensure that hospital trusts buy and continue to buy the new recombinant factor 8 products in the wake of the imposition of value added tax on these products. [3131]

Mr. Horam: It is for clinicians to decide what products are used in the light of available resources and the needs of individual patients. Factor 8 derived from human plasma is used for the majority of patients and is exempt from value added tax.

Mr. Heppell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations has he made to the Chancellor of the Exchequer regarding his decision to impose value added tax on recombinant factor 8 products. [3132]

Mr. Horam: The question of whether value added tax is chargeable on factor 8 products turns on whether they are derived from human blood. My Department has provided technical advice to HM Customs and Excise on that issue.

Hormone Replacement Therapy

Mr. Pope: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to remove the requirement of a separate prescription charge for each drug contained in HRT preparations; and if he will make a statement. [2862]

Mr. Malone: None.

The regulations require a charge to be paid for each quantity of a drug supplied. This includes each quantity of medicine in duopacks such as HRT which are packed in this way for the convenience of the patient and for the manufacturer.

Maternity Services, East London

Mr. Timms: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the cost per delivery of the maternity services in the City and east London district at *(a)* Homerton hospital, *(b)* Newham general hospital and *(c)* Royal hospitals trust. [2863]

Mr. Malone: This information is not available centrally.

Access Committee for England

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the level of funding the Access Committee for England has received from his Department for each year since 1989 in 1995 prices. [2914]

Mr. Bowis: The Access Committee for England has received the following levels of grant under section 64 of the Health Services and Public Health Act 1968, at 1995 prices, since 1989.

1989–90:	£119,159
1990–91:	£149,670
1991–92:	£155,277
1992–93:	£172,252
1993–94:	£156,832
1994–95:	£134,875

Accident and Emergency Trauma and Orthopaedic Service, Leeds

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what response he has made to the review of accident and emergency trauma and orthopaedic service in Leeds. [3123]

Mr. Horam: This review of services was undertaken by independent experts commissioned by the Leeds review task force. I understand a draft report prepared by the task force will be circulated widely for comment in the near future.

Doctors Recruitment

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received alleging difficulty in recruiting and retaining general practitioners to *(a)* general practices and *(b)* hospitals; and if he will make a statement. [3141]

Mr. Malone: We have received representations through informal discussions with the profession and the national health service on pockets of difficulty within general practice and on particular difficulties in filling some hospital specialty posts. We are addressing these through improved work force planning.

NHS Organ Donor Register

Mr. Churchill: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what further plans he has to advertise the existence of the national organ donor scheme. [3133]

Mr. Horam: Since we launched the national health service organ donor register in October 1994 over 2¼ million people have applied to join, of which some 800,000 had joined when applying for a driving licence or registering with a general practitioner. We have been monitoring the effectiveness of the different ways used to encourage people to join and plan further publicity initiatives for early in the new year.

Efficiency Scrutiny

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the work on efficiency scrutiny he announced on 11 October; who is conducting the efficiency scrutiny; and what are its terms of reference. [3340]

Mr. Horam: My right hon. the Secretary of State has asked Mr. Jim Hammond, chief executive of East Gloucestershire national health service trust, to lead the efficiency scrutiny into the burdens of paperwork in NHS trusts and health authorities. The terms of reference for the team are:

a. to identify achievable reductions in the administrative burden associated with the work of NHS trusts and health authorities and recommend action which will eliminate unnecessary bureaucracy, consistent with the objective of improving the efficiency, effectiveness and responsiveness of patient services;

b. to examine the traffic in guidance and information that flows between the Department of Health—including the NHS Executive and regional health authorities—and trusts and health authorities, and make recommendations that will reduce the burden on the NHS while retaining the information necessary for the effective management of the service.

The team will report to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, and the Prime Minister's efficiency adviser, Sir Peter Levene, before the end of March 1996 with recommendations for implementation within two years.

Private Finance Initiative

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if the services of *(a)* chiropodists, *(b)* dieticians, *(c)* medical laboratory scientists, *(d)* occupational therapists, *(e)* orthoptrists, *(f)* physiotherapists, *(g)* radiographers and *(h)* speech therapists are categorised as clinical services for the purposes of the private finance initiative in the NHS. [3341]

Mr. Horam: There is no requirement upon national health service trusts to include these services as part of the testing of private finance options. But these are matters for local determination and cannot be decided without the support of local clinicians.

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many national health service trusts in England are developing plans to use the PFI to care for acutely mentally ill patients. [3220]

Mr. Horam: To ensure that national health service capital projects meet NHS needs as cost effectively as possible, the option of using private finance initiative, under this Government's private finance initiative, must be considered for every potential capital project. Formulation of plans for projects to meet local needs is the responsibility of NHS trusts and health authorities. The information requested is not available centrally.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what are the principal differences between the private finance initiative schemes which may be developed with public finance if no suitable private capital can be raised and those which may be developed only if private capital can be raised; and if he will make a statement. [3476]

Mr. Horam: To ensure that national health service capital projects meet NHS needs as cost-effectively as possible, the option of using private finance, under this Government's private finance initiative, must be considered for every potential capital project. In the event that private capital is unobtainable for a particular scheme, public capital funding will be considered.

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the nature, value and location of all private finance initiative projects in the NHS with a project value of £1 million or more which have been approved to date. [3475]

Mr. Horam: I refer the hon. Member to the reply my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, West (Mr. Sackville) gave the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile) on 6 November at columns *622–23*.

One further project with a capital value greater than £1 million has been approved:

		£ *million*
Anglia and Oxford Region, South Buckinghamshire NHS Trust	New hospital developments at High Wycombe and Amersham	35

NHS Trusts

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the level and percentage of trust income in each region received from non-national health service sources in each year since 1991–92. [3258]

Mr. Horam: The information for 1994–95 is shown in the table. Information from previous years is not available centrally.

Non-national health service income for trusts in England by region—1994–95

£000

	Non-NHS income	Total income	Percentage of total income from non—NHS sources
Northern and Yorkshire	161,439	2,890,531	5.6
Trent	101,214	1,972,187	5.1
Anglian and Oxford	134,998	2,039,415	6.6
North Thames	415,104	3,512,907	11.8
South Thames	218,884	2,974,716	7.4
South and West	181,283	2,725,080	6.7
West Midlands	112,680	1,935,391	5.8
North-west	145,952	3,010,741	4.9

Source:
The annual financial returns of NHS trusts.

Notes: The figures are provisional

Birth Certificates

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he proposes to bring forward legislation to implement the restrictions on access to birth certificates outlined in the White Paper, Cm 939, "Registration: Proposals for Change. [3428]

Mr. Horam: This proposal was part of a wide package of reforms to the system for registering births, marriages and deaths in England and Wales. The Government remain committed to introducing the necessary legislation to implement these reforms as soon as a suitable opportunity occurs.

Hospital and Community Health Services

Mr. Lester: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will announce the 1996–97 hospital and community health services revenue allocations for the new health authorities. [3479]

Mr. Dorrell: Actual allocations cannot be made until the new health authorities come into existence on 1 April 1996. For planning purposes general allocations based largely on 1 April 1995 boundaries are given in the table.

1996–97 Planned General Allocations

	£000
Avon	337,304
Barking and Havering	171,182
Barnet	143,641
Barnsley	100,028
Bedfordshire	202,770
Berkshire	277,247
Bexley and Greenwich	205,751
Birmingham	462,072
Bradford	209,879
Brent and Harrow	216,882
Bromley	122,748
Buckinghamshire	239,990
Bury and Rochdale	168,041
Calderdale and Kirklees	249,711
Cambridge and Huntingdon	156,965
Camden and Islington	233,218
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	207,826
County Durham	270,191
Coventry	130,087
Croydon	137,654
Doncaster	126,568
Dorset	303,240

1996–97 Planned General Allocations

	£000
Dudley	122,509
Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow	323,042
East and North Hertfordshire	191,435
East Kent	265,644
East Lancashire	227,473
East London and the City	337,546
East Norfolk	247,968
East Riding	220,686
East Surrey	166,567
East Sussex	339,567
Enfield and Haringey	227,820
Gateshead and South Tyneside	170,615
Gloucestershire	225,907
Herefordshire	66,306
Hillingdon	106,373
Isle of Wight	62,393
Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster	188,705
Kingston and Richmond	140,930
Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham	390,098
Leeds	310,704
Leicestershire	345,957
Lincolnshire	256,550
Liverpool	229,833
Manchester	231,624
Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth	293,838
Morecambe Bay	138,684
Newcastle and North Tyneside	227,875
North and East Devon	203,643
North and Mid Hampshire	220,406
North Cheshire	144,428
North Cumbria	132,664
North Derbyshire	155,004
North Essex	334,368
North Nottinghamshire	159,622
North Staffordshire	202,485
North-west Anglia	163,117
North-west Lancashire	214,847
North Yorkshire	291,886
Northamptonshire	230,680
Northumberland	129,161
Nottingham	262,200
Oxfordshire	213,607
Portsmouth and South-east Hampshire	221,919
Redbridge and Waltham Forest	213,535
Rotherham	108,909
Salford and Trafford	202,844
Sandwell	133,326
Sefton	131,981
Sheffield	247,740
Shropshire	162,556
Solihull	76,909
Somerset	174,035
South and West Devon	259,464
South Cheshire	248,878
South Derbyshire	226,186
South Essex	273,693
South Humber	151,864
South Lancashire	126,771
South Staffordshire	220,006
Southampton and South-west Hampshire	192,698
St. Helens and Knowsley	146,504
Stockport	113,796
Suffolk	258,491
Sunderland	134,128
Tees	244,373
Wakefield	140,480
Walsall	109,564
Warwickshire	201,221
West Hertfordshire	208,469
West Kent	369,257
West Pennine	205,342
West Surrey	256,275
West Sussex	309,922

1996–97 Planned General Allocations

	£000
Wigan and Bolton	249,232
Wiltshire	306,714
Wirral	154,813
Wolverhampton	107,187
Worcestershire	208,121
England	20,884,969

Community Care

Mr. Lester: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he proposes to announce the allocations of community care special transitional grant to each social services authority in England for 1996–97. [3482]

Mr. Dorrell: I am today publishing indicative allocations showing each English social services authority's share of the special transitional grant for community care in 1996–97. The STG for 1996–97 will be £418 million, bringing to over £2.25 billion the total additional resources provided to local authorities for their new community care responsibilities. As last year, the whole of the STG will be distributed on the basis of personal social services standard spending assessments. Authorities have until 12 January 1996 to make representations about their proposed allocations. A copy of the circular is being placed in the Library.

Personal Social Services

Mr. Matthew Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what specific grants and capital resources he is making available to local authorities for personal social services for 1996–97. [3480]

Mr. Dorrell: Specific grants will again be available in 1996–97 as follows:

	£ million
Mental illness services	58.3
HIV and AIDS services	13.7
Services for alcohol and drugs misusers	2.5
Guardians ad litem and reporting officers	6.3
Social services training	35.5

Each grant will continue to support a maximum of 70 per cent. of total expenditure.

The mental illness grant is planned to increase by a further £9 million in 1997–98. The grant will be targeted on people with severe mental illness.

The capital grant for secure accommodation for young people will be £27.2 million in 1996–97.

Annual capital guidelines of £96.6 million will be notified to local authorities. Supplementary credit approvals will again be available for mental illness services—£11.6 million—and AIDS and HIV services—£3.1 million. The credit approval for information technology has been phased out.

Mr. Matthew Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for health what resources are being provided through the standard spending assessment for social services for 1996–97. [3481]

Mr. Dorrell: A total of £6911.6 million will be distributed by the personal social services standard spending assessment in 1996–97, compared with £6212.7 million in 1995–96. Total standard spending on social services, including specific and special grants, will be £7446.5 million in 1996–97, compared with £6965.9 million in 1995–96 an increase of 6.9 per cent.

GP Numbers

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the total number of general practitioners in *(a)* 1990 and *(b)* 1994. [3755]

Mr. Malone: The information is shown in the list.

1 October 1990: 25,622

1 October 1994: 26,567

The data relate to unrestricted principals in England.

Investors in People

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps his Department is taking to achieve investor in people status; when it started the process; when it expects to achieve investor in people status; and if he will make a statement. [2977]

Mr. Horam: The Department is taking forward work aimed at seeking accreditation as an investor in people by October 1996; the formal commitment was made in December 1994.

Hospitals (Smoking)

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what is his policy on the provision of smoking rooms for the use of patients, staff and visitors within NHS hospitals; [2966]

(2) how many employees of the Rotherham hospital trust signed a petition seeking the provision of a smoking room at Rotherham district general hospital; and what account he took of the petition before he wrote to the hon. Member for Wentworth recently on this subject; [2970]

(3) under what regulation Rotherham general hospital has barred a person from smoking in his own motor vehicle in the car park at the hospital; and what guidance he has issued on that matter; [3021]

(4) what advice was sought from the South Yorkshire fire service in regard to the prohibition of smoking by the Rotherham hospital trust; [2961]

(5) what considerations underlay *(a)* his approval of the ban on smoking at Rotherham district general hospital and *(b)* his Department's letter to the hon. Member for Wentworth in respect of the provision of smoking rooms in hospitals. [3024]

Mr. Horam: The Department of Health issued guidance in 1992 (HSG(92)14), copies of which are available in the Library, to all national health service authorities and trusts, in line with the "Health of the Nation" White Paper, requesting that they implement policies to enable the national health service to become smoke free. Whilst the guidance sets out the basic requirements, detailed implementation is the responsibility of individual authorities and trusts. It is

therefore for local managers and clinicians to decide whether they feel it necessary or practicable to set aside smoking rooms for staff and patients.

Information on an individual national health service trust's implementation of these policies is not available centrally. The hon. Member may wish to contact Mr. A. Baker, chairman of Rotherham General Hospitals national health service trust, for details of the trust's policy.

Bed Availability

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 27 November, concerning criteria for determining the number of beds per unit of population provided by district health services, what is the basis of his determination of the allocation of *(a)* revenue and *(b)* capital expenditure derived from public or private funds. [3355]

Mr. Horam: Allocation of hospital and community health services revenue to health authorities is determined by a national weighted capitation formula. Its aim is to enable health authorities to purchase similar levels of health services for resident populations in similar need.

A proportion of publicly provided capital is allocated to trusts to provide for the maintenance of their existing estate and routine replacement of equipment. Proposals for new capital schemes have to be supported by a business case which must demonstrate that private finance has been fully considered. Where private finance is not best value for money public funds can be made available.

Mental Health Act 1983

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people were detained under the provisions of *(a)* the Mental Health Act 1983 and *(b)* other acts in (i) NHS hospitals, (ii) private and (iii) private nursing homes in each of the last five years. [3344]

Mr. Bowis: Information available centrally is on the number of admissions under the Mental Health Act 1983 to national health service hospitals and private hospitals and private nursing homes and is published in the statistical bulletin "In-Patients Formally Detained in Hospitals Under the Mental Health Act 1983 and other Legislation, England: 1987–88 to 1992–93", copies of which are available in the Library.

Market Testing

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the service areas that have been or are planned to be market-tested. [3346]

Mr. Horam: A list of services where one or more trusts have either completed a market test or plan to market test is as follows.

MARKET TESTING: RANGE OF SERVICES

MAIN SERVICES HEADINGS

Administration, Information and Financial
Building and Engineering Services
Building and Equipment/System Maintenance
Hotel and Non Clinical Support
Clinical and Clinical Support
Training

GROUPS OF SERVICES UNDER EACH MAIN SERVICE HEADING

Administration, Information and Financial
Advertising and Recruitment
Agency Staffing
Audit
Banking
Clerical and Secretarial
Computing
Consultants
Financial
Human Resources
Insurance
Legal
Management Services
Micro-filming
Building and Engineering
Building and Engineering
Design
Electrical
Energy Management
Estates Management
Repairs and maintenance
Fire Systems
Flooring
Lighting
Gas Supply
Glazing
Painting
Water Services
Building and Equipment/Systems Maintenance
Building
Building and Engineering
Estates
Equipment/Systems
Hotel and Non-Clinical Support
Accommodation
Car Parks
Catering
Courier
Creche
Domestic
Environmental Health Management
General Patient Services
Facilities Management
Gardening
Pest Control
Hotel Services
Laundry/Linen
Supplies
Portering
Security
Waste Disposal
Switchboard/Reception
Transport
Clinical and Clinical Support
Anaesthetics
Bio-Engineering

Chiropody
Clinical Coding
Continuing Care-Elderly
CSSD[1]
Dental
Clinical Genetics
HSDU[1]
Haematology
Infection Control
IVF Services[1]
Lithotripsy
Medical Physics
Mobility Provision
Medical Photography
Nuclear Medicine
Ophthalmology
Magnetic Resonance Imaging
Occupational Therapy
Occupational Health
Orthotics
Pathology
Oxygen Therapy Units
Prosthetics
Patient Appliance
Pharmacy
Physiotherapy
Termination of Pregnancy
Radiology
Speech Therapy
Perfusionists
Training
Education
Fire
Staff

1. There is no standard definition of services or list of services within the NHS and those listed above relate to Provider Units' interpretation.

2. Service headings such as "Hotel Services" and "Facilities Management" include a wide and varying range of individual services e.g. catering, portering, security car parking. Again there is no set pattern of which service make up Hotel Services etc., but relates to individual Provider Units' interpretation.

[1]CSSD = Central Sterile Supply Department, HSDU = Hospital Sterilizing and Disinfecting Unit, IVF = In-Vitro Fertilisation.

NHS Finance

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what *(a)* surpluses and *(b)* deficits were recorded by each different health authority by region, in each of the last three years. [2951]

Mr. Horam *[holding answer 28 November 1995]:* The information requested from the annual accounts, for the last three years will be placed in the Library.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Invoices

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the average length of time it takes for his Department to pay invoices. [938]

Mr. Boswell *[holding answer 22 November 1995]:* In common with most organisations, MAFF, including the Veterinary Medicines Directorate and the Veterinary Laboratory Agency, agrees payment terms with its suppliers in advance of orders being placed. The accounts payable system is designed to make payments only when they are due, in accordance with those terms. Thus, the average length of time it takes to pay an invoice is dependent on prior agreement with suppliers. Data emerging from the payments system indicate that 85.41 per cent. of all payments made by MAFF during the first quarter of 1995–96 were paid by the due date.

The chief executives of the Pesticides Safety Directorate, Meat Hygiene Service, Central Science Laboratory and ADAS will reply directly to the hon. Member.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many (i) orders and (ii) firms are represented by the 10.5 per cent. of invoices not paid by his Department within 30 days or in accordance with contractual agreements in 1994–95; and how many of those are related to firms with fewer than 500 employees. [914]

Mr. Boswell *[holding answer 22 November 1995]:* The information requested is not available. During 1994–95, MAFF was in the process of installing a new computerised payments system and, as a result, consistent statistically valid data on prompt payment performance could not be collected. Currently, MAFF, including the Veterinary Medicines Directorate, the Veterinary Laboratory Agency and ADAS, does not identify separately payment performance data relating to firms with fewer than 500 employees, although this possibility is one of a number of enhancements to the systems now under consideration.

The chief executives of the Meat Hygiene Service, the Central Science Laboratory and the Pesticides Safety Directorate will reply directly to the hon. Member.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how his Department publicises payment practices other than as percentages of invoices paid late. [952]

Mr. Boswell *[holding answer 22 November 1995]:* With effect from the 1995 report published in March 1995, Cm 2803, MAFF's, including the Veterinary Medicines Directorate and the Veterinary Laboratory Agency, payment practices, including its prompt payment objectives, are published in its departmental annual report. Now that the new computerised payments system is operational, future annual reports will include data on prompt payment performance.

The chief executives of the Pesticides Safety Directorate, the Meat Hygiene Service, the Central Science Laboratory and ADAS will reply directly to the hon. Member.

Letter from G. K. Bruce to Mrs. Barbara Roche, dated 22 November 1995:

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, has asked me to reply, in respect of the Pesticides Safety Directorate (PSD), to your questions about payment of invoices.

I would refer you to the answer I gave on 3 November to your earlier questions on this subject (Official Report, Cols. 507–508 refer). In line with Government policy and normal terms of trade, PSD operates a prompt payment policy and aims to settle invoices within 30 days of receipt. Our records show that so far during 1995/96 98% of valid invoices have been paid within this timescale. We publicised our payment policy in our 1994/95 Annual Report and Accounts and our payment performance will be included in future Annual Reports.

Letter from Phillip Needham to Mrs. Barbara Roche, dated 30 November 1995:

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has asked me to reply directly to you concerning your Parliamentary Question (PQ 29) in which you asked the average length of time it takes for this Agency to pay invoices.[938]

In line with good commercial practice, ADAS agrees payment terms with its suppliers in advance of orders being placed. Our payment system is designed to make payments only when they are due, in accordance with those terms. The average length of time it takes to pay an invoice is currently 32 days.

Letter from Phillip Needham to Mrs Barbara Roche, dated 30 November 1995:

The Minister of Agriculture has asked me to reply directly to you concerning your Parliamentary Question (PQ 32) in which you asked how this Agency publicises payment practices.[952]

The terms of payment are reproduced on the back of the purchase order which is sent to the supplier. Additionally, our payment policy appears on page four of the ADAS Annual Report and Accounts 1994/95.

Letter from Johnston McNeill to Mrs. Barbara Roche, dated 30 November 1995:

As Chief Executive of the Meat Hygiene Service, I have been asked to respond to your questions regarding payment of invoices in respect of this Agency. As I stated in my letter to you of 3 November 1995 (Official Report column 507), the MHS is keen to pay invoices for all its suppliers on time. In particular, payment to vets that we contract much of our work to, many of which are small practices, have all been paid within agreed timescales since 1 April this year when this Agency was launched. These payments account for 78% of the value of our supplier invoices.[938], [914+952]

As we were only launched in April this year, your supplementary question to those I answered in my earlier letter, regarding the number of orders and firms affected by non-payment within 30 days, is not applicable to this Agency.

Concerning your final question about publication of payment practices, the Meat Hygiene Service intends to include this information in its first and subsequent set of annual accounts, when these are published after our first year of operation.

Letter from Professor P. I. Stanley to Mrs. Barbara Roche, dated 30 November 1995:

You asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food three separate questions relating to the payment of invoices. The Central Science Laboratory (CSL) became a MAFF executive agency in April 1992 and the Minister has asked me to reply to you in respect of the Agency as these are operational matters for which I am responsible.

Firstly, our most recent data shows that the average length of time taken by the Agency to pay invoices, from the date of the invoice to the date of payment, is 23 days.

Secondly, in 1994–95 some 10% of CSL invoices were not paid within 30 days of the invoice date. This represented approximately i) 1,000 orders and ii) 300 firms. I am unable to confirm the number relating to firms with fewer than 500 employees as this information is not available.

Finally, it is my intention in future to publicise the Agency's payment practices in our Annual Report and Accounts.

Intervention Stores (Beef)

Mr. Martin Redmond: To ask the Minster of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list by location, the current cost of the stock of beef held in intervention stores; and what the figure was *(a)* 12 months and *(b)* 24 months ago. [2321]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Since the question concerns matters which are direct responsibility of the chief executive of the Intervention Board Executive Agency. I have asked him to reply directly to the hon. Member.

Letter from George Trevelyan to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 30 November 1995:

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has asked me to reply to your written Parliamentary Question (64) tabled for answer on 27 November 1995. [2321]

"To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, if he will list by location, the current cost of stock of beef held in intervention stores; and what the figure was (a) 12 months and (b) 24 months ago."

Member States are required annually to submit to the Commission a Stock Account showing the value of beef stocks held in intervention stores as at 30 September. The information set out in the attached table lists the locations of stores that held stocks of beef for the years in question. A breakdown of the costs of stocks by location is not readily available and could only be provided at disproportionate cost because the book value of the stock at any particular time is assigned under EC accounting conventions to the stockholding at a national level. The value of the stocks held in the UK on 30 September in each year was:

1993: £87,575,989

1994: £31,473,031

1995[1]: £6,003,333

[1] provisional.

I am sending a copy of this letter, together with a copy of the table to the House of Commons Library and the Public Information Office.

Intervention stores holding beef stocks

Stores containing intervention beef stocks at 30 September identified *

Location of cold stores	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*
North of England and Scotland			
Inverness	*	*	*
Dundee	*	*	*
Edinburgh	*	*	*
Gateshead	*	*	—
Glasgow	*	*	*
Glenrothes	*	*	*
Bellshill	*	*	*
Aberdeen	*	*	*
Midlands			
Grimsby (x3)	*	*	—
Marston	*	*	—
Hull (x2)	*	*	*
Liverpool (x3)	*	*	*
Salford	*	*	—
St. Helens	*	*	—
Leeds (x3)	*	*	*
Fleetwood	*	*	—
Preston	*	*	—

Intervention stores holding beef stocks
*Stores containing intervention beef stocks at 30 September identified **

Location of cold stores	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*
Doncaster	—	*	*
Pontefract	*	—	—
Blackburn	*	*	—
Tamworth	*	*	*
Eccleshall	*	*	—
Cannock	*	*	—
Manchester	*	—	—
Retford	*	*	—
Sheffield	*	*	—
Shrewsbury	*	*	—
Marston	*	*	—
Scunthorpe	*	*	*
Oswestry	*	—	—
Nottingham	*	*	—
East and South-east			
Lowestoft	*	*	*
Southall	*	—	—
Spalding	*	*	—
Lympne	*	*	—
Hornsey	*	*	*
Gillingham	*	*	—
Kings Lynn (x2)	*	*	*
Peterborough	*	*	*
Stratford	*	*	—
Wisbech	*	*	*
Dagenham	*	*	—
March	*	*	—
Bury St. Edmunds	*	*	—
Leicester	*	—	—
Luton	*	—	—
Thetford	*	*	—
Wigston	*	—	—
Paddock Wood	*	*	—
Sevenoaks	*	—	—
South-west and Wales			
Walsall	*	*	—
Cornwall	*	*	—
Willand	*	*	*
Sherbourne	*	*	—
Brierly Hill	*	*	—
Avonmouth	*	—	—
Cardiff	*	*	—
Eastleigh	*	—	—
Exeter	*	*	*
Newport	*	*	*
Plymouth	*	*	—
Swansea	*	*	*
Taunton	*	*	—
Tewkesbury	*	—	—
Northern Ireland			
Banbridge	*	*	*
Belfast (x3)	*	*	*
Ballymena	*	*	*
Lurgan	*	*	*
Portadown (x2)	*	*	*
Lisburn (x2)	*	*	*
Dungannon	*	*	*
Antrim	*	*	*
Newtonabbey	*	*	*
Larne	*	*	*
Omagh	*	*	*
Coleraine	*	*	*

Source: Intervention Board IMD-B November 1995.

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what measures are being taken by his Ministry to prevent the falsification by farmers of documentation regarding BSE infected cattle. [2669]

Mrs. Browning: The Ministry requires that ear tag numbers of all cattle being moved to a market, or presented for slaughter, and which are accompanied by farmers' declarations, are checked by an official veterinary surgeon against the Ministry's central record of BSE cases. Enforcement as regards false documentation is a matter for local authorities, but prosecution is actively encouraged by the Ministry.

Official veterinary surgeons have also been asked to be alert for any indication of possible fraud, such as the replacement of ear tags, and to inform a divisional veterinary manager of the State Veterinary Service of any suspicion they have so that the circumstances can be investigated.

Baby Milk Formula

Mr. Chris Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the reports received from the inquiry panel established by the local authority co-ordinating body on trading standards to investigate alleged infringements of the Baby Milk Infant Formula and Follow-on Formula Regulations 1995; what steps he will take to establish uniformity in the enforcement approach; and if he will make a statement. [2530]

Mrs. Browning: No such inquiry panel exists. The Department of Health, in consultation with representatives of health professions, voluntary groups, baby milk manufacturers and the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, is drawing up guidelines, as required by the regulations, on the donation of informational and educational materials produced by infant formula manufacturers and retailers. The guidance notes will shortly be circulated to interested parties for comment. In addition, LACOTS is preparing guidance on the implementation and interpretation of the regulations.

The two documents will assist enforcement officers in local authorities to achieve a uniform approach in the enforcement of the regulations.

TRANSPORT

Investors in People

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps his Department is taking to achieve investor in people status; when it started the process; when it expects to achieve investor in people status; and if he will make a statement. [2985]

Mr. Norris: The Department of Transport is committed to taking forward investor in people progressively.

The Department's executive agencies are progressively implementing investor in people at a pace relating to their own circumstance.

Three pilot schemes have been developed in the central transport unit. Of these the marine accident investigation branch has submitted its investors in people portfolio to Hants training and enterprise council.

Oil Tankers

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many oil tankers over *(a)* 10,000 tonne net registered tonnage, *(b)* 20,000 tonne net registered tonnage, *(c)* 50,000 tonne NRT and *(d)* 100,000 tonne NRT visited British ports in 1993 and 1994; and how many were fitted with double hulls. [2852]

Mr. Norris: The information is as follows:

Gross registered tonnage	*1993*	*1994*
Over 10,000	4,341	4,412
Over 20,000	2,435	2,513
Over 50,000	1,221	1,284
Over 100,000	140	133

Figures for net registered tonnage—NRT—and the number of double hull oil tankers are not available. As the regulations requiring new oil tankers to be fitted with double hulls, or similar structures, have only recently been introduced, the majority of existing oil tankers have single hulls.

Airports

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list those airports that are equipped with distance measuring equipment in England and Wales. [2853]

Mr. Norris: The following aerodromes in England and Wales are equipped with distance measuring equipment

Barrow/Walney Island
Biggin Hill
Birmingham
Blackbushe
Blackpool
Bournemouth
Bristol
Cambridge
Cardiff
Carlisle
Clacton
East Midlands
Exeter
Fairoaks
Filton
Gamston/Retford
Gloucestershire
Hawarden
Humberside
Leeds Bradford
Liverpool
London City
London Gatwick
London Heathrow
London Luton
London Stansted
Lydd
Manchester
Newcastle
Norwich
Oxford (Kidlington)
Plymouth
Shoreham
Southampton
Southend
Swansea
Teesside
Warton
Welshpool
Woodford
Yeovil (Westland)

Source: Communications (COM) section of UK Air Pilot, published by the Civil Aviation Authority.

National Express

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much National Express was sold for on privatisation; and what is its current stock market value. [3252]

Mr. Norris: The net proceeds to the National Bus Company from the sale of its subsidiary, National Express, in 1988 was £10.1 million. My Department does not hold details of its current stock market value but the present National Express Group bears no resemblance to the original company sold by NBC.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what discussions he has had with the chairman of British Bus concerning the payment of sums of money as gifts to the former chairman of National Express. [3336]

Mr. Norris: None. Any financial transactions between business partners of companies in the private sector are matters for them.

Vehicle Emissions

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many complaints about vehicles emitting excessive exhaust fumes have been referred to the Vehicles Inspectorate in each of the last five years. [3471]

Mr. Norris: I have asked the chief executive of the Vehicle Inspectorate executive agency to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Ron Oliver to Mr. David Chidgey, dated 30 November 1995:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question concerning the number of complaints about vehicles emitting excessive exhaust fumes referred to the Vehicle Inspectorate in each of the last 5 years.

We cannot quantify the total number of complaints received on smoke emissions; many complaints made are on an ad hoc basis and do not exclusively deal with excessive exhaust fumes. However, since 1991 the Vehicle Inspectorate has run a system where members of the public can ring the "Smoky Vehicle Hotline" and report commercial vehicles seen producing excessive amounts of exhaust smoke.

The total number of reports received via the Hotline for the past 5 years were:

1991/92: 1,483

1992/93: 2,481

1993/94: 2,887

1994/95: 8,113

April to October 1995: 11,861

Light Rail Funding

Sir Tom Arnold: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the Manchester passenger transport authority's strategic development plan; if he will make a statement on the future of light rail funding; and what assessment he has made of the benefits which would arise from extending Metrolink. [3374]

Mr. Norris: I refer to the replies I gave on Friday 24 November to the hon. Member for Manchester, Withington (Mr. Bradley) and the right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris), *Official Report* columns *349–50*.

Vehicle Pollution

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to require local authorities to carry out spot checks for polluting vehicles. [3466]

Mr. Norris: We are currently consulting interested parties on how best to implement in practice enabling regulations which could be made under the provisions of section 87 of the Environment Act 1995 to permit local authorities, with police support, to carry out emissions checks on vehicles using the road.

Channel Tunnel Freight

Mr. Chris Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will estimate *(a)* the volume of goods currently being shipped by security approved freight forwarders by rail through the channel tunnel per week and *(b)* the volume being shipped by road and ferry because of the restrictions imposed by the Channel Tunnel (Security) Order 1994; and if he will make a statement. [2684]

Mr. Watts: The average number of containers from security approved channel tunnel freight forwarders carried through the channel tunnel for the month of October 1995 was over 260 per week.

Decisions on the means of transport are commercial ones for the shipper concerned.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Child Refugees

16. **Sir Michael Shersby:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the projected number of child refugees entering the United Kingdom during 1995; and if he will make a statement. [1370]

Mr. Kirkhope: It is estimated that some 600 unaccompanied children will claim asylum in the United Kingdom in 1995.

Private Prisons

17. **Mrs. Mahon:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what instructions he has given to private prisons regarding H.O. Reg. 20/1989. [1371]

Miss Widdecombe: Prison Department circular instruction 20/89 was superseded by the Prison Service policy on caring for the suicidal as set out in instruction to governors 1/94. Contractors responsible for privately managed prisons are expected to have arrangements which are consistent with this policy.

Probation Service

18. **Mr. Clapham:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to restructure the probation service. [1372]

Mr. Sackville: To reinforce court and public confidence in the probation service's work, my right hon. and learned Friend has this year published both revised national standards for community sentences, and the Green Paper, "Strengthening Punishment in the Community", aimed at restructuring community punishment. In addition, my right hon. and learned Friend has recently announced new arrangements reforming the qualifying training and recruitment of probation officers.

Law and Order, Lichfield

19. **Mr. Fabricant:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to visit Lichfield to discuss law and order; and if he will make a statement. [1374]

Mr. Maclean: My right hon. and learned Friend has no immediate plans to visit Lichfield. We should congratulate Staffordshire police force on the 13 per cent. reduction in burglary and the 7 per cent. reduction in vehicle crime recorded by them in the 12 months to June 1995.

Prisoners (Drugs)

21. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department in what percentage of British prisons illegal drugs have been detected in the last year. [1376]

Mrs. Widdecombe: Illegal drugs have been detected in all but two Prison Service establishments in England and Wales during the period 1 November 1994 to 31 October 1995.

This means that drugs have been detected in 98.5 per cent. of establishments.

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his latest estimate of the number of prisoners using drugs. [1375]

Miss Widdecombe: It is too early in the implementation of mandatory drug testing to be able to give an accurate assessment of the number of prisoners misusing drugs.

Figures from the eight first phase sites show 36 per cent. confirmed positive drug tests, but this cannot be extrapolated to the total population.

Asylum Seekers

22. **Mr. Timms:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what account he takes of the likely safety of asylum applicants if returned to Sri Lanka when deciding such applications; and if he will make a statement. [1377]

Mr. Kirkhope: All applications for asylum, regardless of nationality, are carefully considered in accordance with our obligations under the 1951 United Nations convention relating to the status of refugees. Each case is assessed on its merits taking account of all the circumstances, including conditions in the country of origin.

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what percentage of in-country applications for asylum are made within *(a)* one week of the applicant entering the country, *(b)* two to three weeks of entering the country, *(c)* three to four weeks of entering the country, *(d)* two to six months of entering the country and *(e)* more than six months of entering the country; and if he will make a statement. [2348]

Mr. Kirkhope *[holding answer 29 November 1995]:* Information regarding the length of time between arrival date and application date, for those who enter the United Kingdom as visitors but subsequently claim asylum, is given in the table.

Average time taken[1] to apply for asylum by persons granted leave to enter the United Kingdom as visitors, January to September 1995

Period of time between arrival and application	*Percentage*
0 to 2 weeks	27
2 to 4 weeks	10
1 to 2 months	10
2 to 6 months	27
over 6 months	26
Total	100

[1] Estimated.

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the total number of applicants for asylum *(a)* excluding and *(b)* including dependants, for each calendar month from January 1990, with totals for each year. [3227]

Mr. Kirkhope: Annual figures for the number of asylum applications both excluding and including dependants for the years 1984 to 1994 are given in table 1.2 of Home Office statistical bulletin "Asylum Statistics United Kingdom" issue 15/95, a copy of which can be found in the Library. Table 2.3 of this publication gives monthly figures for the number of principal applications in 1994 and the first quarter of 1995. Equivalent information for 1991 to 1993 is given in issues 12/92, 19/93 and 17/94 of the same publication which can also be found in the Library. Monthly application figures for years prior to 1991, and monthly application figures including dependants, are not available.

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the number of persons who applied for political asylum who *(a)* were not admitted, *(b)* were admitted on a temporary basis, *(c)* had their applications refused, and *(d)* had their applications accepted, in each year between 1988 and 1994. [3142]

Mr. Kirkhope *[holding answer 28 November 1995]:* Information is given in table 1.1 of the Home Office statistical bulletin "Asylum Statistics United Kingdom 1994", issue 15/95 on applications for asylum, split by those on arrival at a United Kingdom port of entry and those who applied "in country" after having been admitted to the United Kingdom for some reason under immigration rules, and on the number of decisions made on asylum applications, split by type of decision. A copy of this publication is available in the Library.

Those applying for asylum on arrival at a United Kingdom port maybe granted temporary admission pending the outcome of their application or, depending on the individual circumstances of the case, detained. Separate information on this is not available.

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many applications for political asylum are currently undecided. [1365]

Miss Widdecombe: As at 31 October this year, there were 66,665 applications for asylum in the United Kingdom outstanding.

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many asylum seekers are currently being held in prisons; and at what annual cost to public funds. [2497]

Mr. Kirkhope: As at 21 November 1995, a total of 776 persons who had at some stage sought asylum were detained. Of these, 378 were detained in Prison Service establishments, including 253 at locations used almost exclusively for housing asylum detainees. These figures include people awaiting removal following refusal of their applications as well as those whose applications were under consideration or subject to appeal.

The Prison Service does not separate out costs according to the category of inmate but in 1993–94, the latest period for which published figures are available, the net operating cost per prisoner place in local prisons and remand centres was £21,400.

Prison Places

23. **Mr. Mullin:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate he has of the number of available places in British prisons; and if he will make a statement. [1378]

Miss Widdecombe: On Monday 20 November 1995, the certified normal accommodation available for use in prison establishments in England and Wales was 51,185 places.

Police

24. **Mr. Nigel Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has had from the Association of Chief Police Officers on the likely impact of the Budget on the service it delivers. [1379]

Mr. Maclean: None. Detailed proposals for police funding in England and Wales in 1996–97 will be announced later today by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to increase police strength in the next year; and if he will make a statement. [1360]

Mr. Howard: My right hon. Friend, the Prime Minister has pledged additional funding to enable chief constables in England and Wales to recruit an extra 5,000 officers over the next three years. The details of police funding proposals for 1996–97 will be announced later today.

Metropolitan Police

25. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police officers are currently on the beat in the metropolis; at what cost to public funds; what were the figures in May 1979 in real terms; and if he will make a statement. [1380]

Mr. Maclean: I understand from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis that, at the end of July 1995, there were 12,055 police officers on patrol in the Metropolitan police district—6,002 of these were assigned to foot patrol duties. The cost of this function is £502,482,000 per annum—£246,216,000 for foot patrol officers.

Comparable figures are not available for 1979.

Under-age Gambling

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will estimate the number of under-16-year-olds who regularly play fruit machines; and if he will make a statement. [1969]

Mr. Kirkhope: Statistics on the use of gaming machines are not available.

We have not carried out recent research on the subject but we understand that an independent survey of school children was carried out this summer drawn from 12 schools in the east, north-east and south-west of England. Out of 1,665 pupils aged 12 to 15, 10 per cent. said that they played fruit machines at least once a week.

Prison Accommodation, Wales

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on how many occasions during 1995 each of the prisons at *(a)* Cardiff, *(b)* Swansea and *(c)* Usk have exceeded the certified normal accommodation; and if he will make a statement. [2167]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Alan Walker to Mr. Elfyn Llwyd, dated 30 November 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your Question about the number of occasions during 1995 each of the prisons at (a) Cardiff, (b) Swansea and (c) Usk have exceeded the certified normal accommodation.

Cardiff and Swansea prisons have had populations in excess of certified normal accommodation available for use throughout 1995. The latest monthly information available shows that Usk prison had a population in excess of the certified normal accommodation available for use at the end of each of the last 8 months (March to October).

Population pressures in South Wales will be eased considerably when new accommodation comes into use at Cardiff in May/June 1996 (204 places) and at Swansea in August 1996 (103 places). A new prison at Bridgend is planned to come into use in 1997–98 and will provide about 600 new places.

Remand Prisoners

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on how many occasions remand prisoners committed by courts in Wales have been held in prisons outside Wales for each of the last three full years for which figures are available and for 1995 to the latest available date; and what percentage this figure constitutes of the total number of remand prisoners committed by the same courts. [2168]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Alan Walker to Mr. Elfyn Llwyd, dated 30 November 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question asking, on how many occasions remand prisoners committed by courts in Wales have been held in prisons outside Wales for each of the last three full years for which figures are available and for 1995 to the latest available date; and what percentage this figure constitutes of the total number of remand prisoners committed by the same courts.

The available information relates to the number of remand prisoners who were first received into a Prison Service establishment in England from a court in Wales and is given in the attached table. The number of occasions when remand prisoners committed by courts in Wales, who were first held in a Welsh prison and subsequently transferred on remand to a prison in England, is not available.

Receptions of remand prisoners first received into a Prison Service establishment in England from a court in Wales, 1992–October 1995

Year	*Remanded into custody by a Welsh court but first received into an English prison*[1,2]	*Percentage of all persons remanded into custody by a Welsh court who were first received into a prison in England*
1992	590	25
1993	874	25
1994	991	26
1995 (January–October)	821	25

[1] Provisional figures.
[2] First received as untried and convicted unsentenced prisoners who were not previously held as untried.

Fire Authorities

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what advice he has received from HM chief inspector of fire services on the effects of the 1995 financial settlement for fire authorities on fire brigade response times. [1373]

Mr. Kirkhope: In general, brigades remain able to meet the nationally recommended minimum standards of fire cover—which include the response times that fire brigades are expected to maintain. Her Majesty's inspectors of fire services draw attention to any

exceptions in the course of their annual inspection of brigades. It is for the fire authority concerned to take the appropriate action in any such case.

Investors in People

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps his Department is taking to achieve investor in people status; when it started the process; when it expects to achieve investor in people status; and if he will make a statement. [2978]

Mr. Howard: The Home Office is fully committed to achieving accreditation as an investor in people. Action to this end is under way throughout the various agencies and other constituent parts of the Department, reflecting the different needs of each area and the different lengths of time each has been working towards the standard. Some parts of the Department have already reached the standard and others are expected to be ready for assessment within the next 12 months.

Dangerous Dogs Act 1991

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many charges made under the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 have been contested in court; how many appeals have been lodged; and what is his estimate of the total cost to public funds of the implementation of this measure. [2963]

Mr. Kirkhope: Detailed information is not collected centrally on numbers of persons charged for offences, nor about pleas and subsequent appeals. However, 2,811 persons were prosecuted for offences under the Dangerous Dogs Act between 1992 and 1994; in the same period 1,226 were found guilty, and a further 597 were cautioned.

Information on the cost to the police, local authorities, the Crown Prosecution Service, and the courts of operating the Dangerous Dogs Act is not held centrally.

Mr. Colin Ivor Dunning

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he received the application for the case of Mr. Colin Ivor Dunning to be referred to the Court of Appeal under the provisions of section 17 of the Criminal Appeals Act 1968. [3173]

Mr. Kirkhope: Representations were received from Mr. Dunning's solicitors on 3 February 1994. Supplementary representations were received in May 1995.

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to reply to questions put in correspondence from the solicitors acting for Mr. Colin Ivor Dunning. [3174]

Mr.Kirkhope: Officials have written to the solicitors with our decisions on Mr. Dunning's case and the reasons for that decision.

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to give a decision in the case of Mr. Colin Ivor Dunning. [3175]

Mr. Kirkhope: I have written to the hon. Member with our decision today.

Bingo

Mr. McWilliam: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proposals he has for deregulating the bingo industry. [1353]

Mr. Kirkhope: We are reviewing the present controls on bingo clubs as part of the Government's deregulation initiative.

Asylum and Immigration

Ms Roseanna Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent representations he has received on asylum and immigration; how many were *(a)* in favour and *(b)* opposed to further changes to existing legislation; and if he will make a statement. [1366]

Miss Widdecombe: In the period 1 June to 23 November 1995, we received 634 representations from hon. Members on matters which relate broadly to asylum and immigration policy, including our proposals for further legislative and other measures. It is not possible to break down this figure in the form requested.

Migration (Former Yugoslavia)

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 23 November, *Official Report*, column *291–92*, if he will specify the immigration rules relating to private medical treatment; if he will list the applications received by his Department from the International Organisation for Migration the Child Advocacy International for children to be brought from former Yugoslavia, indicating a date and the number of children; and if he will make a statement. [3386]

Mr. Kirkhope: In order to qualify under the immigration rules for private medical treatment in the United Kingdom, an applicant must demonstrate that satisfactory arrangements for the treatment have been made, that there are sufficient private funds available to meet the costs of the treatment, and that he intends to leave the United Kingdom at the end of the treatment.

The arrangements between International Organisation for Migration and Child Advocacy International concern the evacuation of nationals of Bosnia-Herzegovina, who require visas in order to travel to the United Kingdom. Visa applications must be made at a British diplomatic post abroad, which is a matter for my right hon. Friend and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs.

Immigration, Asylum and Nationality (Legislation)

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the date of the first reading of each Bill introduced by Her Majesty's Government since 1979 relating to immigration, asylum, nationality or a related topic; and if he will indicate in respect of each the date of publication, and where relevant, command numbers of any Green Papers, White Papers or consultative documents relating thereto. [3343]

Mr. Kirkhope: The information requested is as follows:

British Nationality Act 1981

Date for First Reading: 13 January 1981

White Paper: July 1980, Cmnd 7987[1]

British Nationality (Falkland Islands) Act 1983 (introduced as a private Member's Bill)

Date of First Reading: 4 November 1992

British Nationality (Hong Kong) Act 1985

Date of First Reading: 10 January 1985

Immigration (Carriers' Liability) Act 1987

Date of First Reading: 4 March 1987

Immigration Act 1988

Date of First Reading: 5 November 1987

British Nationality (Hong Kong) Act 1990

Date of First Reading: 4 April 1990

Asylum Bill (1992)

Date of First Reading: 1 November 1991

Asylum and Immigration Appeals Act 1993

Date of First Reading: 22 October 1992

[1] This followed a Green Paper in April 1977, Cmnd 6795.

Parliamentary Constituency Boundaries

Mr. Merchant: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if the Boundary Commission intends to conduct an interim review of parliamentary constituencies in England. [3943]

Mr. Howard: The commission has informed me that it intends to consider making a report on parliamentary constituencies in Hereford and Worcester and the west midlands, and also in Essex and the London borough of Redbridge and of Waltham Forest. The commission intends to commence forthwith an interim review of parliamentary constituencies in each of those areas.

Police Grant

Mr. Congdon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he intends to announce the allocations of police grant for individual police authorities in 1996–97 and the allocations of the funding for 5,000 extra officers announced by the Prime Minister; and if he will make a statement on the impact of these allocations on the overall funding of police authorities in that year. [3944]

Mr. Howard: I have today put a copy of my proposals for the allocation of police grant for 1996–97 in the Library. I intend to implement these proposals subject to consideration of any representations I receive about them.

The police service has indicated its support in principle for the continued distribution of police grant in accordance with a needs-based formula, and I am therefore proposing to continue to allocate the greater part of police grant according to the police funding formula.

I am, however, proposing a number of detailed changes to the formula in response to the representations which have been made to me about the working of the formula. The principal changes which I am proposing are:

an increase in the share of available funding allocated by the formula's pensions indicator from 9 per cent. to 12.3 per cent.;

a reduction in the share of available funding allocated by the formula's establishment indicator from 50 to 40 per cent.; and,

the introduction into the formula of a sparsity indicator to allocate 0.5 per cent. of available funding.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has announced funding for 5,000 extra police officers over the public expenditure survey period and an additional £20 million of police grant has been made available in 1996–97. I am proposing to allocate the £20 million according to the daytime and resident populations of each police force area.

I am also aware of, and share, public concern that policing levels generally should be maintained. I therefore propose to apply an additional rule to police grant allocations which would ensure that each police authority other than the Metropolitan police can receive 3 per cent. more funding in 1996–97 than it could have received in 1995–96. For the Metropolitan police, the cap on its reserves will be lifted allowing it to carry forward the substantial extra reserves it has accumulated during 1995–96.

The 3 per cent. additional rule, and the extra freedom to carry forward reserves for the Metropolitan police, are both in addition to the £20 million which has been made available in relation to the Prime Minister's announcement concerning additional officers.

Other police funding proposals within the local government finance system are being announced today by my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for the Environment and for Wales.

The table shows by police force area the total effect of all these proposals for 1996–97. It also shows the allocations approved by Parliament for 1995–96.

£ Million

Police Force area	*1995–96 funding*[1]	*1996–97 funding*[1]
English Shire Forces		
Avon and Somerset	147.8	154.5
Bedfordshire	55.4	57.3
Cambridgeshire	62.7	66.4
Cheshire	93.1	98.4
Cleveland	70.7	73.3
Cumbria	54.3	57.1
Derbyshire	88.3	92.4
Devon and Cornwall	146.5	153.1
Dorset	62.6	64.7
Durham	68.0	71.4
Essex	146.7	151.8
Gloucestershire	56.4	58.5
Hampshire	169.1	175.1
Hertfordshire	87.0	89.9
Humberside	98.1	103.1
Kent	158.1	163.8
Lancashire	155.5	163.2
Leicestershire	89.9	94.8
Lincolnshire	57.1	59.0
Norfolk	71.2	75.9
Northamptonshire	55.8	58.3
North Yorkshire	66.7	69.7
Nottinghamshire	110.2	115.2
Staffordshire	101.2	108.8
Suffolk	58.5	61.7
Surrey	85.1	88.0
Sussex	145.8	150.9
Thames Valley	192.8	202.2
Warwickshire	47.7	49.3
West Mercia	97.8	103.4
Wiltshire	58.7	60.7
English Metropolitan Forces		
Greater Manchester	327.1	342.2

£ Million

Police Force area	1995–96 funding[1]	1996–97 funding[1]
Merseyside	215.0	221.8
Northumbria	179.6	188.2
South Yorkshire	147.2	154.6
West Midlands	329.3	343.7
West Yorkshire	249.8	260.6
London Forces		
Metropolitan Police[2]	1,628.7	1,648.4
City of London[3]	57.3	59.1
English Total	6,092.6	6,310.5
Welsh Forces		
Dyfed-Powys	46.3	48.5
Gwent[4]	60.1	62.7
North Wales	66.0	69.3
South Wales[4]	143.4	150.9
Welsh total	315.8	331.4
Total	6,408.4	6,641.9

[1] Rounded to the nearest £10,000.[2] Figure for the Metropolitan police does not include funding allocated to receiver under the other services block SSA for school crossing patrols, magistrates courts and the probation service.

[3] Figure for the City does not include capital and other services block SSAs which are allocated to the Common Council of the City of London as a whole in respect of all its functions.[4] Figures for South Wales and Gwent police authorities have been adjusted to show what they would have received in 1995–96 had the transfer of the Rhymney valley from south Wales to Gwent, due to take effect on 1 April 1996, been effective for 1995–96. These adjustments enable valid comparisons to be made between these forces' allocations for 1995–96 and 1996–97.

British Dependent Territory Passport Holders

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make the requirements for entry by British dependent territory passport holders from Montserrat to the United Kingdom, the same as for such people from Gibraltar and the Falklands. [3167]

Mr. Kirkhope: No.

Executive Agencies (Overseas Travel)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list for each of his executive agencies for the last financial year in respect of overseas travel by staff of the agency *(a)* the cost, *(b)* the countries visited and *(c)* the posts held by the staff involved. [2363]

Mr. Howard: The available information is as follows:

In the cases of the Prison Service and the Forensic Science Service, some of the overseas visits listed were funded by bodies other than these agencies, and for these visits, costs are not available:

Prison Service

cost: £62,106

Countries visited: Albania, Belarus, Croatia, Denmark, Poland, Holland, Hungary, Czech Republic, Germany, USA, Israel, Sweden, Russia, Romania, Spain, France, Italy, Belgium, Cambodia.

Posts: Senior staff from Prison Service Headquarters, Area Managers, Governors and Prison Officers.

United Kingdom Passport Agency

cost: £6,295

Countries visited: Canada, Zimbabwe, Australia.

Posts: Chief Executive, Director of Systems and Director of Operations.

Fire Service College

cost: £98,432

Countries visited: Portugal, Germany, Belgium, Luxembourg, Bahrain, Azerbaijan, Norway, West Indies, Abu Dhabi, France, Oman, Spain, USA, Hong Kong, China, Hungary, South Africa, Mauritius, India, Brunei, Malaysia, Austria, Indonesia, Vietnam, Thailand, Singapore, Australia, Philippines, Taiwan, Macau.

Posts: Chief Executive, Commandant, Dean, Sales and Marketing Director, International Sales and Marketing Manager, International Marketing Sales Executive, Teaching staff (Civil Service), Teaching staff (Fir Brigade seconded).

Forensic Science Service

Costs: £25,397

Countries visited: Sweden, USA, Germany, France, Portugal, Italy, Taiwan, India, Eire, Spain, Holland, South Africa, Singapore.

Posts: Chief Executive, Director of Operations, Director of Service Development, Drug Intelligence Unit, Research Scientists, caseworkers and team leaders.

Doncaster Prison

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if the population in Doncaster prison will reach its design maximum within the next 12 months; and if he will make a statement. [2398]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Alan Walker to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 30 November 1995.

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question about whether the population in Doncaster prison will reach its design maximum within the next twelve months.

Doncaster prison has a certified normal accommodation level of 771 prisoners. This was reached within three months of it opening on 20 June 1995.

Prison Populations

Mr. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people were in prison for the latest date for which figures are available. [1359]

Miss Widdecombe: On Monday 20 November, a total of 52,297 prisoners were in custody in England and Wales.

Mr Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners in *(a)* category A and *(b)* each sub-category of category A are currently held in prisons in England and Wales. [2472]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Alan Walker to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 30 November 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question about the number of prisoners in category A and each sub-category of category A held in prisons in England and Wales.

On 24 November 1995 there were 823 category A prisoners held in prisons in England and Wales with the following escape risk classifications:

Classification	*Number of prisoners*
Exceptional risk	16
High risk	157
Standard risk	650

Sex Offences (Tourism)

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what intention Her Majesty's Government have of introducing extra-territorial legislation for sex crimes against children abroad, along the lines of that introduced by other western countries. [2002]

Mr. Maclean: We have made clear on previous occasions—12 July, *Official Report*, column *600*—that we do not believe that legislation which extended the jurisdiction of our courts to enable them to deal with sexual offences committed against children abroad would be an effective way to tackle the problem of sex tourism. Accordingly, we have no plans to introduce such legislation although we continue to keep the matter under review.

Prisoners (Home Leave Offences)

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners are known to have committed further offences when on home leave. [185]

Miss Widdecome: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Alan Walker to Mr. Gerry Steinberg, dated 30 November, 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question about the number of prisoners known to have committed further offences when on home leave.

Home leave as such and other temporary release schemes were replaced by a new system of release on temporary licence on 25 April this year.

Information about the number of prisoners who commit further offences while temporarily released is not recorded centrally, because of the practical difficulty in obtaining consistent and reliable information from police forces, both in this country and abroad, in time to be recorded on a prisoner's record. Due to the length of time that some cases can take to resolve within the judicial process, it is possible that some prisoners will have been discharged from prison by the time that information on further convictions becomes available.

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PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

OFFICIAL REPORT

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Bills 1R = first reading, 2R = second reading, Money res = money resolution, Comm = Committee stage, Rep = Report stage, 3R = third reading, amendt/amendts = amendment/amendments, * = matter taken formally, without debate.

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